



Teens hang out after school at the Dorchester clubhouse of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston. (Staff photo by Faith Ninivaggi)

Safety net: Keeping youth out of danger a high priority for Boys & Girls Clubs

By Tenley Woodman

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Mayor Thomas M. Menino recently appealed to the Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston to help keep the city's youth safe this summer. The request couldn't be more timely.

Last week, the city's 24th homicide of the year occurred just steps from the Blue Hill clubhouse in Dorchester.

"Every day we are hearing something," said Daphne Griffin, the Blue Hill clubhouse executive director. "Our kids either know who it was personally or know a family member (who was affected)."

Griffin said two club members have been assaulted this year.

"Why I've turned to the Boys & Girls Club is because they are the most effective youth group in the city of Boston," Menino said.

The clubs serve approximately 13,000 kids citywide annually.

Linda Whitlock, president and CEO of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston, said the organization has assembled an "ambitious, high-impact but achievable plan" for a safe summer.

A key addition to the Boys & Girls Club agenda is offering transportation home to kids.

Griffin said many club members face a Catch-22 in their own neighborhoods. Something as simple as crossing a street can mean trouble with neighborhood toughs.

"For the club to be open late, in a way it's a good idea and a bad idea. It's good because it keeps people off the street later, but when people are going home kind of late the bad guys hang out late. That's when people get into problems," said Jamion Brown, 18, a Blue Hill club member.

Also on tap: full programming on Saturdays, field trips on Sundays, staying open until midnight for teenagers on Fridays and Saturdays.

But extra time requires extra funding.

"We need our staff to have energy, be focused and engage in positive, effective ways with our members. It will cost close to \$300,000 just for this summer alone," Whitlock said. "The mayor has promised to help us secure the funds, and we are in the process of attempting to raise those funds."

The hope is to have enough in the budget to hire more staff and support current workers so they can serve more youth. In the meantime, volunteers from the nonprofit's administration and board of directors are offering their time, approximately 12 hours each over the course of the summer.

"It's what we need to do and have to do," Griffin said. "Failure is not an option."