

Anger at diet book for children

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A new children's book about a 14-year-old girl who goes on a diet and then becomes a soccer star has been met with outrage in Auckland.

The book, *Maggie Goes on a Diet*, is by American author Paul Kramer and is set to be released next month.

But the book, which targets children as young as six, is facing scrutiny ahead of its launch with Twitter forums, Facebook pages and interest groups widely condemning it due to fears it could promote eating disorders and contribute to negative body image.

"We think the message is quite damaging," Eating Difficulties Education Network – EDEN – manager Deb Schwarz says.

"On the cover there's a picture of Maggie and in the mirror she looks thin and happy but she's a bigger girl."

The Epsom-based organisation says numerous people have been in touch to express disgust about the book, which New Zealanders can buy on line.

Ironically, the book launch will coincide with EDEN's Love Your Body month in October.

"We try to help people focus on enjoying their bodies," Ms Schwarz says. "There's also further health impacts of negative body image – it affects self-esteem, mental well-being, it contributes to unsafe sex practices and it means people are less likely to engage in physical exercise.

"There's a lot of outrage from mothers too. There's been a real backlash. People increasingly know that diets don't work."

EDEN is hitting back and in response it plans to launch its own set of children's books.

Ms Schwarz says that in New Zealand, between 2007 and 2010, 29 children under 13 were hospitalised for treatment for disordered eating, and this number does not include those who received support from private clinics and institutions.

International outrage about Mr Kramer's book has also exploded online.

"Seriously, this is a real book? Made for children? This is so wrong," reads one tweet.

Other tweets accuse the author of being overweight himself and one says the book is cashing in on eating disorders.

Mr Kramer is quoted on www.jezebel.com as having told Good Morning America: "My intentions were just to write a story to entice and to have children feel better about themselves, discover a new way of eating, learn to do exercise, try to emulate Maggie and learn from Maggie's experience."

"If I entitled the book *Maggie Eats Healthy*, somebody in a bookstore looking at [the] title is really not going to identify with somebody who has been overweight or who has health problems, or who can't bend and play sports because they are just too uncomfortable."

Mr Kramer believes the uproar is mainly due to people not using the word "diet" the same way he does.

"Diet is kind of a misconstrued word, it has many many meanings."

What do you think about *Maggie Goes on a Diet*? Email your thoughts to edcl@snl.co.nz.

- Central Leader