

# Weld County health campaign underway to reduce child obesity



Make TODAY Count! | Courtesy photo

Boys play with fitness dice and exercise for fun at a recent Make TODAY Count! event in Weld County.

One in four Colorado children suffer from obesity but a Weld County campaign is trying to do something about it by getting kids to give up sugary drinks and exercise more.

Make TODAY Count! is an effort by the North Colorado Health Alliance to increase healthy eating and overall well being by encouraging kids to drink water instead of sodas or juice and add an hour of exercise to their day.

“Our goal is to shift the way people think about health,” Make TODAY Count! campaign coordinator Carlee Rosen said. “People think that health starts in a doctor’s office, but we want to show that it starts in our community.”

Rosen said Colorado is considered a healthy state overall but childhood obesity is rising and the latest generation is supposed to have the shortest lifespan.

“It is an important issue to take action now,” Rosen said. “It can’t be one organization to do it. We have to have the whole community involved if we want a lasting impact.”

The campaign, which was launched this summer, is working with more than 30 organizations in Weld County, including the Boys and Girls Club and various health and learning centers, to provide kids with healthy food options such as water and fruit.

At the High Plains libraries, staff are setting up displays which will show children how much sugar is in all of their favorite drinks.

“The displays will help people see and show them how much sugar is in drinks such as orange juice, and it might make them say ‘maybe water is a better choice’,” High Plains libraries program coordinator Micaela Sanchez said.

Sanchez said the libraries are happy to participate in the health campaign.

“We provide information to be beneficial in the lives of our patrons,” said Sanchez. “(Make TODAY Count!) is passionate about what they do, and they look at all demographics and pockets in our communities and that is what we do, so we support what they are doing.”

Rosen said the purpose of the campaign is to change children's behavior by giving them more knowledge about healthy living.

She said they are trying to create interactive events to teach children and, by letting them play games and win prizes such as fresh fruit and Frisbees, hope to get a positive response from the children.

"It is great to see the kids get excited about drinking water and eating fruit," Rosen said. "My favorite part is working with the kids and them learning about health and being healthy."

There will be surprise events at the libraries in which Make TODAY Count! members provide water with fruit in it, similar to the kind served at spas, so the children have another alternative to sugary drinks.

"They are coming in to explain how to make (the spa water) so that they can show how easy it is to make and how great it is," Sanchez said. "We are hoping it will change the thinking for our patrons."

Make TODAY Count! will also track the progress of the campaign by administering a pre-test and post-test to children to see how their knowledge about healthy living and behavior changes over the summer.

Though the campaign is just scheduled for the summer months, Rosen hopes that the organizations continue to extend the message throughout the school year.