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A safe haven begins where Maryland Avenue ends

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Drive along Maryland Avenue NE as it shoots up the hill from the U.S. Capitol and you come to a desolate end. Here, where the crumbling pavement stops before concrete barriers, children stand aimlessly amid the overgrown bushes, wrecked cars and abandoned buildings. The Carver Terrace apartments landscape is as bone-chilling as the wind this blustery afternoon.

A glimpse of the future is as foreboding as the freezing forecast. Some have dubbed this area in the lower footprint of affluent Capitol Hill as "Little Vietnam," says Lynn A. Curtis, president of the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation, "not because it has anything to do with war but because there are so many bullets flying around." Still, slight signs of rebirth rear their sleepy heads. A "rent now" sign billows from a renovated apartment complex on the hilltop. Sparkling "Hypothermia Patrol" vans line the corner of 21st Street NE. A brightly painted day care center presents a hopeful contrast in a deserted, colorless gully.

And, starting today, the children of this crime-ridden community will find a safe haven if only for a few hours a day.

In a promising private-public partnership among the Eisenhower Foundation, Telesis Corp. and the District government, a new Youth Safe Haven Ministation will be opened this morning in the newly renovated Carver Terrace community center at 2026 Maryland Ave. NE.

"We're investing in physical capital as well as human capital," Mr. Curtis said.

The goal is to develop the children as well as redevelop the property to stabilize and sustain the community.

Using the ministation model, replicated from other Eisenhower programs, police officers and local youths share the same space and develop relationships that ultimately will improve the quality of life.

Everyone talks about the need for "community policing." But that political buzzword has come to mean different things to different people.

The safe-haven ministation is more than a sterile police substation where a few officers conduct only law-enforcement duties. It's a combination after-school and community policing collaborative designed to reduce crime, provide opportunities for youths and protect housing rehabilitation. The children receive adult supervision, a free meal, tutoring and mentoring services. The police officers work with the

children, their parents and program managers, who help them patrol the area and maintain law and order.

Mr. Curtis noted that D.C. Mayor Anthony A. Williams pledged, as part of his inaugural address, to put more officers on the street to reduce resurgent crime. This police-youth-community model, he said, is a scientifically proven, cost-effective way of cutting crime, especially at a time when police are being pulled from traditional duties to deal with potential terrorist activities. The initial Eisenhower grant is for \$100,000, which pays for several staffers who work for the nonprofit arm of Telesis Corp. The District pays the officers' salaries.

"It is becoming apparent that wherever we put this, there [is] a change of what was happening" in those communities, said Eddie Barnes, a former D.C. police sergeant who is now the co-director of the police investment and police mentoring initiative for the Eisenhower Foundation.

The program is so successful and popular it was expanded citywide in Columbia, S.C., and statewide in New Hampshire, Mr. Barnes said. Similar but smaller community policing programs were implemented in Baltimore and the Paradise-Parkside community of Northeast Washington. The Eisenhower Foundation also seeded a safe-haven ministration in Herndon. The youth safe-haven ministrations were adapted from the Japanese "koban" or ministration system. That country's low crime rate is attributed in part to its wide use of ministrations throughout the country, some of which are residential.

The Eisenhower Foundation, founded as an offshoot of the Kerner Commission in the late 1960s, awards grants - primarily seeded from federal funds - to nonprofit organizations that provide a range of social programs. While some argue about the success of such programs, Mr. Curtis suggests that "the problem is not lack of knowledge [of how to tackle social issues] but a lack of will to replicate what we know works at a scale equal to the dimensions of the problem.

"Milton Eisenhower [a brother of former President Dwight D. Eisenhower] was a man of science, and we try to stick to that mantra," said Mr. Curtis, who has led the foundation for two decades. "If nothing else, I want to be known as someone who was dedicated to doing more of what works and less of what doesn't."

"When there is a complete buy-in, there are positive results immediately," an enthusiastic Mr. Barnes said of the project's potential. However, this former director of the District's Police Boys and Girls Club added that it requires volunteers to make the program prosper.

Good wishes for the children who can now enter this safe haven in the hope that it will help turn the desolate end at Carver Terrace into a pathway to promise.

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