

Volunteer and non-profit groups earn praise of health minister

By Annalise Klingbeil, Calgary Herald February 1, 2009

A national fundraising foundation, aiming to raise \$3 million for children's medical research, was launched in Calgary on Saturday with hopes of reducing rising health-care costs through preventive measures.

Kids Strong and Free will raise funds for the research group Maternal, Infant, Child and Youth Research Network, in an effort to make kids healthier and reduce health care costs.

Alberta's health minister, at Calgary's Market Mall for Saturday's launch, said as health-care costs increase, the role of fundraising campaigns like Kids Strong and Free are incredibly important.

"We have increasing costs in health care and we have increasing expectations of what publicly funded health care delivers to Canadians," said Ron Liepert, MLA for Calgary West.

"The role of foundations, of non-profits, of volunteer organizations, I think, is going to become ever more important as we move forward."

Ultimately, Bob Winterford, one of the driving forces behind Kids Strong and Free, said he hopes it will reduce health care costs in the long run.

"If we can make (kids) healthy than we reduce our health costs going forward," said Winterford.

Dr. David Johnson, a pediatric emergency physician at Alberta Children's Hospital, said the fundraising campaign has the potential to positively impact local children to kids across the country.

"Everyday Calgarian children are acutely ill and injured. This research network has the opportunity to find new ways to substantially improve outcomes of these children," said Johnson.

The first fundraising campaign for Kids Strong and Free will be 15 murals, located in different cities across the country.

For \$100, donors can sponsor a child to colour one of 1,000 canvases that will come together to form an inspirational mural.

In Calgary, Winterford expects the mural will be put on the side of a 12-metre trailer and placed along major roads.

Winterford said he doesn't think the economy will affect the fundraising efforts of Kids Strong and Free.

"I think this is strategically-planned so that we're not demanding a lot from people," said Winterford.

"It's going to be a tough haul for every charity, for every organization that requires funding and we're cognizant of that."

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