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On the Scene

### Agencies launch 'Broward AWARE!' to prevent and bring awareness to child abuse

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During the 2009-2010 fiscal year the Broward Sheriff's Office Child Protective Investigation Team investigated 14,086 incidences of child abuse and neglect. Child abuse and neglect investigations have been on the rise, up 5 percent from the previous fiscal year, triggered in part by a worsening economic crisis and the increased stresses that come with it. Last year in [Broward County](#), 1,490 children were removed from their homes due to abuse and placed in the foster care system.

On Jan. 13, Fort Lauderdale Mayor Jack Seiler, Florida Department of Children and Families Secretary George Sheldon, representatives from the [Broward County](#) Commission, Broward's Sheriff's Office, the State's Child Abuse Death Review Team, ChildNet, and the Children's Services Council joined together to launch "Broward AWARE! Protecting OUR Children," an awareness campaign that aims to ensure that [Broward County](#) families, educators, media, law enforcement and all stakeholders use and share resources that will make it possible for all children to safely realize their full potential, hopes and dreams.

Roberto Santiago, an adult survivor of child sexual abuse and the father of a sexual abuse survivor shared his life story, including how attempts to repress the traumatic experiences of his childhood led him to a life of drug and alcohol abuse and how his absenteeism as a father to his then 3-year-old daughter contributed to her being victimized, as well.

Now fully recovered and a motivational speaker focusing on men's role in their children's lives and healing from the trauma of child abuse, he said, "When the person who should be nurturing and caring for a child is not there others, who shouldn't, fill that void. It was what happened to my daughter that opened my eyes," he said, adding that thanks to the diligent work of Broward Sheriff's Office investigators, support from the Sexual Assault Treatment Center and guidance from Henderson Mental Health professionals, "I have full custody of my daughter and the perpetrator is behind bars."

Mayor Seiler, welcoming attendees at the Holiday Park Community Center, spoke of how worsening economic conditions are a contributing factor to increased incidences of child abuse and neglect.



"We all know that when the economy goes south, child abuse goes north. I am proud that this campaign is being launched in Fort Lauderdale and here at Holiday Park, a prime example of the kind of place where children come to play, engage in sports and recreation with their families," Seiler said.

Secretary Sheldon commended Broward for being ahead of the curve in collaborative efforts that help address child abuse and neglect and commended the launching of the awareness campaign as a means to engage the entire community in addressing the issue. ChildNet President/CEO Emilio Benitez told the audience that residents can help [Broward County](#)'s abused children by serving as foster parents for abused children during a tumultuous time in their family life and making abused children a permanent part of their family through adoption; while Children's Services Council President/CEO Cindy Arenberg-Seltzer challenged the community through a "call to action" by using and sharing the many resources available to help stem child abuse and neglect.

"Broward AWARE! Protecting OUR Children" partners include Children's Services Council, Department of Children and Families, ChildNet, [Broward County](#) Health Department, Broward Sheriff's Office, Healthy Mothers Healthy Babies, Healthy Families, [Broward County](#) Public Schools, [Broward County](#) Sexual Assault Treatment Center, [Broward County](#) Human Trafficking Coalition, The Humanity Project, Volunteer Broward, Children's Home Society, Legal Aid of [Broward County](#), 2-1-1 Broward, ARC Broward, Guardian ad Litem and more.

For more information and a list of scheduled events, call the Children's Services Council at 954-377-1000 or visit <http://www.211-broward.org>

serv-BrowardAWARE.html. •

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