

Thousand march for peace in Brentwood, Central Islip

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It was just six months ago that Christopher Hamilton, 15, was fatally shot at a party around the block from his Brentwood home. For his mother, Erica Boynton, the pain is just as strong as the day it happened.

"I'm here today to stop the violence on the streets and make it safer for the kids and the community," said Boynton, 36, addressing a throng of more than a thousand who marched for peace in Brentwood and [Central Islip](#) Saturday. Boynton stood alongside Clara Fiallo, 40, of Brentwood, whose son was shot and killed in February.

"Stop the gangs. Get the gangs out of the community and off the streets completely. I just want everyone to live a longer life," she told the crowd at Brentwood's Timberline Park.

For many participants, the march signaled a turning point for the two communities: After a terrifying series of shootings and killings earlier this year, residents say they have taken back their streets. The effort began in March, when residents began to speak out in public forums, demanding more police, a crackdown on graffiti and better resources for after-school programs.

Since then, Islip Town, [Suffolk](#) County and a new civic group, Brentwood Residents Against Violence Everyday, have initiated a range of anti-graffiti programs. And, after Saturday's march, event organizers say they're just getting started.

"The community's really waking up now," said Renee Ortiz, an organizer of the march, which began at 159 Brightside Avenue in Central Islip and ended at Timberline Park. "We're going to keep up the momentum. We need more funding for programming for our kids. We need a real community center. We need better communication with our schools. We want them to start recognizing that they belong to the community."

Hamilton, a Brentwood Freshman Center student who went by the nickname Brisko, was among more than 30 kids gathered about 10 p.m. on a Friday at a friend's house. Several shots were fired from across the street, and Hamilton was shot in the temple. No one has been charged in the shooting.

"I don't want the next parent to bury their child because it's a painful thing that's never going to be healed," Boynton said Saturday.

Jay Hart, executive director of Cross Roads Counseling Center of [Holbrook](#), one of the organizations at the park, said, "We stand together with other organizations and churches and say stop the violence. We're taking our parks and our streets back."

Said Devon Daniel, executive director of the Boys and Girls Club and minister at Abundant Life Church: "It is important to show the community there are people that care, that they are not lost. We want to change the culture. We want to empower them. They do not have to sit back and take it."