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Hundreds turn out for diabetes walk in park

By HERB BENHAM, Californian staff writer; Posted: Saturday November 6th, 2004, 9:30

Life's improved for 11-year-old Riley Stevenson.

A year ago, after being diagnosed with diabetes, the Discovery Elementary School sixth-grader had a bag strapped to her waist to carry all her supplies. Now she has a pump the size of a pager clipped to her belt that administers insulin and generally makes being a diabetic about as stress free as having a major disease can be.

Saturday, more than 1,500 balloon-carrying, yellow-shirt-wearing, water-bottle-toting supporters converged on Yokuts Park for the seventh annual Walk to Cure Diabetes. Yokuts, the park just west of Beach Park, is the site of many walk, ride and stroll fund-raisers but few garner the support that the local chapter of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation does.

They expect to raise \$225,000, said Gretchen Daughtery, branch manager for the local foundation fund-raising office.

It doesn't hurt to have a glowing fall day, cold grapes, mountains of baby carrots, oven-warm Krispy Kreme doughnuts and crisp ripe apples. But the strength of the foundation's fund raising is that it raises money for children.

People are suckers for kids. Sick kids tug on our heartstrings. Raising money to help find a cure for Type 1 or juvenile diabetes, a disease plaguing more than 2,000 children in Kern County and more than 18 million worldwide, is not a hard sell.

"We have generous corporate response," said Daughtery. "However, our family teams raise more money than anybody."

Those teams rally around a family member who has juvenile diabetes. For months they solicit donations, put up big cheery yard signs and corral friends and family to be on the team.

"Today is a celebration of all the hard work," Daughtery said of the event that had transformed Yokuts Park into a modern day love thy neighbor, and perhaps, love thy neighbor's child with diabetes, fest. "We get together and enjoy each other's company."

Twenty-year-old Amy Story was one of the participants. Like Riley, she wears an insulin pump. When Story was diagnosed with diabetes at 13, she had to give herself shots every day.

"Life is much better now for kids with diabetes," Story said.

On Halloween, Riley skipped the candy and trick-or-treat part of the experience. Instead she went door-to-door to solicit donations for Saturday's walk at Yokuts Park. Riley raised \$250 in her northwest neighborhood. Few could turn her down.