

Housing Agency Gets Big Grant For Youth Activities

By James A. Kimble

The city's Police department and Housing Authority will reap part of a \$1.25 million federal grant to expand their community-based after-school programs and create a police ministration.

Called the Dover Youth Safe Haven, two police officers will work with a local nonprofit organization in helping kids at the Dover Housing Authority keep their grades up and involve them in a number of community-based programs.

During an afternoon ceremony held at the Housing Authority's Community Center on Tuesday, local and national advocates hailed the existing outreach efforts by police as a "model for the state and nation."

The two Dover agencies will receive about \$100,000 over the next 18 months with the potential of receiving more funds if the U.S. Department of Justice continues backing such initiatives, according to Police Chief William Fenniman.

Several children from the city's elementary and middle schools were excused to attend the noon time event. About a half-dozen of them read short essays on why they enjoyed the after-school program.

Already, Dover police have two officers working with Plus Time NH, a Chichester-based nonprofit organization dedicated to helping children make after-school hours productive ones.

Experts say the hours between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. are the time of the day when children are most susceptible to the influences of crime in their neighborhood.

"Three to six should not be a time of danger," said Cynthia Billings, chief executive officer of PlusTime, NH. "It should be a time of opportunity."

The Eisenhower Foundation, an international nonprofit agency, awarded the money to Dover along with three similar pilot projects in Kansas City, MO., Baltimore, and Columbia, SC.

The foundation received the \$1.25 million by the U.S. Department of Justice for the four pilot projects. U.S. Senator Judd Gregg secured the funding for the project through his position as chairman of the Senate Appropriations Subcommittee on Commerce, Justice, State and the Judiciary.

Gregg, who attended the ceremony, congratulated children who read their essays at the ceremony and added "It just goes to show what a successful program this is."

He said several organizations have approached him about getting funding; however, he has seen his role as a facilitator "for those who know how to do the jobs."

"Dover has once again led the way," Gregg said.

Executive Councilor Ruth Griffin agreed that Dover's partnerships are unique. When speaking to other local officials she noted that Dover Housing Authority has several more progressive programs than Portsmouth Housing Authority.

Lynn Curtis, president of the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation in Washington, D.C., said that such partnerships between nonprofit agencies, housing authorities and police departments are not as common as we think.

"Often, housing authorities are not as well run as they are in this case," said Curtis. "Sometimes police won't trust nonprofit agencies and sometimes they don't want to do this type of programming."

Housing Authority Executive Director Jack Buckley said the funding will allow them to reach out to more students and expand the dozen existing programs. Dover Safe Haven is expected to serve about 100 students.