

Somersworth has Youth Safe Haven/Mini Station

By Sean Goodwin
Democrat Staff Writer

SOMERSWORTH - It's more than just a project, it's a village.

That's what Anastra Madden, civilian director of the Youth Safe Haven/Mini Station, recalls housing authority policeman Sgt. David Pratt telling a child about the new program that has been established in the city.

This is the second Mini Station in the state. The first is in Dover. Somersworth's is located at the Albert J. Nadeau Homes, a 56-unit family housing development on Bartlett Avenue. The theme of the station, "a village," was a constant in each speech during the ribbon-cutting Friday afternoon.

"There is an old proverb, 'It takes a village to raise a child,' " said Eddie Banks, co-director of the Milton S. Eisenhower Foundation Youth Development and Police Mentoring Initiative of Washington D.C., the agency that provided Somersworth with the grant that made the Mini Station possible.

"Well, this village will be an example on how to have a successful village," Banks added. "Police will understand the children and what the parents go through, and the parent and children will understand the police and what they have to do."

The genesis of the Mini Station was police Chief Dean Crombie looking at police reports and noticing some problems around the Housing Authority. Crombie then called Joseph Couture, executive director of the Somersworth Housing Authority and discussed the possibility of giving them a fulltime police officer.

After talking to City Manager Doug Elliott and receiving approval from the City Council, the Somersworth received a grant paying for 75 percent of the cost of the Housing Authority police officer.

When Pratt was in place, Couture called Crombie and asked if he would be interested in applying for the Eisenhower grant.

"He told me all of the benefits and I asked him what chance we'd have to get it and Joe said, 'slim to none,'" Crombie said. "My response was 'where do I sign?'"

Once the officials from the Eisenhower Foundation saw Somersworth's application, they had a different perspective on the city's chances.

"The commitment was there," Banks said. "The levels of commitment was outstanding and at that point it was done."

"It was wonderful to see the extent which the Somersworth police, the Housing Authority, and PlusTime (New Hampshire) are committed to this project," said Dorothy Coleman, the other co-director with Banks.

PlusTime NH is a statewide organization that regulates the police Mini Stations across the state. They are headquartered in Chichester and will be providing technical support, training, workshops, and conflict resolution curriculum.

"We want to make this a statewide initiative," said Cynthia Billings, chief executive officer of PlusTime NH. "Within the next few months we want to have Mini Stations in half the state, but next up is Rochester and Keene. A fifth location has yet to be determined."

PlusTime NH will also provide one fulltime Americorp Vista member. Tim Pratt is that person.

"Basically I tutor in the homework lab and I help coordinate the gym program, setting up activities," Pratt said. "I try to share some of that with the volunteers."

"PlusTime applied for Americorp funding," said Tim Dupris, director of the New Hampshire branch of Americorp. "To get the funds, you need to meet specific unmet needs and providing a safe places during nonschool hours is certainly one of them. We also have twelve other programs running in the fields of safety, the environment and education."

Overall, the ribbon-cutting signaling the opening of the Mini Station was greeted with excitement by all of those involved.

"This is what it is all about," Banks said. "This is building the future and these are our future leaders."

Madden said in a prior interview that the program is already in full swing. The enrollment in the homework lab, which began on Nov. 6, is now at 41 students, she said. It targets students from 6- to 18-years-old.

"They love coming here to do their homework and we love to have them come," Madden said. "The homework lab is the heart of the program. Everything we do begins with the homework."

Students are also involved in a choir. They are scheduled to sing at a number of events this holiday season. They already performed at the Governor's Mansion in Concord.

"Parents are going to keep working they're going to have to keep working," said Couture in a prior interview. "Very few people do not work now, that live in the village."

That's why a program, like this one is needed, Couture said.

(Somersworth Bureau Chief Andrew Morse contributed to this report.)

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