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## 20,000 Kiwi kids still set to enjoy a 'virtual adventure'

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Photography, Mark Coote

This year's Zespri Young and Healthy Virtual Adventure will provide classes across Aotearoa with an important opportunity to discover the world virtually and embrace healthier lifestyles – even if they can't get to school in person.

Kicking into action on Monday, November 1, the health and wellbeing programme will take Kiwi tamariki on a virtual trip around the globe, instilling healthy habits along the way like exercising, eating extra fruit and vegetables, drinking more water and reducing leisure time spent on screens.

With the school year once again disrupted by COVID-19 lockdowns, the programme's use of technology means it can still take place while observing all necessary safety protocols across regions with varying Covid-19 restrictions.

Young and Healthy Trust founder Kim Harvey says that the team had been monitoring the situation closely, and adjusting the programme accordingly to ensure that kids could still have the chance to participate even if they weren't necessarily physically back at school given COVID-19 restrictions.

"This year has again been a really challenging period for parents with the disruptions caused by COVID-19 and we've been determined to make sure that we still deliver an amazing programme to provide kids and their families with some much needed fun and encouragement," says Harvey.

"Every year we see fantastic results with teachers, parents and the kids themselves telling us they have more energy, can focus better in class and feel better, so we really wanted to make it work."

Classes taking part in the Virtual Adventure work as a team to travel across the world. Along the way they are met by their sporting heroes – ASICS Ambassadors Ardie Savea, Ameliaranne Ekenasio, Kane Williamson and Samantha Charlton – who will show them around and share some interesting facts about local history and geography, as well as some of their personal health tips.

"The programme has been perfected for the digital generation with each child designing a unique avatar which they'll see interacting with their classmates and the sports stars at every stop.



Zespri give Asics shoes to kids at Rata St School, Naenae

“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.”

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.

While online learning might feel like the new normal for some, Harvey says teachers nationwide have been fantastic, with many working extra hard to deliver the adventure for their classes this year.

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 – something Kim says has become even more important with the arrival of Covid-19.

“Our health approach needs to change. With our health system being put under pressure we need to focus on teaching kids healthy habits as this is the best defence against poor mental and physical health in the future.

“Research has shown that the first 10 years of a child’s life lay the crucial foundations for lifelong attitudes and habits. It’s important we find fun and engaging ways to teach kids how small daily actions can have a massive impact on how we feel,” she says.

Zespri CEO Dan Mathieson says the kiwifruit industry is proud to help entertain 20,000 kids and families involved in this year’s programme, and to help them build healthy habits for them and their families.

“We’re really proud to support the Zespri Young and Healthy Virtual adventure as we know it brings positive benefits to the lives of thousands of New Zealanders, helping ensure happier, healthy young people and communities,” says Mathieson. “We’ve seen first-hand how investing in the wellbeing of our people and communities helps them thrive and we know this year’s adventure will have a huge impact on kids – whether they are back at school or joining in from home.”

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