FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: Oct. 10, 2011

Contacts: Chris Hawkins, Active Healthy Communities Coordinator, Thurston County Public Health & Social Services Department, 360-867-2513
Karmel Shields, Executive Director, YWCA of Olympia, 360-352-0593
Jim Cooper, Executive Director, TOGETHER!, 360-493-2230 x12

Thurston County awarded $300,000 to improve health

OLYMPIA – A federal grant will help Thurston County improve the health of local girls.

Thurston County Public Health and Social Services has been awarded a $300,000 grant by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Office on Women’s Health. Funding will be used to offer the Girls Circle program to middle-school age girls and continue efforts of the Thurston Coalition for Women’s Health.

In early 2011, the Thurston Coalition for Women’s Health determined that reducing violence against women and girls was their top priority. “We came to consensus as a Coalition and decided investing earlier made sense, said Karmel Shields, YWCA Executive Director. “The Girls Circle program builds on strengths, those of local girls and our community”. The YWCA of Olympia is taking the lead in bringing the science-based Girls Circle prevention program to Thurston County.

Research shows that Girls Circle reduces alcohol use, improves the ability of girls to form healthier bonds with others and promotes academic achievement. The University of Washington Division of Public Behavioral Health & Justice Policy has signed on to evaluate Thurston
County Girls Circle to determine the program’s potential to influence beliefs and behaviors that reduce risk for health consequences of violence and abuse.

“Improving health outcomes among local girls requires us to be mindful that healthy relationships are key – those with caretakers, friends and significant others.” said Dr. Diana Yu, Thurston County Health Officer. “Unfortunately, experiencing aggression and coercion within adolescent dating relationships is not uncommon.”

If Thurston County meets performance expected by the Office on Women’s Health, an additional 4 years of grant funding is possible. “We are looking forward to helping the Coalition tackle their priorities for women’s health” said Jim Cooper of TOGETHER!. TOGETHER! will lead local efforts to promote awareness of the Coalition’s prevention priorities and the science behind them.

Current members of the Thurston Coalition for Women’s Health are:

- Behavioral Health Resources
- CHOICE Regional Health Network
- Community Action Council
- Community Youth Services
- Family Education and Support Services
- Group Health Cooperative
- Physicians of Southwest Washington
- Planned Parenthood
- Providence St. Peter Hospital
- SafePlace

-- more --
• Sea Mar Community Health Centers
• South Puget Sound Community College
• South Sound Breastfeeding Network
• Stonewall Youth
• Thurston County Chamber of Commerce
• Thurston County Prosecuting Attorney’s Office
• TOGETHER!
• United Way of Thurston County
• YWCA of Olympia

For more information about the Thurston Coalition for Women’s Health, visit
www.co.thurston.wa.us/health or call the Health Department’s Women’s Health Coordinator at
360-867-2516.

# # #