

## **Bilingual Initiative Encourages Proper Use of Child Safety Seats and Safety Belts Among Latinos**

### **Issue**

One simple hand gesture of “Two thumbs up!” was the reaction of a little Hispanic girl sitting in her brand new booster seat. As South Carolina’s Latino population grows, so does the number of children at risk of injury on South Carolina’s roadways. Child restraints are not required nor are they used consistently in Mexico and other Latin American countries. Parents feel that they can better protect their children by holding them in their arms.

Traffic Fatalities are the leading cause of deaths for Hispanics 1-34 years of age in the United States. Unrestrained vehicle occupants are more likely to be ejected from the car and four times more likely to die if ejected. Hispanic ages 5-12 are 72% more likely to die in motor vehicle crash than non-Hispanic children

### **Intervention**

The Junior League of Columbia contacted the Division of Violence & Injury Prevention (DIVP) of the South Carolina Department of Health and Environmental Control (DHEC) regarding a service project they were interested in sponsoring. The Junior League was raising funds to purchase child restraints to distribute to parents in the Latino community whose children were riding unrestrained. Diversity outreach is one of the objectives of the grant awarded to DIVP by the South Carolina Department of Public Safety (SCDPS). As both entities have similar goals, a partnership was struck between DIVP and the Junior League.

The event was scheduled for April 6, 2008 at the Wal Mart in West Columbia, South Carolina. The theme of “Corazon de mi Vida” was adopted which is a safety program that encourages Latino families to use child restraints and seat belts. Flyers were printed and distributed to various merchants in the Midlands area that serves the Hispanic population inviting them to the event. Flyers were also sent home with children from local schools. The Junior League recruited bilingual persons to assist the child passenger safety technicians in providing safety information to the parents attending the seat check. The Junior League purchased convertible child restraints and booster seats with funds raised for this event. DIVP agreed to match the number of seats.

### **Impact**

The seats were distributed to any parent whose child was in need of a new restraint. According to the terms of the SCDPS grant, with each car seat the parent was given instruction on the proper use of the seat. The Junior League arranged for a jump castle, face painting and games to be available for the children along with a safety message. A total of 73 child restraints were given away during the event. Approximately 13 seats were exchanged for new car seats, as they were inappropriate for use by the child. Convertible seats were also given with education to expectant parents for use with the newborns. Not only were the children who attended evaluated and seated in appropriate restraints, but the parents were also advised about the use of safety belts and minimizing possible projectiles in the vehicles. The following objectives for the event were met:

- Parents left the event with a greater awareness of safety in vehicles.
- Members of the Latino community established a more positive relationship with local law enforcement officers.
- Unsafe child restraints were taken off the road and replaced with new seats.
- Seventy-three children are riding safer than before.

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