

Los Angeles African American Community Paves the Road for National Expansion of "Buckle Up for Life" Safety Program

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August 6, 2011 – LOS ANGELES, Calif. – Children’s Hospital Los Angeles (CHLA), today co-hosted a “Celebration of Safety” in conjunction with the *Buckle Up for Life* program, at an event held at True Gospel Missionary Baptist Church in Los Angeles, California.

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of death for African Americans from birth through 14 years of age and the second leading cause of death for African Americans between 15 and 24 years of age, resulting in three times the incidence rates compared to other children. To address this health disparity, “*Buckle Up For Life*” was created by trauma specialists at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, and funded through a grant from Toyota. The program is designed to educate both African American and Hispanic families on the importance of keeping their families safe while driving.

“We were seeing a disproportionate number of African American and Hispanic children coming into the hospital with severe crash-related injuries and we knew we had to do something about it,” said Dr. Rebecca L. Brown, Associate Director, Trauma Services at Cincinnati Children’s.

“Safety is a priority for Toyota,” said Pat Pineda, Toyota’s group vice president of national philanthropy. “In addition to designing and manufacturing some of the safest vehicles on the road today, we are dedicated to supporting education programs that help drivers and passengers develop responsible habits to protect them on the road at every stage of life.”

Buckle Up for Life meets African Americans in their communities, delivering information in a faith-based setting. To date, Toyota, Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center, and Children’s Hospital Los Angeles have joined together with three local African American churches to deliver safety and prevention education to participants.

Building on the program’s initial success in Cincinnati and Los Angeles, Toyota announced on June 28 that it has committed \$1 million to launch the program in Chicago, Denver and San Antonio in 2011 and 2012.

“What we saw when we began *Buckle Up for Life* in Greater Cincinnati was that, after participating in the program, the number of adults and children using seat belts and car seats more than doubled. When we saw those results, we knew we had found a successful and sustainable model that was meeting the pressing needs of the community,” added Pineda.

The congregations of the three participating churches have devoted weeks of Sunday school classes and sermons to learning about critical safety behaviors. At the closing events, dozens of volunteers from Toyota African American Collaborative joined with their expert partners from Children’s Hospital LA to help educate participants on child passenger safety and injury prevention through free car seat inspections, safety demonstrations and informational booths. Families who did not previously own a child car safety seat were given one, compliments of the program. Festivities also included live music, food, giveaways and arts and crafts for the children.

“Injury and death due to vehicle-related injuries is preventable,” said Dr. Jeffery S. Upperman, Director of Trauma at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles. “If we can save just one child’s life, all of our efforts have been worth it.”