

Free swimsuits, water safety reminder kick off summer at YMCA



By KARI BARNETT

SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL | JUN 06, 2019



Parents and their children pick out free swimsuits during an event at the YMCA in Hollywood. (YMCA of South Florida / Courtesy)

While the choices varied, the prices did not: Everything was free thanks to over 150 community donations of bathing suits and swim trunks from a swimsuit drive earlier this year.

While there are many reasons children don't learn to swim, YMCA officials say they wanted to eliminate the ability to afford proper attire as one of them.

The giveaway took place over Memorial Day weekend as a way to kick off summer and bring awareness to water safety in the months ahead when children will be hitting the pool and beach to cool off.

“Last year, Florida had 88 people die by drowning and 75 were children under the age of 4,” Sheryl A. Woods, CEO and president, YMCA of South Florida, said in a statement. “Since 2010, more than 100 children have died in South Florida due to drowning, two young children recently. As a community, we’ve got to come together to put a stop to this. We owe it to our kids.”



From left, Sheryl A. Woods, CEO and president, YMCA of South Florida; Tongelia Milton, executive director of communications, YMCA; Stanley C. Panther; Jake Steger, COO, YMCA of South Florida; Lauren Simone, executive director, Florida Panthers Foundation; Tara Montenegro, executive director of aquatics, YMCA of South Florida; Danielle Jacobs, foundation coordinator, Florida Panthers Foundation; and Officer A. Barrios, city of Hollywood Police Department, attend the swimsuit giveaway. (YMCA of South Florida / Courtesy)

The **Florida Panthers Foundation** awarded the **YMCA of South Florida** a \$25,000 Community Champions Grant in February to support the nonprofit organization’s Swim for Jenny drowning prevention program.

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The foundation's grant allows charitable organizations in South Florida to request financial support for their programs. Then one organization is awarded up to \$25,000 during each of the 41 Florida Panthers home games.

This year's Swim for Jenny Week provided more than 2,500 free swimming and water safety lessons, and drowning prevention information to children and adults at YMCA locations during spring break.

According to the YMCA, drowning is the second-leading cause of unintentional injury-related death for children age 1 to 14, with Broward and Miami-Dade counties leading the nation in drowning deaths among small children.

Visit ymcaofsouthflorida.org or FloridaPanthers.com/GrantApplication.



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