

Coral Gables news

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Congresswoman Donna Shalala helps launch state-wide 'Faces Are Essential' initiative



Congresswoman Donna Shalala, center, recently donated a box of ClearMasks(TM) to a local childcare center in support of the Florida Association for Infant Mental Health's (FAIMH) state-wide launch of the 'Faces Are Essential' initiative. With Shalala — who is wearing one of the ClearMasks(TM) — are FAIMH's Christine Hughes Pontier, Ph.D., left, and Allen Yergovich, right, Governor of the Florida District of Kiwanis.

United States Congresswoman Donna Shalala, former United States Secretary of Health and Human Services, visited the United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education to help launch the Florida Association for Infant Mental Health's (FAIMH) state-wide 'Faces Are Essential' initiative.

The goal of the initiative is to raise enough funds to supply Florida's 7,500 childcare centers with ClearMasks (TM), which allow children to see the face of their caregivers. A donation of \$75 provides for a box of 24 masks.

Shalala, former President of the University of Miami, donated a box of ClearMasks(TM) to the childcare center in support of FAIMH (faimh.org), Florida's only professional organization for infant and early childhood mental health. "It is important that babies and toddlers see our faces, our smiles," Shalala said to the media throng that attended the event.

FAIMH President Dr. Neil Boris strongly agreed with Shalala's perception of the importance of the ClearMask(TM) to young children. "The ClearMask(TM) helps children develop communication and social skills by allowing babies and toddlers to observe their caregivers' expressions and nonverbal cues," said Boris. "Such neurological advancements are facilitated by keeping the user's face visible to children. Simply put, these masks are essential for brain development during this important stage

in these young children's lives."

The kick-off to 'Faces Are Essential' also featured FAIMH Vice President Jackie Romillo, FAIMH Miami-Dade chapter Chairperson Christine Hughes Pontier, Ph.D., and the Governor of the Florida District of Kiwanis, Allen Yergovich. FAIMH is partnering with the Florida District of Kiwanis, to promote the use of ClearMasks(TM) to its approximate 28,000 members in 240 Kiwanis Clubs and 361 Key Clubs throughout the District, which includes clubs in Grand Cayman, Turks & Caicos and Puerto Rico.

"Having Congresswoman Shalala kicking off our initiative has been a great boost to 'Faces Are Essential' because it significantly raised the campaign's awareness with the public," said Pontier, former FAIMH Board Member, and 'Faces Are Essential' initiative

coordinator. "Having the backing of Kiwanis will be an additional, invaluable ongoing benefit."

The public can donate to Faces Are Essential by texting FACES to 202-858-1233 or visiting faimh.org/faces.



Congresswoman Donna Shalala, wearing a ClearMask(TM), talks to Lucia Hartner, left, and Eva Walter, right, at the United Way Center for Excellence in Early Education as their teacher Aurora Porras looks on. Shalala was at the childcare center to promote the use of ClearMask(TM), in the Florida Association for Infant Mental Health's 'Faces Are Essential' campaign.