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COMMUNITY NEWS

The Florida Panthers Foundation and YMCA team up for water safety awareness month

By EMMETT HALL
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The YMCA of South Florida and the Florida Panthers Foundation of Sunrise partnered up for Water Safety Awareness Month. The kick-off event took place at the Greater Hollywood YMCA Family Center. (YMCA/Courtesy)

Summer time has arrived in South Florida and thousands of people are hitting the pools, lakes and ocean for some fun in the sun. With that comes a serious warning concerning water safety and drowning prevention. The YMCA of South Florida and the Florida Panthers Foundation of Sunrise has formed a new partnership to make kids safer during Water Safety Awareness Month.

The Panthers Foundation awarded a Community Champions Grant of \$25,000 to the YMCA that is providing free swimming and water safety lessons to 175 underprivileged children in Broward County. There was also a free swimsuit distribution for the children.

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“Work and support around water safety and drowning prevention is important in any community, but it’s extremely important in South Florida because we lead the nation in drowning deaths among small children,” said Sheryl Woods, CEO and president of YMCA South Florida. “In the last two months, we’ve had at least three drownings and one near drowning of young children. Parents and adults have to be vigilant about supervising kids, especially when they are in or around the water. We want to encourage everyone to be a Water Watcher and help keep kids safe. Even one drowning death is too many.”

The event was conducted at the Greater Hollywood YMCA Family Center. The impact of drownings has a devastating effect on families in the community. There have been more than 100 children who have drowned since 2010 in South Florida. Broward and Miami-Dade counties top the nation in drowning deaths of children ages 1 to 14.

“With the help of our community partners, like the Florida Panthers, who supported our Swim for Jenny Week of Free Swim Lessons over spring break, we are educating kids and parents on how to be safe around water and providing introductory swim lessons,” Woods said. “Swimming is a life skill that everyone should have.”

Visit ymcaofsouthflorida.org.

Emmett Hall is a South Florida Community News correspondent.
