

FNP collaborates with others to provide health, nutrition experiences in Collier



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Guest columnist

UF/IFAS Family Nutrition Program (FNP) collaborates with many organizations in Collier County, including Blue Zones Project, to encourage children and adults to incorporate healthy eating and increased physical activity into their lives. The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP – formerly Food Stamps) provides funding for this SNAP-Ed program in Florida.

Since 2009, UF/IFAS Collier County Extension FNP staff have offered a variety of learning experiences such as

classes, grocery store tours, food demonstrations, food tasting, gardening and hands-on cooking classes. FNP strives to decrease the risk of chronic disease and improve the quality of life at every age.

FNP has partnered with Collier County Public Schools, providing interactive health education classes each year, using evidence-based curriculum that aligns with Florida Standards for education. Students and teachers are provided with tools and information to make good decisions about their food choices and opportunities for fitness. For example, FNP is a major sponsor of the 95210 Kids on the Go! running program with the Safe & Healthy Children's Coalition. Blue Zones is a member partner in KOTG

and has been supportive of FNP Smarter Lunchroom training for school foodservice staff.

Educating parents, so they can support and teach their children healthy habits, is also an important part of the FNP curriculum. The Collier FNP team teaches adults at partner agencies such as Grace Place, Catholic Charities, Boys & Girls Club (Immokalee) and the FSU College of Medicine Center for Child Stress & Health. The family education classes on Monday evenings at the Center for Child Stress & Health focus on the family and how they can learn and become healthier together.

Growing fruits and vegetables has been a joint FNP/Blue Zones initiative at a Golden Gate Community Park. We are

all encouraging families to eat more fruits and vegetables and there's no better place to grow your own than south Florida!

In addition to teaching healthy nutrition, FNP created the monthly fitness event called Ciclovía Immokalee! Families gather at the community park for free, family-friendly games and activities. Numerous programs, agencies and businesses have joined FNP to make this a fun time for all. There are too many partners to list here, but major contributors from the past five years include: the Harry Chapin Food Bank, Bikes for Tykes, Department of Health-Immokalee, Goodwill Joblink, 1 by 1 Leadership Cultivate Immokalee and the Benison Center.