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Event designed to combat abuse



Yasmin Vazquez, left, 16, of Cooper City, and Chardae Davis, 23, of Coral Springs, line the sidewalk with pinwheels during the Pinwheels for Prevention event at the Reverend Samuel Delevoe Park in Fort Lauderdale. (Eric Bojanowski, Staff photo by Eric / April 9, 2010)

By Julie Levin, Special Correspondent

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A network of [Broward County](#) agencies recently hosted a free community education event to get out the message about preventing child abuse.

More than 400 people turned out for Pinwheels for Prevention: Empowering Families at the Reverend Samuel Delevoe Park in Fort Lauderdale.

"We were trying to communicate information to adults, as well as children, about child abuse and ways to prevent it," said **Nancy Cotterman**, director of the county's Sexual Assault Treatment Center.

Her agency teamed with ChildNet, the Broward Sheriff's Office, the Department of Children and Families and others to coordinate the event for Child Abuse Prevention Awareness Month.

Organizers adopted the Pinwheels for Prevention name to match a statewide program run by The Ounce of Prevention Fund of Florida, a public-private partnership created in 1989 that helps at-risk children and families.

To help bring people out for what can be an unsettling topic, the free event was designed to be fun, but packed with information. Guests were given cards shaped like pinwheels and asked to visit the different vendors to learn about available services and resources. Afterward, they were given a sticker for their pinwheel.

Children enjoyed bounce houses, food and local entertainers while parents had a choice of brief lectures that provided tools for overcoming common parenting pitfalls. Topics included "Safety in the Home," "Baby on a Budget," "Coping with Crying" and "Parenting under Pressure."

"It really focused on how to stay calm, how to manage, how to prioritize, how to pull out the big guns with your kids when you need them, and how to let other things not become a big issue," Cotterman said.

According to the Sheriff's Office, there was a 13 percent drop in abuse allegations in 2009 compared to 2008. Organizers said that's proof that countywide prevention efforts are paying off.

Organizers say prevention can come in many forms. Cotterman points to Broward's dubious distinction of leading the state in the number of deaths by drowning for children age 4 and younger. She said such incidents can be prevented if parents paid heed to calls for swim lessons, safety devices and constant supervision.

"Drowning is largely preventable — not by one, but by multiple methods," she said.

Cotterman said their main message to parents is that child abuse is preventable and help is available.

"There are things they can do that are not difficult that will save the life of their children, and the lives of their neighbors and their community," she said.

For more information or a referral on how to get help, call the Sexual Assault Treatment Center at 954-765-4159. You also can call ChildNet at 954-414-6000 or visit <http://www.childnet.us>.

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