GCC Active and Safe Routes to School Program

Tools of Change Illustrated

- Building Motivation Over Time
- Feedback
- Financial Incentives and Disincentives
- Norm Appeals
- Obtaining a Commitment
- Overcoming Specific Barriers
- School Programs that Involve the Family
- Vivid, Personalized, Credible, Empowering Communication
- Word of Mouth

Initiated by

- Green Communities Canada

Partners

- Public Health Agency of Canada
- George Weston
- University of Toronto
- Cape Breton University
- Numerous schools, school councils and school boards across Canada

Results

- 120 participating schools across Canada in 2012
- Some schools had achieved a modal shift of 20% towards walking and cycling
- Some provinces had average modal shifts of 6% across all participating schools

Location

- Canada

Introduction

This case study covers the piloting and introduction of school travel planning through Active and Safe Routes to Schools programs coordinated by Green Communities Canada (GCC). The approach addresses the increasingly urgent demand for safe, walkable neighbourhoods while taking action on air pollution and climate change. Viewpoints are provided from the national, provincial, municipal and school levels.

Background

To minimize site maintenance costs, all Tools of Change case studies are written in the past tense, even if they are ongoing as is the case with this program.

Active and Safe Routes to School (ASRTS) is an international movement of organizations dedicated to creating safe community environments where families choose to walk or

use other methods of active transportation to and from school. It's ultimately about ensuring that children today have independent mobility.

GCC's ASRTS program started back in 1997 with pilot projects in Ontario and British Columbia. In 1999 and 2000, Nova Scotia, Alberta, Quebec, and Manitoba came on board. By 2011 Saskatchewan and the Yukon had also joined the program, which had grown to a national movement involving thousands of schools and hundreds of communities.

National-level activities, conducted by GCC, provide resources, tools, information and links for schools and communities to create their own unique Active & Safe Routes to School programs.

A case study describing the program between 1996 and 2005 is available at www.toolsofchange.com/en/case-studies/detail/97

While the program was very successful, individual school programs suffered from the lack of a policy document at the school level. A School Travel Plan is that policy document, as well as the process that develops it.

The main benefit of School Travel Planning is that active school travel becomes an integral part of municipal transportation planning and policy. Things like travel to school start to be included in official plans and transportation plans - because often they're not - and it also involves working in conjunction with the school district and having them think about other modes of transportation and not just school buses. It provides targets for implementation, which are really key.

All relevant stakeholders have to get involved, which involves parents, students, school staff, municipal transportation engineers and planners, the police, public health, school districts, politicians, and local residents, and any other organizations that might have something to do locally with active school travel.

By approaching school travel and active school travel in a comprehensive way, you can save everybody's time, there's no duplication of effort, and because you're collecting the data, you can see the results of your investment over time and you can see the savings that are being accrued. In addition, it can be tied to policies at the national, regional, provincial, and local level around health, environment, and injury prevention.

Targeting the Audience

The program's primary audience was students from kindergarten to grade eight, particularly those living within one km of school and those with peers who were already walking to school.

The secondary audiences were their parents, and schools. The parents were involved to

- Help run the program in their schools
- Encourage their children to participate
- Drive and park responsibly
- Turn off engines when parked

Getting Informed and Pilot Testing

National Level

In 2006, Green Communities Canada, with funding from Transport Canada's *Moving on Sustainable Transportation* initiative, started an extensive research project to look at international best practice in School Travel Planning. This led to the creation of an international best practice document, along with some recommendations for Canada.

GCC turned those recommendations into a funding application to the Public Health Agency of Canada, who provided funding from 2007 to 2010 to pilot test the recommendations in Nova

Scotia, Ontario, Alberta, and British Columbia. The pilot testing first included three pilot and two control schools per province (20 in all.) This was followed up with piloting at 70 elementary schools and focus groups with teachers and students at six of those schools.

The students indicated that they would like to walk and cycle to/from school but it was their parents who made the decisions about how they got to school. The boys in particular said they would prefer to cycle to school in the nice weather when the distance was three km or less rather than taking the school bus. Since parent meetings hadn't been as effective as desired in reaching the parents, GCC started focusing on the students themselves as the key influencers in their families. The students were attracted through IWALK clubs, IWALK Days, and Winter Walk Days.

Regional Level

One of the pilot tests was spearheaded by Halton Region Health Department one year in 2008. That pilot was so well received by the school board, that it seconded the local organizer from her Public Health position to the Halton District School Board where she worked on a larger pilot project with 20 Halton District School Board elementary schools and five Catholic School Board schools.

Another of the pilots was carried out in partnership with MetroLinx, an agency of the Government of Ontario that oversaw the implementation of the regional transportation plan for the Greater Toronto and Hamilton area. It included a telephone survey of about a thousand parents and guardians of elementary-aged children (junior kindergarten to grade eight.) The survey collected information on the children's usual mode of travel to and from school, parental perceptions around school travel, awareness of school travel programs, and interest in active and sustainable ways to travel to school.

This research found that nearly 60 percent of parents felt that their children's school was close enough that they could reasonably walk or bike. About 40 percent of those parents who said that their children were currently being driven to school said that they would be very interested in considering a different mode of school travel.

School Level

Every year, additional research was conducted by each participating school. GCC's previous approach to Active and Safe Routes to School involved voluntary, less rigorous surveys. The School Travel Planning approach required student surveys, family surveys, school site visits as well as walkabouts, traffic, pedestrian, and cyclist counts, to determine current travel patterns, key issues at the schools, and possible volunteers. This research was conducted at the beginning of each school year (September), and then again at the end of each school year (May).

Benefits and Barriers

The key benefits to students from walking and cycling to school were found to be: convenience, time savings, independence, socializing time, and interaction with adults. Small incentives were found to be helpful in encouraging participation in the program.

The key benefits for school staff from participating in the program were: improved routes to school, safer school zones, building school and community spirit, healthier, more attentive students, and saving time and reduced stress otherwise spent on traffic duty. They were also attracted to participate when offered incentives such as funds for sports equipment, school walking routes signage, 'no idling' signs and incentives for students and classes.

The key barriers for students were: living too far from school (over 1 km), not having someone else to walk or cycle with, automobile-

dependence, without seeing self as part of the problem, unsafe infrastructure in school communities (making it safer to travel in a car or by bus), parents not allowing their children to walk in cold or wet weather conditions, and parents believing that walking consumes a much longer period of time than driving (in reality, it often takes less time and less frustration to walk a child to school.)

The key barriers for school staff were: time pressures and competing priorities (although the program can actually save them time and stress), liability concerns, and unsafe infrastructure in school communities, making it safer to travel in a car or by bus.

Setting Objectives

National level

- Influence national, provincial and local municipal and school district policies and practices related to active school travel.
- Reduce expected number of cancer cases by:
    - Increasing the number of elementary school children actively travelling to/from school
    - Decreasing automobile congestion and resulting air pollution in school zones
    - Applying lessons learned from UofT's BEAT project research and CBU's sustainable happiness research
    - Expand and establish STP projects in 5 new P/Ts
- Reach 120 schools, 2,400 teachers; 48,000 students; 60 community stakeholders
- Educate at least 20 planners/20 transportation engineers

School level

- Each School Travel Plan set objectives for that school.

Developing Partners

Planning team members included:

National level:

- Green Communities Canada – the Project Lead and the Program Manager (project management)
- Cape Breton University - academic staff from the Department of Education (Child and Youth-Friendly Guidelines, sustainable happiness, sustainability)
- University of Toronto – academic staff from the departments of Geography (infrastructure aspect of transportation planning, evaluation) and Physical Activity and Health (health and psychological influences)

Provincial level:

- Provincial lead (provincial level coordination). Leads can be NGOs, governments or health agencies.
- Ministries of health, education and transportation (to correspond with the health, education and transportation representatives steering the program within each municipality; and to help enact supportive policy changes at every level of government)
- Provincial funders

Municipal level:

- Municipal lead (municipal level coordination)
- Municipal health, education and transportation representatives
- Police
- School District representatives

School level

- Vice Principal (official administrator)
- Parent volunteer

Delivering the Program

National Level

With funding from George Weston, GCC created a guide for school travel. The toolkit consisted of over 20 appendices, with everything one needed to know to do School Travel Planning. The Public Health Agency of Canada then funded dissemination to every part of the country.

Municipal / School Level

By June (three months before school starts) participating municipalities established a Municipal Steering Committee, which then selected the schools that would participate, established school-level committees, and worked out an overall project plan.

GCC asked committee members to sign a Statement of Support, to be reviewed by their organizations, specifying the level of support and contributions from each organization. Each committee then created a Terms of Reference based on the statement of support. (Building Motivation Over Time, Obtaining a Commitment)

September involved the school-level research, described above under "Getting Informed." That process indentified the key issues.

The walkabouts then brought together all of the key stakeholders (politicians, parents and school administration) to observe these safety concerns, determine built environment issues, and brainstorm short and long-term solution. That way they were fully aware of the issues, had begun discussing them with the other participating decision makers, and had become invested in finding a solution (Building Motivation Over Time; Overcoming Specific Barriers; Vivid, Personalized, Credible, Empowering Communication.)

Next, the entire Stakeholder Committees working with each school identified ways to address these issues. Then, they moved into implementation.

Based on the formative research findings (see above, in "Getting informed"), the program focused on the students themselves as the key influencers in their families. It involved organizing IWALK clubs, IWALK Days, and Winter Walk Days that were easy to join, and that led to further commitments to walk and cycle at other times as well. (Building Motivation Over Time; Obtaining a Commitment; School Programs that Influence the Home; Vivid, Personalized, Credible, Empowering Communication)

The program also encouraged the use of small incentives and recognition for encouraging initial involvement and increasing engagement in the program. To increase word-of-mouth promotion and norm appeals, each student in the pilots received a pencil case with the logo "It's Really Cool to Walk to School," along with pencils bearing the same logo. In addition, teacher/principal champions at each of the 12 pilot schools received reusable mugs bearing the same message. The longer-term strategy is to get the school boards and municipalities to develop more supportive policies, by engaging enough schools across each municipality to ask for those changes. (Building Motivation Over Time, Financial Incentives, Norm Appeals, Word of Mouth)

Sometimes, the action planning and the implementation stages overlapped, and the communities were able to get things done (like changing the markings painted on a road) while still planning other actions.

This pattern was repeated each year, and each year, all of the research findings were fed into the continually evolving Travel Plan document. The school engineers and planners really liked this process because it mirrored a lot of the

work that they were already doing. (Building Motivation Over Time, Feedback)

Measuring Achievements

Each participating school carried out student surveys, family surveys, school site visits, walkabouts, and traffic, pedestrian, and cyclist counts at the beginning of each school year (September, yearly baseline) and then again at the end of each school year (May.)

Hands-up classroom surveys were used to find out the modes of transportation used by every student in the school to and from school for one week.

The family surveys obtained information from every family about present mode of school transportation, routes taken to school, existing barriers along those route, and attitudes towards school travel.

Traffic/pedestrian/cyclist counts recorded the number of pedestrians/cyclists/vehicles arriving at each school entrance, as well as any unsafe behavior observed.

Results

By 2012 the program had spread to 120 schools across Canada. Some of the schools had achieved a modal shift of over 20% towards walking and cycling. The provinces that had been conducting the program the longest had average modal shifts of up to 6% across all participating schools. Across all 120 schools (at various stages of implementation) the modal shift averaged 1%.

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Concluding Thoughts

Lessons Learned

- You really have to have all the right stakeholders at the table (see “Developing Partners.”
- You also need to have some things that make it fun for the kids to get them engaged.
- Liability concerns come up often. The School Travel Plan process, if it's followed properly, brings together all of the stakeholders, and one of the things that we recommend in our process is that you put in an application to your school district to ask their permission to do this project to bring them to the table. We're having a lot of success in getting those approved here in Ontario and in other parts of the country. That way, you have an opportunity to explain to them what the process is about and to show them some of the tools. Because we bring together all of the stakeholders, no one is pointing fingers; you're coming at it as a team effort.

Landmark Designation

The program described in this case study was designated in 2009.

Designation as a Landmark (best practice) case study through our peer selection process recognizes programs and social marketing approaches considered to be among the most successful in the world. They are nominated both by our peer-selection panels and by Tools of Change staff, and are then scored by the selection panels based on impact, innovation, replicability and adaptability.

The panel that designated this program consisted of:

- Danny Albert, University of Ottawa's Parking and Sustainable Transportation Department
- Daniel Coldrey, Transport Canada
- Mark Dessauer, Active Living by Design
- Catherine Habel, Metrolinx
- Jacky Kennedy, Green Communities Canada
- Jessica Mankowski, Federation of Canadian Municipalities
- Gary McFadden, National Center for Biking and Walking
- Lorenzo Mele,Town of Markham
- Chuck Wilsker, U.S. Telework Coalition
  Phil Winters, University of South Florida
- JoAnn Woodhall, Translink

For step-by step instructions in using each of the tools noted above, to review our FULL collection of over 100 social marketing case studies, or to suggest a new case study, go to www.toolsofchange.com

This case study and additional related materials are available online at http://www.toolsofchange.com/en/case-studies/detail/635/

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