



Children Rock 'n Read to make healthy choices, build literacy skills

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Using plush characters, sing-along tunes and adventurous tales, the 1890 Research and Extension Program at South Carolina State University is motivating children to adopt healthy lifestyle practices and encouraging them to read through a new initiative called Rock 'n Read.

Rock 'n Read is an outreach program that incorporates literacy education and the attention-getting curriculum of the OrganWise Guys. OrganWise Guys promote the benefits of good nutrition and preventive health care practices to people of all ages, but focuses primarily on preschoolers and students in elementary school.

"We're concentrating on educating children because reports have shown that the habits that one learns during his or her early development years will likely be maintained well into adulthood," said Stephanie Felks, senior extension director of 4-H and youth development.

The brainchild of Felks and Monica Fields, senior extension director of family life programs, Rock 'n Read was developed in response to two national awareness campaigns in which 1890 Extension has participated in locally for the past three years. The outreach program had already provided health and wellness educational sessions to early childhood and elementary programs in observance of the Week of the Young Child and National Nutrition Month. The educational sessions were combined and given a name to get children excited about practicing healthy habits and learning to read, Fields said.

A typical Rock 'n Read session begins with a story about the adventures of the OrganWise Guys, who have names like Calci M. Bone, Madame Muscle and Sir Rebrum. After the story, the children get active by singing and dancing to a song about the importance of being healthy. The OrganWise Guys are then introduced to the kids by gently pulling them out of OrganAndy, a 30-inch doll. Youths receive a coloring book and crayons, and are encouraged to read the book with their parents.

Rock 'n Read was launched in March and continued through April. In that time, Fields and Felks say the program educated more than 1,500 children at Head Start programs and elementary schools in the Midlands and Lowcountry.

"Rock 'n Read is educational and a very good program," said Linda Hickson, family service coordinator of the Head Start Program in Neeses. "It starts children at a very early age, encouraging them to eat healthy, and explaining to them the importance of reading and healthy eating."

Rock 'n Read's focus on health and wellness coincides with a federal push to address childhood obesity, a rising public health concern in the nation. The National Institute of Food and Agriculture, the U.S. Department of Agriculture division which funds and directs programming at the nation's land-grant institutions, has identified childhood obesity as one of its five priorities. NIFA-supported programs ensure that nutritious foods are affordable and available, and provide guidance so individuals and families are able to make informed, science-based decisions about their health and well-being.

"The 1890 Research and Extension Program recognizes that childhood obesity threatens the future of our youth," said Delbert Foster, 1890 extension administrator. "That's why 1890 Extension staff partners with community organizations and leaders to develop and provide services and programs that educate individuals and families about making healthy choices regarding food and physical activity."

To schedule a Rock 'n Read session with your early childhood or elementary program, contact Felks at 803-536-8855 or

sfelks@scsu.edu, or Fields at 803-516-4775 or mofields@scsu.edu. For more information on other 1890 Research and Extension research projects or programs, contact Elizabeth Mosely at 803-536-8464 or emosely@scsu.edu.