

Licking County Foundation Awards Major Grant for YES Program

In a joint statement released today, representatives of the Licking County Foundation and the YES Program of Mental Health America of Licking County announced a grant in the amount of \$441,425 to enhance available services to youth through the construction of a new facility.

From their existing facility, at the corner of First and Church in downtown Newark, the YES (Youth Engaged in Service) program provides valuable after school and summer programming for youth between the ages of 11 and 18 years. The new facility will enable YES to continue to provide opportunities during the risky after school hours between 2:30 and 6:30 pm where they are far more likely to use alcohol, drugs, and tobacco, engage in criminal and other high-risk behaviors, receive poor grades, become teen parents, and drop out of school.

In addition to homework assistance and health and wellness education, the program also offers healthy snacks and a hot meal. Another key component of the YES program is its commitment to service learning. Regularly scheduled service projects at healthcare facilities, in public parks, and the local animal shelter teach the Club members the importance of giving back to the community.

In 2006, the YES Club served a total of 391 students.

For most of the program's 15 years of existence, it has been housed in a building leased from the City of Newark at a dollar per year. And, according to Mental Health America of Licking County's Executive Director Paddy Kutz, is showing all the signs of having hosted a lot of young people in a very small space.

"We have worked hard to keep the place as nice as we could," said Kutz, "but after so many years and so many kids, the place is used up. This opportunity offered by the Foundation could not have come at a better time."

The Licking County Foundation grant comes from the William E. and Annie S. Miller Fund. National City Bank is the trustee and investment manager of the Emerson R. Miller Trust, which establishes the William A. and Annie Scheidler Miller Memorial Fund. The fund is designed to assist low-income children in Licking County with their health care needs. In addition, the Emerson R. Miller Trust also benefits several other Newark non-profit organizations. "This community is fortunate to have so many visionary people like Mr. Miller," said Mike Wolfe, Executive Director of Licking County Foundation.

Key to securing support for this project was the involvement of local developers and philanthropists, Frank & Herb Murphy. According to Kutz, they saw the value in the program and have continued to do what they could to support it over the years.

“On our own, we never could have supported a new building,” said Kutz. “The Murphys and the Foundation helped us to dream a little bigger and then they helped us to make those dreams a reality.”

The new building will be located on property diagonally across the street from the existing YES house at the site of the former Go-Kleen Carwash. Groundbreaking is set for sometime this fall.

For more information about the YES program grant or the Foundation in general, please contact the Licking County Foundation at 349-3863. For more information on the YES program, or other services provided by Mental Health America of Licking County, please call 522-1341.