

# Kids' helpers receive a hand

*Voter-approved fund has \$2 million for programs this spring*

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## **The city this month is inviting another round of organizations to apply for nearly \$2 million in investments through the Children's Investment Fund.**

Approved by Portland voters in November 2002, the fund provides about \$8.5 million a year for five years to after-school and mentoring programs and programs that prevent child abuse and family violence. It costs homeowners about \$60 a year for a home valued at \$150,000.

The fund has maintained a fairly low profile during the past two years. Where has the money gone? Fund organizers said they have invested about \$16 million in 50 programs at 42 organizations throughout the city. Among them:

- A two-year, \$220,000 grant to the Native American Youth Association, based in North Portland, has allowed the nonprofit center to expand from serving about 20 young people to 200 in its culturally specific arts and sports programs. An estimated 31,000 Native Americans live in the metro area.

"We've always been involved in the public parks and rec league, but at much lower level and with almost no equipment or staffing, and with all volunteer coaches and coordinators," said Executive Director Nichole Maher.

Now, she said, paid staff can provide more stability to the programs. One of the most popular is a Monday night drumming class.

"It's more than kids coming in and drumming," Maher said. Instructor Harold Paul provides a curriculum "that teaches responsibility, community service, the meaning of the drum in the community, and responsibilities about leading a drug- and alcohol-free life if you're going to be a drummer," she said.

- A \$300,000 grant to Big Brothers Big Sisters of Metropolitan Portland, based in Northeast Portland, supports mentoring programs for two groups of children: those living in or making the transition out of foster care, and those with risk factors, such as having single-parent families or non-English speaking parents, or living below the poverty level.

"For 2004, we were the fastest growing Big Brother Big Sister in the country. And I can tell you, we would not be if not for (the fund)," said Chief Executive Officer Lynn Thompson.

The foster care program serves 36 children and has a waiting list of 50; it would not be running without the Children's Investment Fund, she said. The regular mentoring program serves about 500 children, with a waiting list of 600.

"That's without doing a lot of outreach," Thompson said. "I think we're really going to grow fast."

- A \$435,621 grant to Camp Fire USA Portland Metro Council, based in Southwest Portland, has allowed the center to double its capacity to serve 150 students a year. The fund supports fourth- to sixth-graders in the Centennial School District in East Portland, who participate in team-building activities, homework support, basketball leagues and twice-a-year camping trips for a fee of \$50 per year.

Chief Executive Officer Keith Thomajan said he appreciates the fund's "scientific approach to youth development."

"They mandate and expect good outcomes," he said. "The onus is on us to deliver that. We work hard to quantify the value of their investment."

In all, the fund has provided \$6.4 million for early childhood programs, \$3.2 million for child abuse prevention and intervention programs, and \$6.4 million for after-school and mentoring programs.

Experts say such programs help reduce dropout rates, reduce youth crime, and provide arts and cultural activities that public schools lack.

City Commissioner Dan Saltzman, who heads the allocation committee that maintains the fund, said he hopes to ask voters to renew the levy in November 2006. The children's levy might even be combined with a parks levy, since they both support after-school programs, he said.

"It's always a tough sell," Saltzman said. "I think we've got a good shot. We just have to get our story out there. I do think people — starting with our mayor — care about children very much. This is one way to show that we care in a tangible manner."

The allocation committee also includes Multnomah County Commissioner Lisa Naito; Dr. David Willis, a developmental pediatrician with the Northwest Early Childhood Institute; and Ron Beltz of the Portland Business Alliance.

The new round of grants will be awarded for three years beginning in July and running through June 2008. The grants will be split between organizations with budgets of more than \$1 million and those of less than \$1 million, and each grant will be capped at \$500,000 per year, per proposal.

For more information, and to apply by the April 13 deadline, visit [childrensinvestmentfund.org](http://childrensinvestmentfund.org). A bidder's conference is scheduled for 3 p.m. to 5 p.m. Thursday in the Portland Building auditorium.