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Media contact: Dianne Shipley, 941-861-2852, cell: 941-302-1058;
Dianne_shipley@doh.state.fl.us

Project contact: Katie Leonard, 941-861-6133, cell: 941-957-8803;
Katie_Leonard@doh.state.fl.us

‘Community Field Day: A Rx for Reducing Community Crime’ event to be held March 24

A free grass-roots event, “Community Field Day: A Rx for Reducing Community Crime,” will be held on Saturday, March 24, from 10 a.m.-2 p.m. at the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex, 1845 34th St., Sarasota. The youth athletic event is designed to foster relationships between local public safety officials and youths in the community.

Participants will be able to connect with law enforcement, firefighters and others serving in public safety roles. Youths ages 5-18 will be able to participate in basketball and kickball games to encourage safe and fun physical activity and team-building efforts. Also, as part of a plan to educate north Sarasota residents, several community groups and organizations, including Enough is Enough, Safe Place and Rape Crisis Center (SPARCC), the Florida Clinical Research Center and others, will provide information about their efforts to impact community violence and public health.

“For families that live in the north Sarasota and Newtown neighborhoods, violence, crime, and fear of crime, has been identified by the community as barriers for community members to take their children to local parks, as well as engage in physical activity,” said Sarasota County Health Department Community Planner Katie Leonard. “It is important to foster an environment that prevents crime and creates opportunities for increased physical activity and recreation.”

Reducing crime in North Sarasota is a top priority for the city of Sarasota, which is now organizing an anti-violence, grass-roots campaign in Newtown. Leading the call to stop the violence is District 1 City Commissioner Willie Shaw.

“We need events like the Community Field Day, where the children can play together and know they’re safe,” said Shaw. “Most importantly, they’ll have a chance to interact with those who protect us such as police officers and firefighters. We want to encourage that interaction so that children understand public safety officers are here to help us build a stronger community and keep us safe.”

The link between community violence and health has been well-established. According to the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, “available evidence shows that both direct and indirect exposures to violence have serious health consequences for our nation.” Go to www.rwjf.org/files/research/sdohseries2011violence.pdf.

Additionally, a study by researchers from the University of Southern California states: “Violence is a public health problem and children are particularly vulnerable to its effects. Besides being a leading source of injury, violence takes a toll on thinking and reasoning, behavior, social, and emotional functioning.” For more information, visit http://www.psy.miami.edu/faculty/dmessaging/c_c/rsrscs/rdqs/peers_social_general/margolin.exposure2violence.curdir.04.pdf.

Euline Myrick Sr., president of the North County Community Organization said “the bad economy and the housing crisis is a great recipe for crime in north county.

“This affects kids because it sends them down a negative path, a direction they shouldn’t be going in. I think that an event like this one that has the youths working together with law enforcement will greatly help the community, he added.”

This effort is being spearheaded by the Newtown/North Sarasota Community Health Action Team’s (CHAT) Environmental Health Committee in partnership with the Sarasota County Health Department, Division of Environmental Health Services. Last year, community violence, along with home or property maintenance, were identified as key health concerns in the Newtown/North Sarasota community. Last month, the group held an open house event at the Taylor complex to help homeowners with practical ways to create a healthy home.

The Newtown CHAT operates under the leadership of the Community Health Improvement Partnership (CHIP), which has been a catalyst for engaging communities throughout Sarasota County in efforts to create a healthier community.

Youths who want to participate in the free sporting events on March 24 are urged to sign up prior to the event by going in person to the Robert L. Taylor Community Complex. A parent or guardian must be present at the sign-up.

There will be two Tuesday open houses for sign-up on March. 13 and 20 from 4-6 p.m. at the Taylor complex.

For additional information about the event, contact Katie Leonard at the Sarasota County Health Department at 941-861-6133. For additional information on community violence prevention, visit the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention website at <http://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/>.

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