

Media Release

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Local champions team rugby with healthy living messages

The chance to play and chat with their local rugby heroes brought kids out in their droves at Mount Maunganui College this week.

As part of a relationship with Bay of Plenty District Health Board, four Bay of Plenty Steamers players joined in a game of touch and spoke to the students about keeping themselves healthy.

“The Steamers are a very community focused team and the players do a lot more than just play rugby!” says BOPDHB project manager Jessica Burke. “The Steamers approached us earlier this year, eager to give back to their community by promoting nutrition, physical activity and smokefree messages amongst different community groups. We saw this as a great opportunity.”

Along with a DHB representative, around seven Steamers players visited every secondary school in the Bay of Plenty District Health Board region over the past six months. Welcomed by schools, the players are seen as positive role models, motivating students to take up key healthy eating and physical activity messages. At each school they played a game of touch or led students in training skills, helping to reinforce the messages around healthy eating, physical activity and smoking. Students who did well in a quiz won a ticket to a Steamers home game.

Middle-aged men were also a focus of this joint campaign. The chance to meet local rugby heroes was the ideal motivation for Bay of Plenty men to get off the couch and attend a men’s health evening.

Eight evening gatherings were held across the region for males aged 35-65 from rugby clubs and the wider community.

“The evenings raised awareness of healthy eating and physical activity with the main aim of linking males back to their local GP,” says Jessica. “We worked closely with local PHOs and GP practices where possible, with local practice nurses providing free mini cardiovascular disease risk assessments.”

As well as health professionals, at least three Steamers players spoke about how nutrition and physical activity had affected their lives. Players spoke about the steps they took to regain their fitness after injury and prior to the rugby season, and highlighted the importance of being smokefree.

Attendees all received a take home bag with further information and freebies including a *Healthy Food Guide* magazine, as well as the opportunity to redeem tickets to a Steamers home game by visiting their GP for a check up.

Jessica says the key driver of success for this project was the commitment of the local rugby team.

“The players were keen to get involved. We’ve had a great response and have been approached by several other people keen to see the initiative extended to other sports,” she says.

The healthy eating, health action and smokefree messages couldn’t be missed across the region during the rugby season as images and messages were displayed on the Steamers tour bus, as well as their website. Player of the day certificates included key healthy eating and healthy action tips for sportspeople, and Subway vouchers were given to the nominated player of the day in place of the usual less healthy options. Conditions applied for the Subway voucher ensuring players were only entitled to use the voucher for healthy Subway options. Around 3,600 certificates and vouchers were presented over a 12 week period to primary and secondary school rugby teams.

August 2009 saw the launch of Kiwisport, with a significant amount of funding invested in schools and communities to get people involved in organised sport.

“This example from the Bay of Plenty illustrates a potential opportunity to combine nutrition messages with this work,” says Julia Lyon from Agencies for Nutrition Action (ANA). “It helps to stimulate interest in rugby and other sports, as well promoting attendance at local rugby games. Players gave their time willingly and were ideal role models to deliver the nutrition and physical activity messages because of the respect they have in their local community. This means a win for health, a win for the rugby union and a win for the community.”

For further information on this initiative visit the Steamers website

www.boprugby.co.nz/smokefree. For more information on the Ministry of Health’s Healthy Eating Healthy Action (HEHA) campaign visit www.bopdhb.govt.nz and click on the HEHA logo.

ENDS



Steamers players join Mount Maunganui College students on the rugby field at lunch time for a game of touch.



Mount Maunganui College students take on a healthy living quiz, eager to win tickets to a Steamers game.



Mount College student Sharhika Leopold correctly answers healthy living questions and wins a ticket to a Steamers home game. BOPDHB representative Jessica Burke presents the ticket.

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