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## **Martin County Healthy Start Coalition decreases number of infant deaths, improves in state rankings**

Stuart, FL (Nov. 5, 2012) – For every 10 babies born, one will be born premature. November 17 marks World Prematurity Day, a day to honor all babies who have died as a result of premature birth and a day to increase awareness about the prevalence of this issue. For mothers and expectant mothers throughout Martin County, the Martin County Healthy Start Coalition serves as a resource to prevent prematurity and increase the number of babies born healthy.

For the last 20 years, the Healthy Start Coalition has played an integral role in increasing the number of healthy babies born in the state of Florida. Since its inception in 1992, the Martin County Healthy Start Coalition has assisted more than 19,000 expectant mothers throughout the county.

Research shows that mothers who do not seek prenatal care are more likely to experience child-birth complications. Thanks to the many services offered by Healthy Start, there has been an increase in the number of mothers seeking prenatal care in the first three months of their pregnancy from 56.2 percent in 2005 to 71 percent in 2011.

As more women are seeking the services offered by Healthy Start earlier in their pregnancies, babies are being born at healthy birth weights and infant mortality rates have decreased. In September, the Florida Department of Health released a report showcasing infant mortality and low birth weight rate statistics for each county in 2011. With the help of the Martin County Healthy Start Coalition, Martin County has risen from 47<sup>th</sup> in the state to 5<sup>th</sup> out of the 67 counties due to improvements in programs, services and community outreach.

In 2005, the infant mortality rate was 8.2 deaths per 1,000 live births. By 2011, the rate of infant mortality in Martin County had decreased by nearly 50 percent to 4.2 babies per 1,000 live births.

“We’ve made significant gains since 2005 in a number of core areas and our statewide rankings have steadily improved. More babies are being born healthy and that’s one measure of us becoming a healthier community,” said Martin County Healthy Start Coalition Executive Director Scott Berry.

The comprehensive Healthy Start program assists mothers from the time they find out they are expecting and throughout their pregnancy through a risk screening. These screenings determine if a mother or her infant are at risk of any health complications. All prenatal care providers in the state of Florida are required to offer a Healthy Start risk screening to all pregnant women during their initial visit with their physician. If the results of the screening suggest that the mother is at risk for having a complicated pregnancy, the mother is then referred to the services provided by Healthy Start.

### **About Martin County Healthy Start Coalition**

Martin County Healthy Start Coalition is a community-based 501(c)3 not-for-profit organization that offers support and education to pregnant women and infants. Prenatal and infant health screenings, childbirth education, counseling services, and parenting education classes are available to families to ensure that all babies are born healthy. All information provided to Healthy Start is kept confidential. Eligibility for services is based on the presence of risk to the health of the mother or infant, not on income level.

Connect with Martin County Healthy Start on Facebook at [www.facebook.com/MCHHealthyStart](http://www.facebook.com/MCHHealthyStart). For more information, call 772-463-2888 or visit <http://www.mchealthystart.org>.

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**Photo Identification:** Martin County Healthy Start Coalition Executive Director, Scott Berry