

CASE STUDY SERIES

Profiles of *Active & Safe Routes to School* initiatives in Canada involving one or more schools at the local, regional or provincial/territorial level.

2: Newcastle Public School and Durham Region

Pilot Project of
Go for Green

<i># of schools</i>	<i>Setting(s)</i>	<i>City/Town OR Region</i>	<i>Province/Territory</i>
5 (expanding)	Rural	Durham Region	Ontario

KEY WORDS

Language(s): English

Problems/Solutions: no-idling zone

Partners: public health department, school boards, safety patrol program, municipality

Tools: reflective armbands, active transportation contest with “Healthy Kids...” buttons

Events: Walk a Child to School Day; Healthy Kids campaign during Earth Week

Curriculum resources: *Blazing Trails through the Urban Jungle*

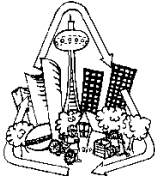
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Partners

Greenest City
Durham Region Health Department
Durham Regional Police Department
Go for Green
Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board
Durham District School Board
Whitby Parent Safety Patrol Program
Municipality of Clarington

Participants

Newcastle Public School, Newcastle
Orono Public School, Orono
Palmerston Public School, Whitby
Enniskillen Public School, Enniskillen
School Community Councils



THE WALKING SCHOOL BUS

"Walking gives us fresh air and a little bit of exercise" says Patti Chatterton, one of the parent walkers from Orono Public School. "There's less pollution from cars being brought into the school area and the kids are safe all walking together."

Goals

- Teach children the pleasures of walking and encourage healthy, lifelong habits.
- Reduce automobile use and related traffic hazards.
- Promote safer, less polluted communities.
- Help children to become better acquainted with their neighbourhood.
- Increase physical activity levels in children (enhancing academic performance).
- Reduce travel time for busy parents.

Program Components (& Players)

- Walking School Bus (Health Department, volunteer parents and students)
- Neighbourhood Walkabout (school administration, parents, police, school board, municipality)
- Blazing Trails Through The Urban Jungle (teachers through curriculum activities and students)
- No-Idling Area (school administration and the health department)
- Walk a Child to School Day event (parents, students, school staff, police, municipality, school boards)

Background

In early 1997, Greenest City – a Toronto-based organization focusing on community and environment issues – was approached by a public health nurse from Durham Region to explore the possibility of developing an A&SRTS program for predominantly rural communities. Following several meetings, a partnership was developed involving the Durham Region Health Department, Greenest City and *Go for Green*. Newcastle Public School became the first A&SRTS national rural pilot, launched in October, 1997.

Newcastle Public School has a current student population of 567. It is expanding rapidly and will eventually accommodate many more children from kindergarten through Grade 6. According to the baseline school transportation survey, approximately 20% of the school population is bused from outlying areas, 50% of children are driven to school, and 30% use active modes of transportation (walking and biking).

Implementation

The pilot set out to determine if the Walking School Bus (WSB) component would catch on in the Foster Creek subdivision, located just west of the school. There was immediate interest from families in this area and the first WSB was started in February, 1998. Parents wanted a way to identify the WSB participants, but the principal expressed concern that the traditional WSB symbol—a yellow scarf—might be a danger to children when using playground equipment. It was, thus, decided to use reflective vests instead. By the end of March, three small WSBs were in operation with plans in the works for more.

In developing the program, Greenest City provided consulting expertise in the form of:

- background materials to make the case for an A&SRTS initiative

- presentations to school trustees, principal, and teachers, health department staff and management, and to parents
- securing start-up funds through *Go for Green's* national program
- coordinating assistance for various promotional events, WSB planning, and implementation of the overall program
- networking opportunities with other participating schools.

Interested in the experience of implementing a program in a rural area, *Go for Green* selected this local initiative as one of its pilot projects in 1998. They provided seed funding to assist in the development.

A Greenest City representative met regularly with school and health department staff as the program evolved and also with teachers to discuss the *Blazing Trails through the Urban Jungle* material. If they wished, teachers were 'connected' with their counterparts in other schools that had already implemented this curriculum component of the program. The



The A&SRTS newsletter was extended to include Newcastle, and health department staff provided input.

Promotion & Communication

Preliminary meetings were held at the school to explain the overall program and answer questions. Two special WSB promotions were held and interested families were given a chance to sign up.

To further promote the program and create excitement around related issues, the school used Earth Week 1997 to launch a 'Healthy Kids Campaign'. Earth Day was 'Walking Wear Day'. The temporary road into the school was closed, and school buses and parents driving their children to school were directed to an area a few blocks away. Student safety patrollers escorted young children from the school buses and cars through the school yard to the school building. The Superintendent of Schools attended, along with the Mayor of Newcastle, Community Relations Police Officers, and school trustees. Parents lingered in the school grounds long after 9:00 a.m., chatting and drinking coffee.

During the campaign, children were able to earn a button if they used any physical means on five occasions to get to and from school. Buttons said "Healthy Kids ... Bike/Board/Blade and/or Walk to School". This promotional effort was a huge success.

Local media covered the Earth Day event, including:

- Orono Weekly Time
- Clarington This Week

- Courtice Independent

Lessons Learned

- The strong partnership that developed between the local health department and Greenest City was instrumental in the success of the program.
- The mandate of the public health nurse to promote physical activity (to improve heart health) *and* injury prevention provided natural tie-ins to A&SRTS. Since that time, two public health nurses have been assigned joint responsibility for the A&SRTS program. Other support people/agencies have offered assistance when needed.
- The Newcastle Public School pilot benefited from the already well-established relationship of the principal and staff with the public health nurse. It was a perfect example of health and education personnel working together for a common cause.
- It is important to stress flexibility. For example, parents who work part-time must know that it's fine for them to participate just on the days they are available.
- With some imagination, even children who are bused to school can participate. For example, WSBs can be organized to get children safely from home to the bus pick-up location (for parents who are now driving their children to the bus!). Drop-off areas, a few blocks from the school, can be established to allow bused children to participate in event days.

Building on the Experience

Because of the success of the Newcastle pilot, both the Kawartha Pine Ridge District School Board and Durham Regional Police Service endorsed the program and expressed a keen interest in seeing it expanded across the region. An A&SRTS presentation was made to the Whitby Parent's Safety Patrol Committee and they are actively promoting the program.

On Earth Day 1999, Orono Public School launched their WSB program with a Walk to School event. Palmerston Public School in Whitby launched their program on June 2—Canada's first Clean Air Day—with a Walk to School event and a 'no idling at school' campaign.

Durham Region Health Department has purchased 500 buttons for students and 250 green, reflective armbands for parents participating in the 1999/2000 WSB program. These both have the 'Durham Lives' logo on them.

Greenest City continues to support the Durham Region program in a consultative capacity and hopes to further this expansion in the future through joint fund-raising efforts.

Do Something About It

Call *Go for Green* toll free at 1-888-UB-ACTIV (822-2848)
or visit our Web site at www.goforgreen.ca