

Bringing Healthy Foods, Beverages and Sports to Children and Families

Summary

After partnering with Measure Up Marion, both the park and the sports league have found that concession profits are still positive and the families are buying out the healthier choices. With nutritious food options, parents are giving good feedback. "As a parent of a teenage boy, we are grateful for the healthy alternatives at the park. It helps reinforce what we are teaching at home. Often there is nothing remotely healthy at a concession stand. Now we have fruit, granola bars and other options to choose from." – Cyndi Hanna, parent at Big Sun

Challenge

Concessions can worsen the problem of childhood overweight and obesity statistics, which in Marion County are already topping 29% for middle and high schoolers. In after-school programs, the numbers are even worse -- 17.6% of students are overweight and 21.3% are obese. Childhood obesity is, as it is throughout the country, another segment of the problem as a whole. Adults suffer the same issues, especially when eating out or eating "on the run". Sports leagues take up a lot of time for families, and many families use the concession stands for meals, both during practice and games. Measure Up Marion, and its partner the Marion County Children's Alliance, wanted to change the offerings at one of the largest and most active parks in Marion County. To make that change happen required the cooperation of numerous entities and widespread agreement among those groups.

"We know that families spend about half of their disposable income on food outside the home. Having concession stands that provide healthier foods gives families the opportunity to eat well -- and be well -- where they play!"

- Brianna Liles



Solution

By approaching both the park and the soccer league that brings in the largest numbers of people, Measure Up Marion partners, Marion County Children's Alliance and the Florida Department of Health in Marion County, laid the groundwork for stocking healthier options. They worked with Big Sun Soccer League and Scott Carrigan Park to offer better choices at the park, which hosts an estimated 1,000 players, plus their families and friends, each soccer season. Concessions now offer fruit, granola bars, baked chips and 100% juice beverages, allowing patrons to make informed, healthier choices. Signage announcing the changes, and special notations on the menus added to the messages delivered.

Success Stories

<http://nccd.cdc.gov/dchsuccessstories/>

Results

The league's and the park's contacts are pleased with the success of the program. "We are very appreciative of our park families. When you are a part of a team or a league, you spend a lot of evenings away from home," notes Dawn Fernandez of Scott Carrigan Park. "By having a healthy concession stand, it's allowing the families a healthy option of eating at the park. We're very proud to be a part of Measure Up Marion." That sentiment is echoed by the Big Sun Soccer representatives. "With the help of Measure Up Marion's project, Big Sun soccer has been able to show our athletes that to replenish fuel for their bodies, they shouldn't eat or drink things sweetened with sugar," noted Brian Behan. "Our concessions proudly offer healthier options that are quality fuel and satisfying snacks!" Profits remain constant and feedback is positive.

Sustainable Success

The success with one of Marion County's largest parks offers Measure Up Marion an outstanding example of how well the healthy choices can be the easy choices. By adding bright, cheerful signage, the stands allow families to identify the healthier choices. It also shares the important education messages with the public on healthy choices being the healthy choices. The coalition is moving forward in year two of its program to bring its message of healthy food and beverage options to other parks' concession stands because of its success at Scott Carrigan. This success is made possible with funding from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention through its Partners in Community Health award.

Your Involvement is Key

Parents, parks and "proper" food choices CAN go together, as proven by the success of Measure Up Marion at Scott Carrigan Park with Big Sun Soccer League. In expanding the program to other parks and other concession stands, Measure Up Marion can not only help lift the low health ranking of Marion County but also help its citizens live longer, healthier, happier lives. Parents and athletes will make the final difference through buying (into) the healthier choices found at local parks.



Contact

Maclyn Walker

Heart of Florida

203 Silver Springs Blvd. #101

Ocala, FL 34471

352-732-6599 phone

<http://www.measureupmarion.org>