

# Local/Regional

## Committees using grant money to help children of county

By PETER KENDRON  
Recorder Intern

Educating parents on how to raise their toddlers, matching up older children with programs to help them, preventing violence among teens and helping children test their ability to start their own business...

In the next three months, four committees plan to try to make these ideas a reality in Franklin County.

The committees have formed as part of an effort by the Franklin County Action Group on Children and Youth to bring to this area some of the \$750,000 in funding offered by the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts over the next three years.

The Community Foundation, a non-profit organization that grants money to organizations in Hampshire, Hampden and Franklin counties, decided to dedicate the \$750,000 to programs aimed specifically at aiding children in the three counties.

Each of the committees focuses on the needs of a specific age group, said Phillip S. Korman, resource development program manager at the Franklin County Regional Council of Governments, who helped organize the Action Group's efforts. Their aims were formed through a process that began last year, continued through community meetings and consultation with area service groups and became finalized at a July 24 meeting when the group split into the four committees.

During that time, Korman said the group also consulted surveys done in previous years that showed the needs of the county.

Out of the discussion and reviewing, one proposal for children under 5, one for children ages 6 to 12 and two for teen-agers from 13 to 21 resulted.

The proposal for children under age 5 does not aim at the children, but instead at educating their parents on how to care for them.

"Just because you brought children into the world doesn't mean you know what to do with them," said Pat Fettinger, executive director of Montague Catholic Social Ministries and a member of the committee. "And when you add the issues of poverty and sometimes homelessness, (some parents) need as much help as they can get."

While Fettinger said that there are programs in existence to educate parents, she said their availability varies over the county as well as among economic levels. The preliminary proposal for her committee states that any expansion in programs would best occur at already-existing family centers in the county, while ensuring that child care and transportation do not create barriers to participating in the program.

For 6- to 12-year-olds, which committee leader Becky Lockwood, director of youth programs at the Franklin Community Action Corp., said traditionally has the least activities and programs aimed at it, the action group hoped to establish a "matchmaker."

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ing" position, in which a person would be hired to compile all the community resources available to those 6 to 12, as well as assessing the needs of schools, community groups and other organizations that work with the age group and trying to find resources to meet those needs.

She said she personally could have used such a person this summer.

"We had been getting information from a lot of summer camps on scholarships to summer camps, and we had a group of 9 to 12 girls interested ... But we had a problem getting transportation to get them to the camps. Maybe a "matchmaker" could have had that information," she said.

One of the two proposals aimed at teen-agers would be a violence-prevention program. A member of that committee, Cheryl Fox, a training coordinator at the Mediation and Training Collaborative at Franklin Community Action Corp., said the needs assessment revealed there was a need for showing teens how to resolve conflicts peacefully. She said the project her committee aimed to create would be based on a peer education approach, where teens teach teens mediation skills and techniques on how to avoid violence. While Fox said these programs could be focused on schools, she added her committee also hoped to look at how they could be used in the outside world as well.

She said she has seen similar programs work in the past at her job.

"One young man, he was in a bad situation, but learning skills to resolve conflicts led him to get a grip on himself. He was excellent helping other kids," she said.

The other proposal for teen-agers is entrepreneurial business training. The county already has examples that programs like this work, said John Waite, executive director of the Franklin Community Development Corporation and committee member.

He cited the Young Entrepreneur Society in Orange, where students learn how to apply school skills to real life.

"Some kids can't make sense of subjects like math or English in a classroom setting, but running a business, they might have to use math at the register or English to sell things," Waite said.

He said his committee plans to try to set up a program on a countywide basis, but must decide whether to have groups of people all work on one project or have individual teens each work on separate businesses.

All four committees plan to meet within the month to further discuss their proposals. Anyone interested could contact Philip S. Korman at 413-774-3167.

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