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Small Projects Get a Big Boost

By MELANIE GRAYCE WEST

Funding neighborhood projects that are making small but important changes and bringing people together to improve their communities is the focus of the Citizens Committee for New York City.

The organization recently announced that it is giving about \$330,000 to 177 community groups as part of its annual New Yorkers for Better Neighborhoods Awards. Grants range between \$500 and \$4,500 and have been given primarily to support neighborhood beautification, education, and gardening and urban agriculture projects.



Noli Novak
PETER KOSTMAYER

All of the projects are meant to "create civic engagement in the city," says Peter Kostmayer, chief executive of the Citizens Committee.

In some cases, the grants are going to fund services that might have previously been covered by city funding, especially after-school and senior programs.

The groups receiving the grants are mostly block and civic associations, gardening groups and neighborhood community-based groups. Many of the applications that Citizens Committee receives are handwritten.

Their process in getting to know neighborhood groups is "kind of old-fashioned, neighborhood by neighborhood, block by block," says Mr. Kostmayer.

The receiving organizations are "very, very small in low-income neighborhoods and they don't know about the Carnegie Foundation or the Rockefeller Foundation," says Mr. Kostmayer. "They wouldn't get funding from other places."

This year, the Herbal Garden of East New York in Brooklyn, received a grant of \$2,150 to begin a bee program. The garden has been around since 1998 when the neighborhood converted three abandoned trash-strewn lots to a garden that now has heirloom fruit trees, a herb garden with a rain-water harvesting system and a composting station for area residents.

The Groundswell Project in the Bronx was awarded \$2,000 for a project to create 50 herb gardens in backyards and windowsills throughout the borough. The goal is to get the families to use the herbs in healthy dishes.

The Milk Not Jails group in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, received a grant for \$2,250 for its advocacy work to

establish relationships and connections between urban neighborhoods in the city that have high incarceration rates with communities upstate that produce dairy products. The program seeks to create buying clubs between the New Yorkers and upstate farmers.

Some of the smallest grants of \$500 went toward supporting an adult literacy program in the Bronx run by the Gambian Society in New York and a composting project by Farm Spot, a local community-supported agriculture group in Jackson Heights.

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