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Pupils shoo-in for healthy mission

Bay of Plenty Times, Tauranga Bay of Plenty

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Zespri joins with sports stars for national health and wellbeing initiative

Children at Katikati Primary School were super-surprised when given a new pair of Asics sports shoes, to launch Zespri's nationwide health and wellbeing initiative.

Fifty pupils at the primary school will join 20,000 tamariki participating in the 2021 Zespri Young and Healthy Virtual Adventure.

Chiefs/Bay of Plenty Steamers rugby player Naitoa Ah Kuoi led Monday's activities as the pupils tested out their new shoes.

Zespri's Young and Healthy Virtual Adventure provides children in primary and intermediate schools an opportunity to discover the world virtually and embrace healthier lifestyles – even if they can't get to school in person. It takes 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.

Young and Healthy Trust founder Kim Harvey says this year has again been challenging for parents with the disruptions caused by Covid-19.

"We've been determined to make sure we still deliver an amazing programme to provide kids and families with some much-needed fun and encouragement.

"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 work as a team to travel across the world. Along the way they are met by sporting heroes – Asics ambassadors Ardie Savea,

Ameliaranne Ekenasio, Kane Williamson and Samantha Charlton – who show them around and share 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.

"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 is free thanks to partners such as 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 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. 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.

"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."

Katikati Primary School principal Andrea Nicholson says they are thrilled with the prize the children have won through Zespri's initiative.

"The children can't wait to get outside and active with their new footwear."



Katikati Primary School pupils are excited to take part in Zespri's Young and Healthy Virtual Adventure launched at the school on Monday.



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The look on Noah Roberts' face says it all when opening the box to find a new pair of Asics running shoes, with Skye Kuipers closely checking hers.

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Jamie Troughton/
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