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PORTLAND'S KID-REALITY SHOW

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Summary: Tune in Thursday to watch as the children's levy is distributed to mentoring and after-school programs

They don't have a Web site or business cards yet, and from a marketing standpoint, their acronym, CHIF, is about as snappy as sawdust.

But those working behind the scenes to make the *Children's Investment Fund* a reality are, nevertheless, going strong. The allocation committee, which makes funding decisions with help from a host of volunteer screeners, has distributed money to children's programs exactly as taxpayers were promised.

Portlanders generously funded the program, called the children's levy, in November 2002. It was intended to raise \$50 million over five years, but thanks to compression of property taxes, the annual amount raised by the levy could be closer to \$8.5 million.

Although the levy itself is an innovation, the money is not supposed to be spent on innovation. It's supposed to finance proven programs. The allocation committee has already distributed money in two categories, to child-abuse prevention and early childhood education programs.

A final category will receive funds Thursday. If you're so inclined, you can watch public-access Comcast Cable Channel 30, beginning at noon, when the allocation committee will pick mentoring and after-school programs.

After-school funds will be focused on 4th-graders through 8th-graders, which is wise. This is the age when children become restless with after-school programs and can get into trouble if they're left on their own.

We hope the allocation committee will give extra points to those mentoring and after-school programs that can show they work closely with schools. This is one way to leverage the children's levy, to make sure that we aren't funding programs in a vacuum, but instead applying the money strategically.

Those involved with the *Children's Investment Fund* have learned a lot, added safeguards and tweaked the program as they went along. "It's not every day that you ask the taxpayers for their money, and you (spend) it like you said you would," says the program's Nancy Hamilton.

We agree.

As for that unfortunate acronym, CHIF, we know it's only a name, but someone ought to think of a better one. Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who founded the program, prefers the word "child" to "kid," and we can understand that. But some other acronym, something that makes sense, even something hokey like KIDS (Keep Investing in our Daughters and Sons) or CHAMP (Children's Alliance to Empower *Portland*) would be an improvement.

Portland has lots of marketing whizzes. Surely, one of them can dream up something less wooden.

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