

## Hawthorne Huddle focuses on early education, child health and crime

Written by Ivan Phifer

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The September Hawthorn Huddle meeting discussed the value of childhood education and ways to help parents understand what they need to do to help their children be ready to start school.

Twin Cities Healthy Start is a part of the National Healthy Start Association, founded in 1991 and established on the premise that community driven strategies are needed to address the cause of infant mortality and low birth weight, especially among high risk populations. The program is designed to impact infant mortality

"The health disparities in the Twin Cities are huge," said Angela Watts, Project Director of Twin Cities Healthy Start, Minneapolis Department of Health and Family Support. "In order for both Minneapolis and St Paul to receive this funding, that means our infant mortality rate is two and a half times the national rate. It is a black eye to receive this funding. Families and women need support; our most vulnerable children are infants and youth and they deserve a healthy start."

Watts also said the most important aspect is to involve men in this issue. "Fathers who are a part of their children's lives (have children who) do better. No matter what is going on in the primary relationship, fathers have to have a roll," said Watts.

Also during the Huddle, Inspector Mike Martin of the Minneapolis Police Department, 4th Precinct, provided a safety report that revealed an up-tick in burglaries.

"We had a large increase last year as well; part of that was due to the tornado," said Martin. "We used to have a lot of serial and older, career burglars; now we get kids who used to sell drugs on the corner, due to the profits not being as high as in the (19)90s."

Martin said robberies too are up.

"It's mainly people on the street being robbed by youth," said the inspector. "Some are by gunpoint, some by strong arm, mainly for cell phones, iPods, and money."

According to Martin, robbery is up 15 percent from last year, but down from two years ago, gun seizures are up 25 percent as well with a total of 225 guns seized.

These alarming statistics demonstrate the need for programs such as Family Academy of the Northside Achievement Zone, Twin Cities Healthy Start and Family Partnerships, proponents say.

The Northside Achievement Zone (NAZ) Family Academy is a foundational component of the NAZ "cradle to career" pipeline. The Family Academy consists of the Infants and Toddlers model, which teaches parenting strategies that promote children's language development and positive parenting for families with children age zero to three.

Andre Dukes, Family Academy Lead Facilitator for NAZ said the organization also runs a parent group with a goal to assist parents to ensure their children are school ready and able to develop meaningful relationships, focus in school and proceed to college successfully.

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During the 12 week program, parents are taught the biological functions of early childhood development. "Everything a parent does with a child the first five years is setting the trajectory for that child's entire life. Parents are the first and primary teachers," said Dukes. "The primary goal is to get parents to understand how they influence child development."

The Hawthorne Huddle is held the first Thursday of every month from 7:30 a.m. - 8:45 a.m. in the multi-purpose room of Farview Park, 621 29th Ave. N., with continental breakfast starting at 7:15 a.m. For additional information on the Huddle, contact Sophie Winter, at 763-764-3413 or [sophie.winter@genmills.com](mailto:sophie.winter@genmills.com)

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