CRIME WATCH

Foundation helps keep children safe this spring

BY CARMEN CALDWELL
Special to The Miami Herald

Spring break is almost upon us and many parents will, unfortunately, depend on older siblings to take care of smaller ones. Therefore, for the next couple of weeks I will be providing you with information that will help in dealing with possible dangers and give you some peace of mind.

A couple of weeks ago, I met with a representative of the Samantha Foundation, a unique safety program.

I asked the foundation to submit information on the program. Here it is, as provided by the director, Jennifer Gould:

In 2001, Katie and Mark Kessler's hearts were shattered when they lost their 2-year-old daughter, Samantha, after she became entangled in window blind cords in their Coral Gables home. Determined not to let Samantha's death be in vain and to prevent other parents from experiencing a similar tragedy, the couple, with the help of family, founded The Samantha Foundation in 2002.

CALDWELL

The mission of the Miami-based nonprofit is to create safe home environments through an educational approach designed to raise awareness about childhood injury prevention among parents, caregivers and children.

While many of us may think we know how to childproof a home and may even think our home is safe, the tragedies continue at alarming rates. More than 2,000 children 14 and under die in the home each year — and more than two-thirds of them are 4 years old and under.

Each year, there are an estimated 3.4 million visits to emergency rooms by children 14 and under for injuries that occurred in the home. Fires, suffocation and drowning are the leading causes of unintentional home injury and death among children in this age group.

The Samantha Foundation focuses on the hidden danger in the home, as well as the more-obvious precautions that should be taken. One key initiative is The Child Home Safety Project which involves safety demonstrations and the distribution of kits containing childproofing devices. There is no fee for participants for the educational seminar or the kit.

Additionally, this spring The Samantha Foundation and partners will bring the Aquatic Safety Awareness Program (ASAP) at no charge to parents and caregivers in low-income communities who would otherwise not have the opportunity.

Participants will learn how to properly secure a pool area with alarms, gates and fencing to prevent accidental drowning, CPR, proper supervision of water areas, first aid and rescue techniques.

The programs are geared for children 12 and under and are scheduled in Miami May 4 at the Alper JCC in partnership with Swim Gym, May 31 at the Miccosukee Golf & Country Club with partners Ocaquatics and Little Swimmers and June 14 (tentative date) at the Westminster Christian School in partnership with Aqua Kids Inc.

To request a child home safety demonstration in your community and/or to sign up for the water safety programs this spring, contact Gould at 800-636-9520 or info@thesamanthafoundation.org.

Carmen Caldwell is executive director of the Citizens' Crime Watch of Miami-Dade. Send feedback and news for this column to her at cmcwatch@aol.com, or call her, 305-470-1670.

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