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EVENT CALENDAR

## MEDIA ADVISORY

Oct. 24, 2013

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### North Port hosts community forum on juvenile justice alternatives

SARASOTA COUNTY — The North Port Community Health Action Team (CHAT) is hosting a community forum, “Avoiding the System: Alternative Approaches to Juvenile Justice.”

**WHEN:** Tuesday, Oct. 29, 6-8 p.m.

**WHERE:** Morgan Family Community Center, 6207 W. Price Blvd., North Port

**WHY:** To support North Port youths through increased dialogue about improving juvenile justice options, while recording residents’ concerns and ideas.

CHAT has been exploring the issue of juvenile justice, particularly options for diversion, according to the CHAT organizers. Juvenile diversion programs allow certain first-time, non-violent juvenile offenders the opportunity to repair the harm they have done in ways that divert youths from involvement in the court system. This is important, because a criminal record can haunt someone for years, impacting opportunities for employment, housing, public assistance and much more, said the organizers.

Diversion programs often include some form of education or counseling aimed at preventing future offenses, requiring the offender to pay restitution to victims and to complete community service hours. Started 25 years ago, Sarasota County’s Teen Court is an example of a diversion program. It is based on traditional courtroom procedures, but a teen jury determines the offender’s sentence, which usually takes the form of community service, group classes or jury duties.

Some have indicated that North Port youths have a difficult time accessing diversion options located in the northern part of Sarasota County. According to North Port CHAT Chair, Vanessa Carusone, North Port youths should be aware of their options when it comes to diversion programs. The CHAT has learned about diversion programs in Charlotte County, including neighborhood accountability boards and civil citation programs.

Representatives from local diversion programs, the Department of Juvenile Justice and law enforcement will also be present to answer questions.

Those from the public who plan to attend can register in advance at [www.NorthPortForum.com](http://www.NorthPortForum.com).

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**MEDIA NOTE: Media are invited to attend and pre-event publicity of the event is also encouraged.**