

STARTING ON A HEALTHIER PATH



All kids should have access to the great San Mateo County parks and outdoors

Get Healthy San Mateo County works to build healthy communities with opportunities for all.

Why we need to think “outside” the box

Did you know one in three children are obese or overweight in San Mateo County and expected to develop Type 2 Diabetes in their lifetime?

To reverse these trends, Get Healthy San Mateo County (Get Healthy) is looking for new ways to increase opportunities for people to be active.

One great way to inspire healthy habits like hiking, exploring, and outdoor play is to expose youth to the outdoors early on. Research shows when youth interact with nature they are more likely to have positive environmental attitudes and behaviors in adulthood.¹ San Mateo County has a wealth of beautiful outdoor space that all community members can utilize.

Finding health outside

San Mateo County’s Parks and Recreation Department has a great program to facilitate access: Take a Hike. Take a Hike park rangers lead free hikes in one of the County’s 20 parks and over 17,000 acres on the first Saturday of the month from March through November each year.

The program encourages residents to get outdoors, enjoy nature, and engage in physical activity. However, many families lack the resources and transportation to get there.

Unfortunately, not everyone has the same opportunities to benefit from being active outdoors and connecting with nature.

Low-income communities generally have reduced access to parks and open space. Safety is a concern when accessing neighborhood parks, whereas county parks and open spaces are typically farther away from low income communities, not easily accessible via public transit, and therefore more costly and infeasible to visit.



¹Wells, N. M., & Lekies, K. S. (2006). Nature and the life course: Pathways from childhood nature experiences to adult environmentalism. *Children Youth and Environments*, 16(1), 1-24.



“Many of the families that participated in the hike don't have consistent access to transportation, and as a result, have never gotten the chance to enjoy the beautiful natural spaces that exist in their own backyard...the hike helped our students and families to realize that exercising as a family can be fun! Experiences like Take a Hike are so important in teaching our students to develop healthy lifestyles. My students are constantly reminding me of all the amazing trees and animals they saw on their hike!” – *Tiffany Moon, EPACS Teacher*

Bringing parks to the people

East Palo Alto has one of the poorest health outcomes in San Mateo County, where residents live 13 years less than the County average (62 compared to 75 years). This is a result of numerous factors that cumulatively impact health, such as the ability to be active outside. A recent analysis by The Trust for Public Land showed that almost half of East Palo Alto residents have no parks or open space within a half mile of their home.

Supporting one school and inspiring 150 youth to be active outdoors

To help get one school on a better path, Get Healthy provided funding for buses to take over 150 students, their families, and teachers from East Palo Alto Charter School (EPACS) to Pacifica to hike San Pedro Valley Park in May 2015 as part of the San Mateo County Parks' Take a Hike program. **EPACS has primarily Latino students, with 9 out of 10 qualifying for free or reduced lunches. This was the first time most of these families had ever been to Pacifica and for many their first time hiking.**

Park rangers welcomed EPACS families and other Take a Hikers by sharing what plants and animals they might see along the trail. They organized two hikes for the day – one easier for people with less experience and the other more rigorous – both led by park rangers. A sports medicine specialist from Kaiser Permanente led the group through warm-up exercises and discussed how to prepare for physical activities, such as by being well hydrated and eating nutritious foods.

“We should continue to go on hikes because it sets a good example for our kids to exercise and take care of their health.” – *Lucia Velasco, EPACS parent*

Students set off on their hike looking for wildlife and spotting numerous birds and insects. Upon returning, participants visited the Visitor Center for more details on the plants and animals that can be found in the park. **Many students and families said they wanted to return or visit another County park. EPACS staff said the coordination effort was minimal and well worth the results of seeing their students enjoying nature and being active.**

“One student even said that before this hike she wasn't sure about nature because she thought it was boring, but now she knows that she **LOVES nature!**” – *Kristina Turner, EPACS Teacher*



For more information on funding similar opportunities, visit www.gethealthysmc.org.