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## Federal grant pays for Columbia after-school program

By ADAM BEAM

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A Columbia after-school program has received a \$300,000 federal grant to help children with their homework and build their trust in police officers.

The Columbia Youth Safe Haven is one of 14 programs nationwide organized by the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, which administers the grant. The program is scheduled to receive roughly \$108,000 a year for three years, with the money coming from the Justice Department's Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention.

Michael Myers, a retired Columbia Police officer, directs the program from the Hammond Village community center. About 50 children are on the roster for the free program.

"They can just be kids — with a purpose," Myers said. "I think that's one of the biggest key components to a child's success is for them to be themselves, and at the same time have some values with them being successful down the road."

The grant pays for the salaries of Myers and two other staff members, plus computers, books, school supplies and what Myers calls enrichment trips to places like a Myrtle Beach water park.

Twelve students from Benedict and Columbia colleges come by several times a week to help kids with homework and ask them what they want to be when they grow up.

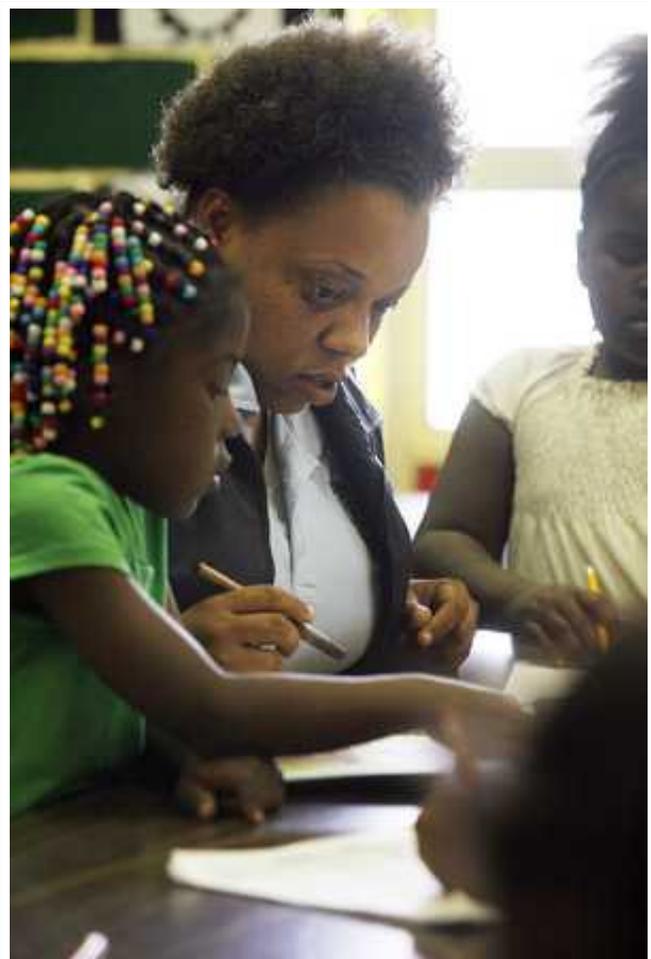
The program has been around for about a year, but just last month was awarded the grant money.

But it seems to already have an impact on the community it serves.

Hammond Village is 28 wood-frame buildings, with 78 apartments owned by the Columbia Housing Authority. Its community center, where the children meet, has bars on the doors and windows to prevent vandalism.

But last month, the community for the first time founded a neighborhood association and elected officers. Its goals, according to vice president Sherry Harkless, include organizing a neighborhood crime watch and preventing the children from dropping out of school.

"There are some parents who don't know how to be parents, and we're trying to get a group to help them be parents to their kids," Harkless said. "No matter how much we do, they still have to go home."



Community Safety Officer, Tamara Kelly helps six-year-old Dayonie Roberts and (R) Zy'Keria Davis, 7 with their homework. Columbia was one of 14 cities in the country to receive federal money for an after school program designed to eliminate the hostilities between teens and police. With over 17 years of experience working with teenagers, Officer Micheal Myers now volunteers at the Columbia Youth Safe Haven Community Center located in Hammond Village in Columbia. Community Safety Officer, Tamara Kelly has also been volunteering her time to help local youth.

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The Eisenhower Foundation was started in 1981 as a way to continue the work of two presidentially appointed commissions: The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, appointed after the big city riots in the 1960s; and the National Commission on Causes and Prevention of Violence, appointed after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr.

"We set out to keep the flame burning, to identify programs that work and to replicate them," said Alan Curtis, president of the Eisenhower Foundation.

Myers and his staff review the children's report cards to keep up with their grades and school attendance. They give them surveys to find out if their attitudes have changed, or if they feel more motivated to do well in school.

The foundation chose Columbia, Curtis said, because of the city's history with other Eisenhower Foundation programs, including the Koban, a mini-police station where officers live in the communities they patrol.

"The police department has the institutional memory of this work," Curtis said. "It's not easy doing this around the country today with all the cuts in local budgets."

Myers said his short-term goal is to get the community to a point where the bars on the community center are no longer needed. And he wants the kids to know they are loved, which he hopes will motivate them to succeed.

Monday, as the students started to arrive, Myers pointed out a little boy bounding out of a car. He handed a Safe Haven volunteer a dandelion he had picked up somewhere.

"He does that every day," Myers said with a smile. "Every day."

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