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HAWKES BAY TODAY

Hawke's Bay kids to join Ardie Savea and other sporting heroes on virtual adventure

Hastings Leader
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Ardie Savea's virtual avatar shows off some of the virtual adventures, New Zealand sites. Photo / Supplied

Tamariki across the country are set to work alongside their sporting heroes to clock healthier habits as part of the 2022 Zespri Young and Healthy Virtual Adventure.

About 22,000 Kiwi kids, including 845 from 32 school classes across Hawke's Bay and Central Hawke's Bay, have joined forces with celebrity heroes Ardie Savea, Amelie Ranne Ekenasio, Kane Williamson and Samantha Charlton.

Starting on October 20 and running until November 24, the health and wellbeing programme is taking Kiwi tamariki on a virtual trip around the globe.

The initiative will instill healthy habits along the way - concepts such as the importance of moving their bodies, eating extra fruit and vegetables, drinking more water, getting a good night's sleep and reducing leisure time spent behind screens.

Kim Harvey, founder of the Young and Healthy Charitable Trust and Virtual Adventure, is delighted to kick off the adventure for its fifth year.

The Young and Healthy Virtual Adventure has had more than 120,000 kids move through the programme.



New Zealand netball player Ameliaranne Ekenasio helping young Kiwis get active and create healthy habits. Photo / Supplied

"Each year, we see incredible results, with teachers, parents and the kids themselves telling us they have more energy, can focus better in class, and feel better, which is all the more important as we head to the busy end-of-year sprint," Harvey said.

The Virtual Adventure was created with the knowledge that healthy habits formed early set a child up for a lifetime of improved physical and mental wellbeing.

Harvey says this has become even more important, as kids have become used to long stints of attending school from home over the past few years.

"Our health approach needs to put a strong focus on prevention."

With students back in the classrooms, Harvey and her team can visit so many more of the participants.

The Young and Healthy Virtual Adventure has started a Roving Reporters campaign, where students can tell stories of how they are using the Virtual Adventure on the private Planet WellBeing TV YouTube channel.

After completing the program, Harvey said her team will engage with some of the families involved and follow them post-programme to see how it continues to influence their choices.

"In addition to the newly upgraded programme platform and added 'travel destinations', there are some very exciting new elements of the programme this year," the founder said.

Classes taking part in the Virtual Adventure work as a team to travel across the world.



Ameliaranne Ekenasio's virtual Avatar in Rome shows off one of the many global sites that Kiwi kids will travel to as part of their virtual adventures. Photo / Supplied

Along the way, they will be met by their sporting heroes and Asics ambassadors.

They will show them around and share some interesting facts about local history and geography, while sharing some of their professional health and wellbeing tips.

Participation in the Virtual Adventure is free thanks to the support of partners like Zespri and Asics, with The Young and Healthy Trust ensuring teachers in participating schools have the resources and support they need to encourage kids to succeed.

The initiative's founder explained the program has been perfected for the digital generation.

Each child gets to design a unique avatar, which they'll see interacting with their classmates and the sports stars at every stop.

"Better still, every real-world healthy choice – like moving their body, eating a piece of fruit or drinking water – comes with the instant reward of digital points to add to their class total.

Over 5 weeks, these actions start to become ingrained, so the likelihood of continuing them is much greater than a one-off lesson, Harvey said.

Zespri CEO Dan Mathieson says the kiwifruit industry is proud to help 22,000 kids and families get active and to instil healthy eating and social habits.

"We're really pleased to see such strong participation in this year's Zespri Young and Healthy Virtual Adventure, which we know teaches such important habits at an important time in kids' lives," Mathieson said.

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