Celebrities tour health campaign through South Auckland schools

On Tuesday 23 February, Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ brought their latest campaign, Hard2Breathe, to select Auckland schools along with ambassadors – TV personality Erin Simpson and professional basketball players Brook Ruscoe and Mika Vukona.

The Hard2Breathe campaign is in place to raise awareness of asthma and respiratory conditions amongst teenagers and children. By touring the campaign through South Auckland primary schools, the foundation was able to bring the message to a region most affected.

“As all respiratory conditions, including asthma, occur at higher and worsening rates among Māori, Pacific peoples and low-income groups, it is imperative to improve health literacy here to reduce some of that inequality” says foundation CE John Wills. “The schools tour reached over 800 kids in low decile schools and encouraged them to talk openly about asthma. Educating these children enables them to go home and educate their parents on proper management and diagnosis.”

Last year the Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ funded an educational asthma show at Manurewa West School. “After the visit, many students went home and talked to their parents about what they learned, prompting some to have their child tested for asthma,” comments David Wallis, principal of the school. “We know of at least three children who were diagnosed because of this.” This positive outcome highlighted the importance of the visits for his students and staff, making them eager to have the foundation back again.

Hard2Breathe ambassador Brook Ruscoe had a similar experience, not having his asthma diagnosed until his mid-teens. “Until then, me and my family [sic] just thought I was unfit” Ruscoe says. “But once I had the asthma test I could manage my condition and my training became so much easier. It could be the same case for so many kids out there.”

The Hard2Breathe ambassadors – who all have asthma themselves – played an important part at the schools tour by encouraging kids to talk about asthma. They initiated a balloon blowing competition, in which children with asthma demonstrated to their peers the difficulty of exhaling with restricted airways. Ambassador Erin Simpson says, “I’ve suffered from asthma all my life but as long as I take my medication I have been able to achieve anything - my goal is to let our youth know that they can do that too.”

Three schools were visited, including Kelvin Road School, Kereru Park School, Manurewa West School all in the South Auckland area. Asthma and Respiratory Foundation NZ gave away Hard2Breathe balloons, drink bottles and bubble wands for the students as prizes for their involvement on the day.

Hard2Breathe is an awareness taking place throughout February, encouraging people to show support by posting and sharing photos and videos of them blowing up a balloon. Hard2Breathe finishes on Monday 29 February.

Download hi-res images of the schools tour:
https://www.dropbox.com/sh/e0201hthcci89s9/AACnAkwH_rk04B3Ox5dWiPGea?dl=0
For more information please contact:
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Quick facts
• Over 460,000 New Zealanders take medication for asthma - one in nine adults and one in seven children.
• Asthma costs New Zealand over $800 million per year.
• Respiratory diseases, including asthma, account for one in eight of all hospital stays in New Zealand - in 2013, there were more than 69,000 admissions, a third of which (23,000) were children.
• Respiratory disease is New Zealand’s third most common cause of death.
• Māori are 2.9 times and Pacific people 3.7 times more likely to be hospitalised for asthma than Europeans or other New Zealanders (Telfar Barnard et al., 2015).