

PASIFIKA CHOICE: FAMILY ACTION FOR THE PREVENTION OF OBESITY IN PACIFIC CHILDREN



Pasifika Choice is a new initiative now underway in the Hutt Valley designed to tackle the prevalent problem of childhood obesity in Pacific communities.

Candice Apelu, Project Manager for the Pasifika Choice project, says that despite improvement in Pacific children's health over the last 10 years, the recently conducted New Zealand Health Survey 2011/12 highlighted that one in five Pacific children are obese. These rates are higher than the national averages and obesity rates have not changed since 2006/07.

Delivered and led by Pacific Health Service Hutt Valley in partnership with Te Awakairangi Health Network and Family Centre, Pasifika Choice is a three year project funded by the Ministry of Health through the Pacific Innovations Fund.

The overall goal of the project is to reduce the incidence of obesity in Pacific children in the Hutt Valley by working with Pacific families with children aged from 3 to 11 years. Instead of waiting for children to develop the co-morbidities associated with overweight and obesity, project activities will largely focus on early intervention strategies around food choices and physical activity developed in conjunction with the families with an emphasis on changing healthy lifestyle habits rather than weight loss.

The project aims to work with 150 children and their families within the three years. It is a free programme for Pacific families and families can join the project by contacting the team at Pacific Health Service Hutt Valley.



Pasifika Choice team with Project Ambassador Rodney So'oialo

The project offers families the opportunity to work with a Healthy Families Coach within their homes or wherever they feel comfortable in, nutrition interventions, attend cooking sessions and other necessary support and resources at no cost to support any healthy lifestyle changes families want to make. The only requirement from the families is commitment and time.

The project's ambassador is former All Black Rodney So'oialo. "I did not hesitate to give my support and come on board as an Ambassador for Pasifika Choice because as a parent I can identify with what the project is trying to achieve. As parents and role models we can make a huge difference in the way children think and act. When children see us making healthy and better choices, they will do the same" he said.

One of the strengths of this initiative according to Ms Apelu is that it is driven from a research/evidence base that understands traditional Pacific attitudes to food and physical activity and the present realities of Pacific families. The project also offers flexibility for each family to choose the activities and associated benefits they want from the programme to fit around their family routines and other commitments. This ensures a level of local ownership and commitment to the project that is likely to lead to a continuation of being physically active and more nutritionally aware after project support ends.

Since it started in October 2013, the project is now working with the first cohort of families. Some highlights have also included the inaugural Pasifika Choice Family Touch tournament which included over 30 families getting active through the sport of Touch Rugby. 🏉

"Together as parents, Pacific families and communities we can tackle, ruck and maul this childhood obesity problem out the door. Things like limiting access to fizzy drinks and lollies in the house, and being active together as a family even if you start with a 10-minute walk. Small and subtle changes can reap big health rewards." – Rodney So'oialo

For more information about Pasifika Choice contact:

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