

Spotlight on the Safety Net

*A Community Collaboration
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Safe Kids Cleveland County

Safe Kids Cleveland County is a community coalition that uses innovative ideas to help children and families learn how to prevent childhood injuries “at home, at play, and on the way.” Born out of community tragedy, Safe Kids strives to impact the entire community, one program at a time.

Injuries are the leading cause of death for children older than 1 year. More than 15 years ago, Cleveland County lost 6 teens to motor-vehicle crashes in a single year. At the time, Cleveland Regional Medical Center was planning to become a designated level III trauma center. The group was committed to providing injury-prevention education, even though this activity was not required for level III designation. Michael Barringer, the medical director for the state’s first level III trauma center, led the effort to establish Safe Kids Cleveland County and served as its chair for almost 10 years. Since its inception, Safe Kids Cleveland County has flourished and has maintained its commitment to what works in the community.

Safe Kids Cleveland County coordinates several signature programs each year. Kid Tips is an injury-prevention program for kindergarten students. The program was developed by the Hemby Pediatric Trauma Institute, which is located at Carolinas Medical Center in Charlotte. Instructors are contracted to provide 30-minute classes on a weekly basis for 12 weeks. The program’s topics, which vary weekly, include fire, fall, bicycle, school bus, and home safety. In Cleveland County, the program visits every kindergarten class, educating approximately 1,600 children per year. All participants are given fitted bicycle helmets, with more than 20,000 distributed to this point. Initially funded by Children’s Miracle Network, this program is now supported by Cleveland HealthCare Foundation.

Risk Watch is an injury-prevention program developed by the National Fire Protection Association. Safe Kids Cleveland County received a grant 6 years ago to implement the program in elementary and intermediate schools. Teachers are trained to integrate an injury-prevention curriculum, which includes 8 different safety topics, into core subjects throughout the year. Risk Watch began in 3 schools and is now in 14 elementary and intermediate schools in Cleveland County. Approximately 5,000 students participate each year. Safe Kids Cleveland County staff provided training, curriculum manuals, student workbooks, and classroom teaching tools to teachers at the program’s outset and continue to help schedule community visitors to talk about safety, to serve as a resource for the schools, and to work as key contacts for other programs.

Safety Zone is an annual event at the Cleveland County Fair, the largest county fair in North Carolina. Cleveland Regional Medical Center leases a building on the fairgrounds, and for the past 10 years, Safe Kids Cleveland County has hosted a number of injury-prevention attractions and games in the leased building. An estimated 1,500 children and 2,000 parents attended the Safety Zone during the 2010 fair.

SAFETeens ThinkFirst is a 3-hour interactive injury-prevention program that is presented to students in driver education classes in the county. SAFETeens focuses on destructive decisions (including using alcohol and other drugs) and their consequences. During the program’s first hour, emergency department nurses review age-appropriate brain development, injuries, and driving distractions. During the second hour, emergency medical service professionals simulate a motor-vehicle crash and an assessment of an injured passenger and discuss the activity with students. The third hour is led by law enforcement officers, who discuss the influence of crashes and death on the family and the potential punitive effects on

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the driver. Of note, every SAFETeens class begins by giving students the chance to view a wrecked car donated to the program by the family of a teenage victim of a crash. Barringer attends as many classes as possible, to describe to students the difficulty of talking to parents whose child has died in a crash.

In addition to these signature programs, Safe Kids Cleveland County offers car seat-safety classes for new parents, at least 4 car-seat checks each year, bicycle rodeo and safety classes, International Walk to School days, and many other programs. Safe Kids Buckle Up, a Safe Kids Worldwide program, and Buckle Up Kids, a Safe Kids North Carolina program, partner with the Cleveland County Department of Social Services, the Shelby Fire Department, and the Cleveland County Health Department to provide and fit car seats at a reduced price for families that cannot afford them. Safe Kids Cleveland County also collaborates with Shelby, Boiling Springs, and Kings Mountain police departments; the Cleveland County YMCA; the Cleveland County Sheriff's Department; the State Highway Patrol; Cleveland County Schools; Cleveland County EMS; the Cleveland County Boys and Girls Club; Gardner-Webb University; Cleveland County Partnership for Children; Chevrolet; the Kiwanis Club; and many others to serve their local communities. Partnerships with Safe Kids North Carolina, Safe Kids USA, and Safe Kids Worldwide facilitate the program's participation in broader injury-prevention efforts. Recently, a runner represented Safe Kids Cleveland County in the Marine Corps Marathon, in Washington, D.C.

Joan Mabry and Judy Hawkins, the Safe Kids Cleveland County cocoordinators, have a great sentiment about their leadership. She said, "It was wonderful to have a trauma surgeon as the driving force. Barringer made the connections and was a voice for the program." She notes that Barringer, the former chair of the board, and Jon Brownlee, who is a pediatrician and the current chair, both have a passion for the safety of children. They believe their work has contributed to the absence of teenage fatalities in Cleveland County during the past several years. Safe Kids Cleveland County is committed to the belief that every child has the right to grow up safe, healthy, and injury free. NCMJ

Figure 1.
Safe Kids North Carolina Director Kelly Ransdell (left), North Carolina Insurance Commissioner Wayne Goodwin (left center), and Safe Kids Cleveland County's Judy Hawkins (right center) and Joan Mabry (right).



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