

## Community health fair promotes tools for healthy lifestyles

Written by Story and photos by Dee Velasco For the Sun  
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On Sept. 19, the public was invited to a Community Health Fair held in the gymnasium of Chee Dodge Elementary School at 641 U.S. 491 in Yatahey. The event kicked off a full day of health-oriented information on various topics, and coincided with parent-teacher conferences.

“We’re here promoting community health with others, and it’s good because it will be with the

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parent-teacher conference,” Navajo Health Education Program Gallup Service Unit member Kelly Bitsilly said. “Parents are hard to get a hold of because of work, so this way, we can get the parent engaged, too, rather than just always the student.”

Other health-related vendors were on hand at the event to teach the public about what they do in and for the community.

“We basically go out into the communities and we teach safe driving practices,” Navajo Department of Safety Office Aide Brian James said. “We also join the national campaigns about texting and driving, we bring awareness of impaired driving.”

James said the department also has a child-passenger-safety program that teaches parents about proper car-seat installation.

“Anything that has to do with highway safety, that’s what our program goes out and educates on,” James said.

Big Brothers Big Sisters of Gallup, a nonprofit youth mentoring program, was also in attendance.

“It’s really important for the parents and children to have resources in the community,” Big Brothers Big Sisters Regional Director Sarah Piano said. “This is a great way for kids to get into our program and have a positive mentor in their lives.

Piano said her role at the event was to chat with families, give out information, “and hopefully, this will be helpful to everyone here at the school and provide some additional resources for them.”

According to Piano, the program entails “six scopes of work: Substance Abuse Inter-Prevention, Family and Maternal Health, Physical Activity, Communicable diseases, Chronic diseases, and

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Emergency Preparedness.”

Bitsilly said she tries to hold an event like this every month.

“I invited all programs around the Gallup area, so we will have informational booths on health, hygiene, diabetes, anything related to healthy behaviors,” she said.

The event not only offered information about healthy eating habits, but it touched on difficult topics like bullying, too. According to Navajo Nation Senior Community Health worker Vanessa Woods-Henry, four types of bullying were taught at the event: physical, social, verbal, and cyber.

“Mainly cyber bullying, because now a lot of kids have cell phones, tablets [which are] accessible to the Internet,” she said. “We teach them to be cyber-smart because cyber-bullying has led to suicides. We educate parents on setting boundaries, trusting your child, too.”

United Healthcare Community Liaison Watson Billie was on hand to teach the community about the Medicaid Centennial Care plan.

Billie said the goal was to provide information to community members — Native and non-Native alike — about New Mexico Medicaid.

“We assist them with enrolling with an MCO [managed care organization], helping to get them United Healthcare,” he said. “We promote our added-value services.”

Bitsilly said community events like health fairs help organizations show off health-related aspects of their work.

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The event collaborated with Indian Health Service health-promotion programs like the Just Move It campaign, which promotes physical activity among Indigenous peoples.

Attendees were given information about healthy food-related programs like ChooseMyPlate.gov, which aims to get kids (and adults) on healthy diets for a lifetime. The event promoted the consumption of more fruits and vegetables, food portioning, beating diabetes, and drinking more water.

***Story and photos by Dee Velasco***

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