



Sarasota PD hands out books to local children

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By Sydney Baulier

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SARASOTA- Several local organizations teamed up to host an event for children to encourage a little R&R....reading and relationship building that is.

Sarasota Housing Authority partnered up with Sarasota PD and Sarasota County libraries to host their annual Books and Badges event.

"It's addressing early childhood literacy, making sure our families have books in their homes, and having this positive connection with the Sarasota Police department," says William Russell, CEO of Sarasota Housing Authority.

The event is a part of the Book rich environment program, a national campaign aimed to make books accessible for low income communities.

"We want to make sure that every child has the opportunity to read and to get a book that they can take home, and keep, and mark-up, and do whatever they want to it, and make sure. These are things that parents don't necessarily have the means to purchase for them. So, we feel that it is really germane that we help the community," says John Colon, SHA board commissioner.

Sarasota Housing Authority CEO William Russel says the team of organizations gave out several hundred books during the event.

"Books are so important because it's the only way kids can develop and enhance their reading abilities. We know that if kids struggle to read by third grade, their really going to struggle in school after that because the schools don't teach them to read after third grade."

He says the kids enjoy receiving them from Sarasota PD.

"A lot of these officers already know our kids so that's a bonus so they are going to see you know oh our friends are here and they are giving out books today."

Lt. Shellhammer says he enjoys sharing his love for reading and getting to know the kids of the community.

"It can be fun, it can be imaginative, it can be nostalgic, What's better."

"It's not often we get to do stuff like this to just get out there and show we are people too and we love to read and speak with kids and promote our agency, just bond with the community," says Shellhammer.

Mayor Brody says the event is crucial in creating a two-way dialogue between first responders and the community.

"I want our residents to feel connected to our police department in a very personal way. We are here to serve them, serve you, and for our police department to be out here building those relationships particularly at a young age, I think is critical."

Sarasota Housing authority is one of the forty housing authorities that participate in the Book Rich program. They have over 1000 books to give out to the community this summer.