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## **A call to action to promote a healthy future for Sarasota's children**

A Children's Health Summit focusing on promoting a healthy future for Sarasota's children will take place on Tuesday, Sept. 27, from 5:30-8 p.m. at the Lee Wetherington Boys and Girls Club, 3100 Fruitville Road, Sarasota.

"This free event will provide parents, middle- and high school-age students, and interested residents a voice in creating a community where children and youths are healthy, ready to learn, living in stable families and safe neighborhoods and able to successfully transition into adulthood," says Liza Leonard, community outreach coordinator for the Sarasota Partnership for Children.

The event will involve participants in the development of an action plan on issues related to healthy weight and preventing prescription drug misuse.

"Children are our future, yet the unprecedented economic conditions have taken their toll. Nearly half of Sarasota County's school-age children are on free and reduced-cost lunches, and high unemployment impacts youths' successful transition into the workplace. Prescription drug misuse is also on the rise," says acting president and CEO of the United Way of Sarasota County Katie Knight.

Last year, the Florida Department of Children and Families identified drugs as the primary reason for needing to shelter children in Sarasota County, with nearly two in three removals due to prescription drug abuse in the family. Nearly one-third of Sarasota County youths who participated in the 2008 Youth Risk Behavior Survey reported they were offered, sold or given illegal drugs on school property. This is a 10 percent increase from 2006.

Reversing these trends will require a concerted effort involving many different groups, including parents. "This summit will help us to engage parents and residents in a discussion about innovative ways to address these issues in our community," says Early Learning Coalition executive director Janet Kahn.

The [Sarasota Partnership for Children](#), a newly formed group of residents who are working together to promote a good future for Sarasota County's children, is sponsoring the summit.

"This summit is a first step in building a broader partnership involving businesses, education, health and human services, neighborhoods, government, parents, youths and community members to change the odds for our children," says Knight.

This event will include free dinner refreshments. There also will be educational activities provided for elementary school-age students who attend. Students from area middle and high schools are encouraged to join in the discussion. Spanish language interpretation will also be available. Please register online at <http://healthysarasotakids.eventbrite.com> by Tuesday, Sept. 13. Those without computer access can call Cheri Boland at 941-861-1410.

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