



NEWS RELEASE

CONTACTS: Cookie Speet – (616) 837-9410
Virgil Gulker – (616) 546-3580

COOPERSVILLE CHURCH RECEIVES NATIONAL RECOGNITION FOR ITS WORK WITH CHILDREN

Church goes beyond mentoring to offer children and their families a summer camping trip

HOLLAND, MI, July 20, 2005 – A program that links mentors from Coopersville Reformed Church with students in Coopersville elementary schools has been recognized for its positive results in a 10-state awards program.

The Faith and Service Technical Education Network (FASTEN) named the Coopersville Reformed Church KIDS HOPE USA program a state semi-finalist in the first-ever Partners in Transformation awards program.

“It’s not often that a church in a small Michigan community receives national attention for its outreach to children,” said Dr. Virgil Gulker, executive director of KIDS HOPE USA.

The awards program recognized faith-based organizations that collaborate with community partners, such as schools, government agencies or police departments. The competition was open to organizations in Alabama, Alaska, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Michigan, New Jersey, Ohio, Oklahoma and Texas.

“Our mentors meet with one child for one hour every week,” said Coopersville Reformed Church KIDS HOPE USA Director Cookie Speet. “This recognition is a reminder to the mentors that what seems like something small makes a big difference in a child’s life.”

KIDS HOPE USA, based in Holland, Michigan, is a national mentoring program that works exclusively through local churches, equipping them to engage their own members in one-to-one relationships with at-risk public elementary school children in their neighborhood. Founded in 1995, it has grown from three pilot programs to 317 programs in 27 states today.

The Coopersville Reformed Church KIDS HOPE USA program formed eight years ago and currently has 36 mentors. Since its inception, the program has had a total of 69 mentors, and 71 percent of them have worked for at least two years with the same child, Speet said.

Beginning last summer, the church went beyond its school-year mentoring to offer KIDS HOPE USA children and their families a summer camping experience. This summer, 12 families will participate in the program, which allows families to reserve time to stay in a camper at Laman’s Landing, a private campground in Ludington.



Page Two

A church member purchased and loaned the camper to program. The church pays for the campsite rental with help from a Coopersville Area Youth Advisory Committee grant. Speet said the idea originated from a teacher, Nancy Courson, who now serves as a hostess for the families during their stay at the campground.

“We wanted to help families build memories and allow children to experience the self esteem that comes along with that,” Speet said.

An initiative of Pew Charitable Trusts, FASTEN identifies best practices in faith-based services and multi-sector collaboration, and produces and disseminates educational materials for practitioners in the public and private sectors. The award was offered in cooperation with the Points of Light Foundation, which engages and mobilizes millions of volunteers to help solve serious social problems in thousands of communities.

Rev. Mark Farr, senior director of interfaith initiatives for the Points of Light Foundation, has called KIDS HOPE USA “the premier model for faith-based mentoring.”

--end--