



# Streets Ahead 2008–2011

Program evaluation report

© Copyright Victorian Health Promotion Foundation 2011

ISBN: 978-1-921822-22-3

Publication number: P-079-PA

**Suggested citation:** VicHealth 2011. *Streets Ahead 2008–2011. Program evaluation report.* Victorian Health Promotion Foundation, Melbourne.

Cover photo: Public transport is just one of the active travel options encouraged by *Streets Ahead* to enable children to move more independently around their neighbourhoods.

Within this publication, the term Aboriginal is used to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

# Streets Ahead 2008–2011

Program evaluation report

# Acknowledgements

VicHealth would like to acknowledge the key contributors to the *Streets Ahead* program.

## Project development & support

Kathleen Brasher  
Ben Rossiter  
Shelley Maher  
Cameron McLeod  
Fiona Tinney  
Kellie-Anne Jolly  
Kerry Haynes  
Lisa Thomson  
Roopa Umesh  
Serrin Cooper

## Program implementation

Brimbank City Council  
Cardinia Shire Council  
City of Darebin  
City of Greater Bendigo  
City of Greater Geelong  
City of Wodonga

## Technical Advice

Australian Council of Education Research



*Streets Ahead* advocates for safer environments to support active travel, such as installation of school crossings, lower speed limits on roads and improving accessibility of footpaths.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>04</b>
<b>About the program</b>	<b>05</b>
<b>Lessons learnt and insights gained</b>	<b>06</b>
<b>Project case studies</b>	
Wodonga	09
Brimbank	10
Bendigo	12
Cardinia	14
Geelong	16
Darebin	18
<b>Active transport versus the backseat of a car: a child's view</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>21</b>

# Introduction

This report outlines the experience and insights gained through the *Streets Ahead* demonstration projects funded by VicHealth between July 2008 and June 2011.

The aim of the *Streets Ahead* program was to create supportive environments for children's physical activity in all aspects of their lives, with a focus on travelling to and from school.

The program was located in six local government areas in Victoria facing high levels of social disadvantage and health inequalities.

The case studies presented here highlight the diversity of approaches taken in each location. Each of the six projects is represented by featuring one successful or unique initiative. Common lessons learnt are also included.

---

**Children who actively commute to and from school have higher levels of physical activity and improved cardiovascular fitness compared with children who do not.**

---

## Background

Regular physical activity offers fundamental health benefits to children. These include improved fitness, reduced body fat, better cardiovascular and metabolic health, enhanced bone health and reduced symptoms of depression.

Achieving regular physical activity however, has become increasingly difficult for adults and children across the world as lifestyles become progressively sedentary, even in developing countries. Physical inactivity is now the fourth leading risk factor for global mortality, according to the World Health Organization (WHO 2010).

The Australian Department of Health and Ageing recommends children accumulate at least 60 minutes, and up to several hours, of moderate to vigorous physical activity every day (DOHA 2004). This can be achieved through combinations of play, recreation, physical education and sport, as well as through active travel such as walking, cycling, scooting or skating between destinations.

Children who actively commute to and from school have higher levels of physical activity and improved cardiovascular fitness compared with children who do not [Davison et al. 2008]. However, walking to and from school, a general indicator of levels of active travel, has declined dramatically over the last several decades. For example, one Melbourne study found that 55.3 per cent of young people walked to school or higher education in 1970, which fell to 22.2 per cent in 1994 [Garrard 2009].

As well, fewer children now walk or ride to school without an adult present. In 2005, 10 per cent of Australian primary school children walked or rode to school independent of adults compared with 55 per cent in 1974, according to a representative study [Peddie & Somerville 2005].

Over the past ten years, VicHealth has worked with a range of sporting bodies to increase children's participation in physical activity. In more recent years, while maintaining investments in sport, VicHealth has focused on increasing children's physical activity through developing walk to school programs and funding Victoria Walks.

The *Streets Ahead* program, which VicHealth funded from mid-2008, was specifically designed to promote children's independent mobility (CIM) as well as active travel. CIM refers to children's freedom to move about unaccompanied by an adult in public spaces. VicHealth supports CIM, as it helps develop motor and spatial skills, practical coping skills, local environmental knowledge, confidence, independence and responsibility in children.

## About the program

The aim of the *Streets Ahead* program, which targeted children aged four to 12, was to create supportive environments that increase children's active travel and independent mobility in all aspects of their local community life, not only to and from school.

VicHealth funded six councils for three years between July 2008 and June 2011 to implement *Streets Ahead*. The demonstration projects were located in: Bendigo; Brimbank; Cardinia; Darebin; Geelong and Wodonga.

Within each local government area, *Streets Ahead* targeted a cluster of three or four primary schools, in a bounded geographical neighbourhood that faced the greatest health inequalities within that area.

A great diversity of approaches and projects resulted from the place-based work conducted by the project officers, each applying their specific skills to the unique characteristics of each area. Some projects for example, took a strong community development approach, while others relied more on health promotion principles.

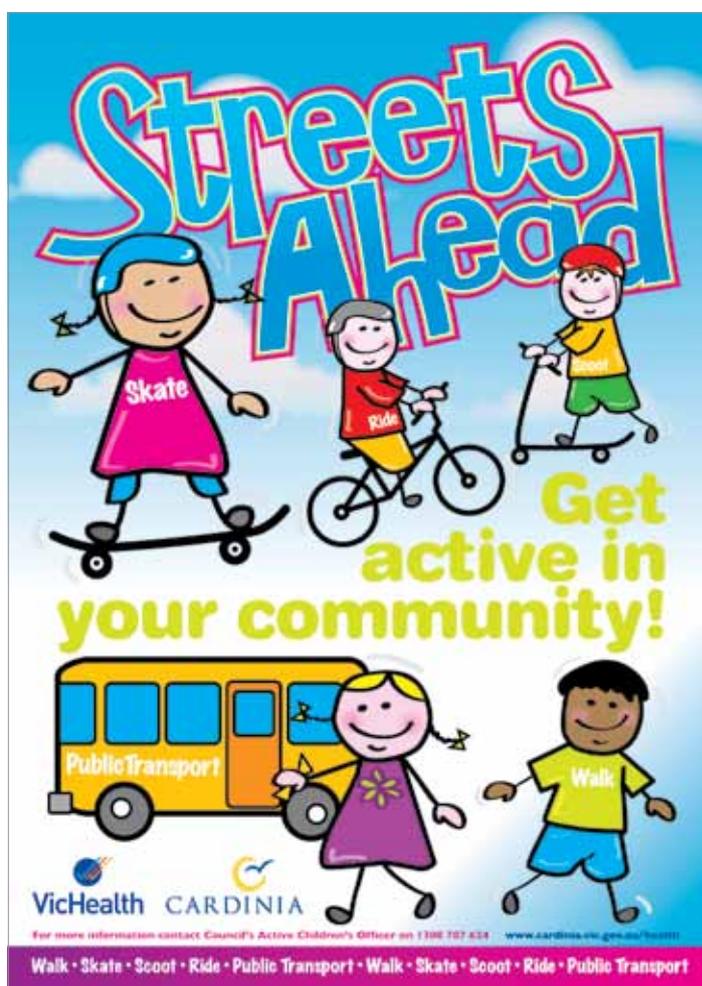
The projects employed a suite of strategies typically including liaising with council for infrastructure change—most commonly to improve road safety—direct participation programs and activities for schools, and capacity building of local community groups to enhance community connectedness and increase ownership of *Streets Ahead's* priorities.

The projects evolved over the three years as the project officers responded to changing circumstances and opportunities that arose.

---

The aim of *Streets Ahead* was to create supportive environments that increase children's active travel and independent mobility in all aspects of their local community life.

---



One of the promotional posters showing the five modes of active travel developed by Cardinia Shire Council.

# Lessons learnt and insights gained

The combined experience of the six projects over three years yielded valuable insights. These included a more refined understanding of barriers and enablers to increasing physical activity in children, especially in disadvantaged communities, as well as the strengths and challenges of a council-based program model.

## Perceptions of safety

Parents' fear about child safety was generally high. These fears, often shared by school principals, may have curtailed support for those elements of the program designed to increase independent mobility. About three quarters of parents in all project areas indicated that their child's movement around their neighbourhood was hindered to a moderate or to a major extent by concern about 'stranger danger'. Equally important was the safety of the roads.

## De-skilling of children

Some children said they simply didn't know how to play with each other and wanted to learn how to do so. In some families, sport had not been played for generations. To our knowledge this is the first time that children have named lack of basic physical skills as a barrier to playing and being more active.

## Adapting to community needs

Flexible program delivery was critical to allow approaches to be tailored to the local people and local environment, and to respond to their needs and wants. In one project this involved broadening out the project's focus, to embrace and support the goals of a local community group. This group went on to become an advocate of *Streets Ahead*.

## Socioeconomic assumptions

The communities targeted for this pilot project were chosen because of their high level of health inequalities. An unstated assumption was that low socioeconomic status communities would behave like more affluent communities, with parents 'bubble-wrapping' their children through practices such as driving children to school to protect them from a 'dangerous' world, rather than encouraging independent mobility.

As a number of project officers discovered, this wasn't always the case. In fact one of the most disadvantaged schools had the highest rate of active travel, of over 80 per cent. This was due, at least in part, to the close vicinity of the school to its community. It may also be due to less fearful parental attitudes and these children's increased resilience in navigating their way through the neighborhood.

Another assumption was that lower socioeconomic status communities would regard active travel and independent mobility as important. These issues often did not rate highly in relation to more pressing needs.

The processes used by *Streets Ahead*, such as forming a Community Action Group, attending meetings and developing and implementing strategies, were also based on the assumption that these methods could be translated across differing communities. Consequently, in some areas, community members did not relate or respond to this way of working.

These experiences highlight the importance of avoiding socioeconomic assumptions when working with disadvantaged communities.

---

Some children said they simply didn't know how to play with each other and wanted to learn how to do so.

---

## Engaging the community

As originally conceived, the *Streets Ahead* projects were to establish a local action group of community members who would drive the project. Varying degrees of community involvement were achieved, with project officers typically struggling to engage the community through a local action group. When this occurred, the project officers devised alternative ways to engage the community, such as consulting children directly through Student Representative Councils or aligning themselves with other community groups' priorities.

The local action group appears not to have been the strong drivers of *Streets Ahead*. The project officers often became the drivers, with a strong focus on schools.

## The challenge of working with schools

While schools have the obvious advantage of gathering the target age group of children in one location, the disadvantages included crowded curriculums and schools feeling under pressure to take responsibility for an increasing list of causes. For some disadvantaged schools, higher order issues were of greater concern. As one principal said: '*encouraging a shift to using active travel modes of transport is not our core business.*'

If schools are to remain the focus of initiatives to increase levels of children's activity, then a more considered, long-term approach may be needed to avoid administrative overload, to operate within the Department of Education's policy frameworks and to link active travel and CIM to school-identified needs.

When a *Streets Ahead* project was able to address a pressing school need, the results were very positive. For example, in some schools *Streets Ahead* targeted disengaged students with workshops teaching bicycle maintenance. When the school saw these students become engaged again, support for the program surged.

## A council-based model

*Streets Ahead* was situated within local councils to help the projects make connections with the relevant council areas such as road safety or planning, and to facilitate council taking ownership of the *Streets Ahead* agenda. Project officers established an internal steering committee to help achieve this, with varying success. Within at least some of the councils, awareness and understanding increased regarding the barriers to, and importance of, independent mobility for children. The council-based location put the projects at arms length from schools, making it difficult to work effectively with and within schools.

## Involving parents

Promoting children's active travel and independent mobility needs to involve families as a whole. However engaging parents as volunteers to help drive the *Streets Ahead* projects was very difficult. Parents were often time poor, low users of active travel themselves and potentially judgmental of other parents affording their children freedom. They also did not always possess the skills needed to engage the rest of the school community.

Only a couple of projects managed to achieve ongoing commitment, at times with the use of incentives. However, once engaged, a 'parent champion' made an enormous positive difference.

## Time needed to build relationships

It can take at least a year to develop trust in relationships and build the strategic networks and partnerships necessary for a community-driven project such as *Streets Ahead*. The project officers generally found the three-year project delivery time frame restrictive. One project officer recommended a minimum of four to five years for projects.

Despite these limitations, all the demonstration projects succeeded in fostering supportive environments for children's active travel. The project officers in each council spent time getting to know the unique culture of each school, adapting their programs to fit with each school's approach to learning.

The development of effective partnerships with teaching staff, members of their own councils across different departments, and key organisations outside the school gate were essential to providing a wide range of opportunities for children to develop skills, confidence and enjoyment from walking, cycling, scooting or playing sport in their local neighbourhood.

The case studies that follow illustrate some of the successful and innovative approaches taken to overcome barriers and make a difference to children's physical activity.



*Streets Ahead* Local Action Committees worked with council transport and road safety areas to plan and implement infrastructure changes such as improving bicycle paths, especially around schools.

## Some simple, good ideas:

Examples of effective *Streets Ahead* activities:

### Mother's and Father's Days

An invitation was sent from children to their parents to walk with them to school on mother's day or father's day. One of the participating schools in Geelong said they had never seen so many dads at a morning event.

*'It was very satisfying because we usually bring the car. It gives you a good start to the day.'*

*'It was a lovely walk to school today, you see so much more when you slow down. It's also good to talk and look at people's gardens.'*

Fathers from East Geelong Primary school.

### Swooping magpies

During magpie season, the Active Kids Committee of St Monica's Primary School in Wodonga issued special helmet ties provided by the Department of Primary Industries that discouraged magpies from swooping riders.

### Community maps

Several *Streets Ahead* projects created or updated local neighbourhood maps to include features such as suitable routes for active travel, safe crossings, time needed to walk between locations and places to play.

### Awareness-raising events

- Ride2School Day
- Walk Safely to School Day
- Walktober
- Walk on Wednesday Awards.

### School Travel Planning

The *Streets Ahead* project officers worked with the schools to develop a policy that outlined the active travel initiatives the school would commit to. Within Australia, 'School Travel Planning' has been a flagship project of the Australian Department of Transport since 2002.



One school developed a Frequent Rider program, which led to whole-school events such as Ride2School Day. Others introduced bicycle maintenance workshops targeted at disengaged students.

# Project case study: Wodonga

**Target areas:** Wodonga West, Melrose, Martin Park, Wodonga Central and Belvoir

## Community profile

In the target areas:

- Residents aged five to 11 years make up 10.9 per cent of the population, compared to the regional average of 9.96 per cent.
- Of the 5,384 households, 12.3 per cent have an income of less than \$250 per week. Twenty-two per cent are single parent households while the regional average is 15 per cent.
- 88.9 per cent of Wodonga's public housing exists within the target area.
- A higher than city average of residents has low education levels i.e. less than Year 10.
- This area is predominantly flat and ideal for walking and cycling. There is an existing network of footpath and off-road cycle paths that link amenities, schools and other neighbourhoods. Facilities include the Wodonga Sport and Leisure Centre complex, many and varied sporting clubs and facilities, corner shops, neighbourhood parks, major outdoor recreation spaces and picnic facilities, a public bus interchange, BMX track and skate bowl. In the past year the City of Wodonga has upgraded signage and crossing points within the pathway system in the area.

## Community engagement

This *Streets Ahead* project used health promotion principles to engage the four diverse primary schools: Wodonga West Primary School, Melrose Primary School, St. Monica's Primary School and Belvoir Special Development School. It formed partnerships with numerous community organisations, including the local Men's Shed and the local bicycle users group.

## Spotlight: 'Frequent Rider' at St. Monica's Primary School

The recruitment of a parent champion at St. Monica's Primary School, after eight months of struggling to gain any interest, was key to the success of *Streets Ahead* at this school. The parent champion established the volunteer Active Kids Committee, made up of dedicated volunteers from the St. Monica's Primary School community. The Active Kids Committee developed a number of innovative and successful initiatives, which increased active travel at the school.

The incentive-based Frequent Rider program is one example. When a child cycled to and from school, the classroom teacher stamped his or her 'Frequent Rider Pass'. Classes competed on a monthly basis to win the student-created Frequent Rider trophy. This trophy, presented at assemblies, was awarded to the class of students who cycled the most over the past month. The school established its own goal of achieving at least 80 per cent of students per class participating in the program. The highest achievement reached was 91 per cent of students per class cycling throughout a month.

As part of the Frequent Rider program, the Active Kids Committee organised whole-school celebrations for such events as Ride2School Day, Walk to School Day and Walk Safely to School Day. It also funded the local Men's Shed to construct custom-built scooter racks for the school, thus solving the storage problem created by increasingly popular scooters as a mode of active transport.

*'The Frequent Rider program works as it's the kids, not the council, parents or teachers that are motivating each other to ride to school. That is why it's worked so well and will continue to get the kids on their bikes.'* – Angela Lawson, *Streets Ahead* Parent Champion.

The majority of St. Monica's Primary School students lived more than seven kilometres away from the school. This fact prompted the Active Kids Committee in partnership with *Streets Ahead* to create a 'Half Way is OK' approach by identifying locations where parents or carers could drop off or pick up students, part of the way to school so students could still use active transport methods for at least some of the journey.

## Making a difference

Regular surveys conducted by the Active Kids Committee indicated that the Frequent Rider program had a strong influence on achieving sustained cycling behaviours within the school community. Anecdotally, *Streets Ahead* also improved the sense of community. One example of this is a group of Year 6 girls who now ride to school once a week, from one house to the next to collect each other.

Data collected by the Bicycle Network shows an increase in active travel rate in Wodonga primary schools from 15.3 per cent in 2008 to 24.5 per cent in 2010.





The unveiling of the first Footloose Footpath at the Walk Safely to School Day event, May 2010.

## Making a difference

Feedback from both events revealed that the festival played an important role in connecting parents, appeasing their anxiety about safety while creating an open space for children to move freely.

*'There would be no way I would allow my kids out anywhere without me watching over them. For some reason today it's a relief in my heart to allow the kids to just be playing out there with other kids. It's probably the first time for a very long time. They're meeting new friends here too, different kids, so I'm starting to feel more comfortable about letting them out.'*

– Father of two primary school aged kids.

*'One of the things I've been really excited about is seeing all the kids out here being a bit free-range...'*

– Community member.



Participants enjoying Walk Safely to School Day which encouraged the local community to reclaim neighbourhood street spaces as pedestrian-friendly and social zones.

# Project case study: Bendigo

**Target areas:** Long Gully West, North Bendigo–California Gully–Jackass Flat, Kangaroo Flat–Big Hill and White Hills

## Community profile

- Of Greater Bendigo households, 34 per cent are low income, compared with 24 per cent in the Melbourne statistical division.
- Long Gully and North Bendigo–California Gully are the most disadvantaged areas in the municipality.
- Of those living in Greater Bendigo, 47.2 per cent of persons aged 25 years and over had tertiary or TAFE qualifications, compared to the Victorian State average of 50.7 per cent.
- Of people living in Greater Bendigo, 58.3 per cent aged 15 years or older were employed, compared to the Victorian State average of 60.9 per cent.

## Community engagement

One feature of this project's consultation process was to include the voices of children. After struggling to engage parents at the local schools and in the general community, the council steering committee agreed to invite input from students at the four local primary schools. School children's input formed the basis of the *Streets Ahead* projects that took shape in Bendigo.

Children said they wanted to learn the skills to participate in games and activities they had little or no experience in, so they could be more independent, participate in sports and be able to create activities in the playground and in their neighbourhood without needing adult supervision.

This led to the establishment of the Specialist Coaching Program in schools, which sourced local coaches to teach children the physical, social and leadership skills need to participate in sport, as well as Team Bendigo, which focused on CALD children.

Later, humanitarian refugee Karen children from Burma also asked to be supported to play sport. A neighbourhood renewal forum held in 2009 confirmed the need for disadvantaged CALD children to be more physically active and involved in sport.

By the end of the first year of *Streets Ahead*, a demand for a project addressing the physical activity and social inclusion needs of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) children and families became apparent.

The focus of the project subsequently shifted to include the entire municipality, so it could include the 87 different CALD communities in Bendigo originating from Burma, East Africa, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, North India and Indonesia.

## Spotlight: 'Team Bendigo', promoting harmony through sport

Team Bendigo, created to address the physical activity and social inclusion needs of newly arrived humanitarian refugee children, has its origins in Karen children asking a community volunteer to help them play cricket. This community volunteer contacted Cricket Victoria and a meeting was called to gather support from key organisations to assist a larger number of CALD children to play sport. The *Streets Ahead* project took on the coordination and strategic development of this process. A Team Bendigo Steering Committee was established to develop and refine the strategic plan and to implement programs.

The process involved bringing together all the major groups involved in settlement of new arrivals and linking them through sports participation. There were many spin-off benefits to Team Bendigo beyond physical activity. For example, connection between parents was enhanced as they organised transport for their children and learnt about the sporting clubs, and filling out registration forms became an opportunity to practise English skills.

Challenges faced included: funding children's registrations which were subsequently subsidised by Football Federation Victoria; parents favouring boys' over girls' participation in sport when registration fees increased; transporting children to training and games, which necessitated a community volunteer to act as transport coordinator; and understanding the refugee experience and how this affected children's and parents' behavior in their new settlement in Bendigo.

Drawing on its experience, Team Bendigo developed a resource for sporting clubs called 'Guide to Including New Arrivals into your Sporting Club.' This guide includes a background to the refugees' homeland, customs and experiences before arriving and practical tips for encouraging participation. Other initiatives have included supporting an informal Sunday morning football game for parents, developing online networks and resources and hosting an annual multicultural sports carnival.

---

The project covered the entire municipality, so it could include the 87 different CALD communities in Bendigo originating from Burma, East Africa, the Philippines, Sri Lanka, North India and Indonesia.

---



Karen refugee children being kitted out for the game by local business after asking if they could be helped to play cricket.

### Making a difference

Team Bendigo has introduced many CALD children and families to sport. At least fifty Karen, Sudanese and Burundi children and youth were assisted to play winter sport during 2010. It is now strategically engaging and empowering the community to take leadership and responsibility for their needs in regard to this social inclusion program.

*'Playing sport makes my son happy. If he is happy then I am happy'. – Karen father.*

# Project case study: Cardinia

## Target area: Pakenham

### Community profile

- Pakenham is one of the fastest growing townships in the Shire of Cardinia, with families moving into the area daily. During the course of the project, between 2008 and mid-2011, the population in Pakenham increased by 11,100 residents.
- Pakenham has the highest unemployment rate in the Shire of 7.5 per cent, which is also considerably higher than the Victorian unemployment rate of 5.4 per cent.
- Lack of footpaths, walkways and public transport are the most important issues facing Cardinia Shire residents, according to 2010 research, commissioned by the National Growth Area Alliance.
- Car dependency is high, due to limited active and public transport options. The proportion of residents who owned three or more vehicles was 22.7 per cent, compared to 14.2 per cent of the Melbourne Statistical Division according to 2006 ABS data.

### Community engagement

A unique strategy devised by the project officer was to be school-based. The officer suggested to the four schools that she work onsite, basing herself at a school one day a week for a term, and each term at a different school, to become the face of *Streets Ahead*.

The four target schools were Pakenham Springs, Pakenham Hills, Pakenham Consolidated and St Patrick's primary schools. All staff stated it was beneficial having the officer based at their school and that they now understood more about the *Streets Ahead* project. The onsite location of the officer also made it easier to engage the school community.

The project officer conducted quarterly focus groups with children from Grades 3 to 6 at each school. Discussions focused on barriers preventing children from being active in their community and ideas on how to overcome them.

To increase parent commitment to the project in the second year, monthly financial contributions were offered enticing seven parents to become 'school champions.' Their role included helping to promote *Streets Ahead* within the school and wider school community. At the end of 12 months, all parents said they enjoyed their role and stated that monthly financial contributions were not necessary for their support.

### Spotlight: Multi-level health promotion onsite in schools

In consultation with the staff and students at each school, the project officer used a number of strategies to promote active transport, ranging from education and activities to advocating for safer travel environments.

These included: holding information sessions for staff and parents; attending every classroom to promote key messages and initiatives; attending school functions; running events and activities that promoted active travel; providing resources for staff; and creating displays promoting *Streets Ahead*.

One initiative designed to address parents' anxiety about their children using active transport, was a texting system installed at three of the four schools. The texting system notified parents if their child had not arrived at school. This way, 'no news' gave parents peace of mind.

Branding materials were created to make the project recognisable and memorable in the community. A graphic designer created a *Streets Ahead* 'look' with specific text and five icons to represent walking, riding, scooting, skateboarding and public transport. Promotional materials included stickers, badges, colouring in books, postcards, posters, books, water bottles, balls, t-shirts, banners and postcards as well as a story book for early primary school aged students highlighting active travel and road safety.

---

### Focus group discussion focused on barriers preventing children from being active and ideas on how to overcome them.

---

The project officer continually advocated within council for safer environments to support active travel, such as installation of school crossings, lower speed limits on roads, the installation of footpaths and improving the accessibility of footpaths. Cardinia Shire Council supported the creation of Stop and Drop Zones, which are designated spaces up to a kilometre away from the school entrance where parents can drop off and pick up their children.

*'The Stop and Drop zones have been a great way to help parents avoid the traffic congestion outside of the school at peak times, and promote students being active by walking, cycling, scooting or skating to school....it's also given the staff a reason to get out and get active!'*  
– Colin Sloper, Principal Pakenham Springs Primary.

*'I think the Stop and Drop zones are good because you feel safe.'*  
– Grade 6 student, St Patrick's Primary.



# Project case study: Geelong

## Target areas: East Geelong, Breakwater and Thompson

### Community profile

- Most residents of East Geelong are Australian-born. Two per cent of the population is Aboriginal, (compared with 0.6 per cent in Victoria). A small cluster of Sudanese families also live in the area.
- Breakwater, located along the Barwon River is a largely an industrial area with a relatively small population.
- Of those aged 15 years or older and living in Greater Geelong, 56.9 per cent were employed, compared to 58.8 per cent in the Barwon South West Region and the Victorian State average of 60.9 per cent.
- A number of venues are available for children's activities, including the football and netball club, swimming complex, BMX track, oval and open space precincts.
- Of people living in Greater Geelong, 15.7 per cent had experienced transport limitations compared to 16.4 per cent in the Barwon South West Region and the Victorian State average of 20.3 per cent.



Research shows the importance of independent mobility for children: it helps develop motor and spatial skills and practical coping skills which foster independence and responsibility, which in turn builds confidence and social skills.

### Community engagement

Successful partnerships with a number of community development organisations, sports clubs, police, areas of council (for example the Travelsmart program) and church agencies resulted in a variety of community events throughout the area.

---

At times principals also seemed to subscribe to protecting children, rather than seeking opportunities to foster children's independence skills.

---

### Spotlight: Working closely with schools to bust myths about child safety

Building community connectedness so parents would feel it was safe to allow their children to travel independently was an important focus of this project. Education of parents, staff and council and community events helped achieve this aim.

Through discussions with local parents, it became apparent that some of the fears parents encounter when they think about their children travelling independently, were not based on fact. Attention was turned to enabling parents to distinguish between the real potential dangers of active travel such as traffic (the three schools were completely bounded by large roads carrying heavy traffic) and perceived 'stranger danger.' At times, principals also seemed to subscribe to protecting children, rather than seeking opportunities to foster children's independence skills. For example, one school organised a bus to take a class of children to a nearby school 400 metres away due to potential rain.

Dr Karen Malone, Professor of Social Sciences in the Faculty of Education at the University of Wollongong, NSW was engaged to provide education on the topic. She delivered seminars to about 90 parents, challenging the practice of 'bubble-wrapping' children to protect them. She highlighted that stranger danger has not increased in the last 30 to 40 years but our perception of it has. This is mainly due to extensive global media coverage that transmits every rare event of child abduction in the world into families' homes.

---

## Stranger danger has not increased in the last 30 to 40 years but our perception of it has, mainly due to extensive global media.

---

Dr Malone also presented on the value of children's outdoor learning for teachers, and on Child Friendly Cities for Geelong Council staff.

Follow-up conversations indicated that teachers found the professional development highly relevant to their own families. Some teachers reported subsequently allowing their children more freedom than they would even have previously contemplated.

Opportunities for creating a locally owned parent seminar are being investigated. This includes the possibility of embedding active travel messages into existing well-attended seminars for parents on how to raise a resilient child.

Neighbourhood events were also organised to help connect residents and increase a sense of safety in the community. The Treasure Hunt was one such event, convened by a working group of local residents. Feedback from participants of all ages indicated that residents welcomed the opportunity to meet their neighbours and have fun in a safe environment.

Some children said they just wanted a chance to play with their parents and see them smile. One dad who attended the Treasure Hunt with his children, played with his children for an hour for the first time.

### Making a difference

Evidence gathered through routine weekly or monthly school activities shows that the project saw at least short-term gains in school-related active travel from around 25 per cent at the start to around 40 per cent routinely and as high as 90 per cent in some classes at special events.



When considering changes needed to make it safer for their child to walk or ride to school, 62 per cent of parents referred to issues related to traffic or road safety (for example, more supervised crossings).

# Project case study: Darebin

## Target areas: Preston and Reservoir

### Community profile

- Darebin is one of the largest, most diverse communities in Victoria.
- It is ranked the fifth most disadvantaged municipality out of the 31 municipalities in metropolitan Melbourne using the Index of Relative Socioeconomic Disadvantage.
- Disadvantage is most evident in Reservoir East and Preston East. These predominately residential precincts, dominated by post-war and public housing, have the highest Aboriginal and culturally diverse population in Darebin.
- Of people living in Darebin, 27.6 per cent experienced transport limitations, compared to the Victorian State average of 20.3 per cent.
- Most residents (93.9 per cent) in Darebin agreed, or strongly agreed, that cultural diversity is a good thing for a society, compared to the Victorian State average of 89.4 per cent.

### Community engagement

With the success that the project discovered working with participating schools, and as membership of the community action team established in 2009 declined, a decision was made for community engagement work to focus directly on local schools. From 2010, each of the very diverse school communities led the way for developing, implementing and delivering *Streets Ahead* initiatives and events. Principals, assistant principals, teachers, parents, social workers and health promotion workers involved in programs at the schools became the main drivers.

The four local primary schools involved in delivering *Streets Ahead* were Preston North East Primary School, Reservoir East Primary School, Preston Primary School, Holy Name Primary School and Oakhill Pre-School.

In addition to the schools, *Streets Ahead* worked with a number of other external stakeholders to implement the project, including: Darebin Community Health Service, The Active East Reservoir Project, East Reservoir Neighbourhood Renewal, Darebin Best Start Partnership, Bicycle Victoria (including the Ride2School Program), Victoria Police and VicRoads.

The *Streets Ahead* project focused mainly on direct participation programs for school children, while assisting schools in future planning and integrating *Streets Ahead* aims into local council's core business.



To raise awareness about access to green public spaces and reducing dependency on cars, Preston Primary School held two PARKing Day events where metered car spaces were replaced with 'parks' for the day.

### Spotlight: Local council embraces *Streets Ahead* aims and supports schools in promoting active transport

The *Streets Ahead* project officer worked to develop relationships across many areas of Darebin Council. One notable outcome of this was the commitment gained from the Transport Management and Planning area. Nine recommendations were adopted in the *Darebin Safe Travel Strategy 2010–2015* to guide council's work with schools to promote active travel based on *Streets Ahead* findings. In addition, \$10,000 was spent annually on infrastructure improvements from the area's Capital Works budget to support the aims of *Streets Ahead*. Improvements included the installation of pram ramps at locations identified as having access and safety issues, the upgrade of a school crossing and the recruitment of additional school crossing supervisors.

Such actions taken by council was critical to the success of implementing the Kids on Bikes project in a couple of local schools, especially Reservoir East Primary School. (Kids on Bikes works directly with children to increase their bike-riding and road safety skills as well as creating a school-owned bike bank.) Initially in 2008, Reservoir East Primary School actively discouraged cycling to its students citing road safety concerns due to speeding traffic, no secure storage space and low ownership of bike helmets as reasons for this. Mainly due to the trust and cooperation gained between Darebin Council and the school, and the funding of initiatives to address barriers, cycling to school began to be promoted in term 3, 2010, with the Kids on Bikes program. Since then the school has adopted a School Travel Plan Policy outlining how the school would support and promote cycling to its students in 2011–2013.



Through the Children's Safe Travel project, all four Darebin schools now have locally appropriate, targeted road safety resources for children and their families to use.

### **Making a difference**

Before Kids on Bikes was implemented, only one out of 140 students regularly cycled to school. In term 1, 2011 this had risen to approximately 11 children who regularly rode to school. As well, 30 students had the opportunity to learn to ride a bike safely at no cost to them. The school will now offer all students, at some point in their education at the school, the opportunity to learn to ride a bike.

*'The impact of children learning to ride bikes that are reliable and roadworthy has built the children's confidence and provided them an opportunity to be physically active with their friends.'* – Adam, teacher and co-ordinator of Bike Ed program, Reservoir East Primary School.

# Active transport versus the backseat of a car: a child's view

During class time, students at each school were asked to draw two pictures titled: 'This is a map of my neighbourhood', and 'How I got to school today and what I saw on the way.'

Children who walked to school included in their drawings:

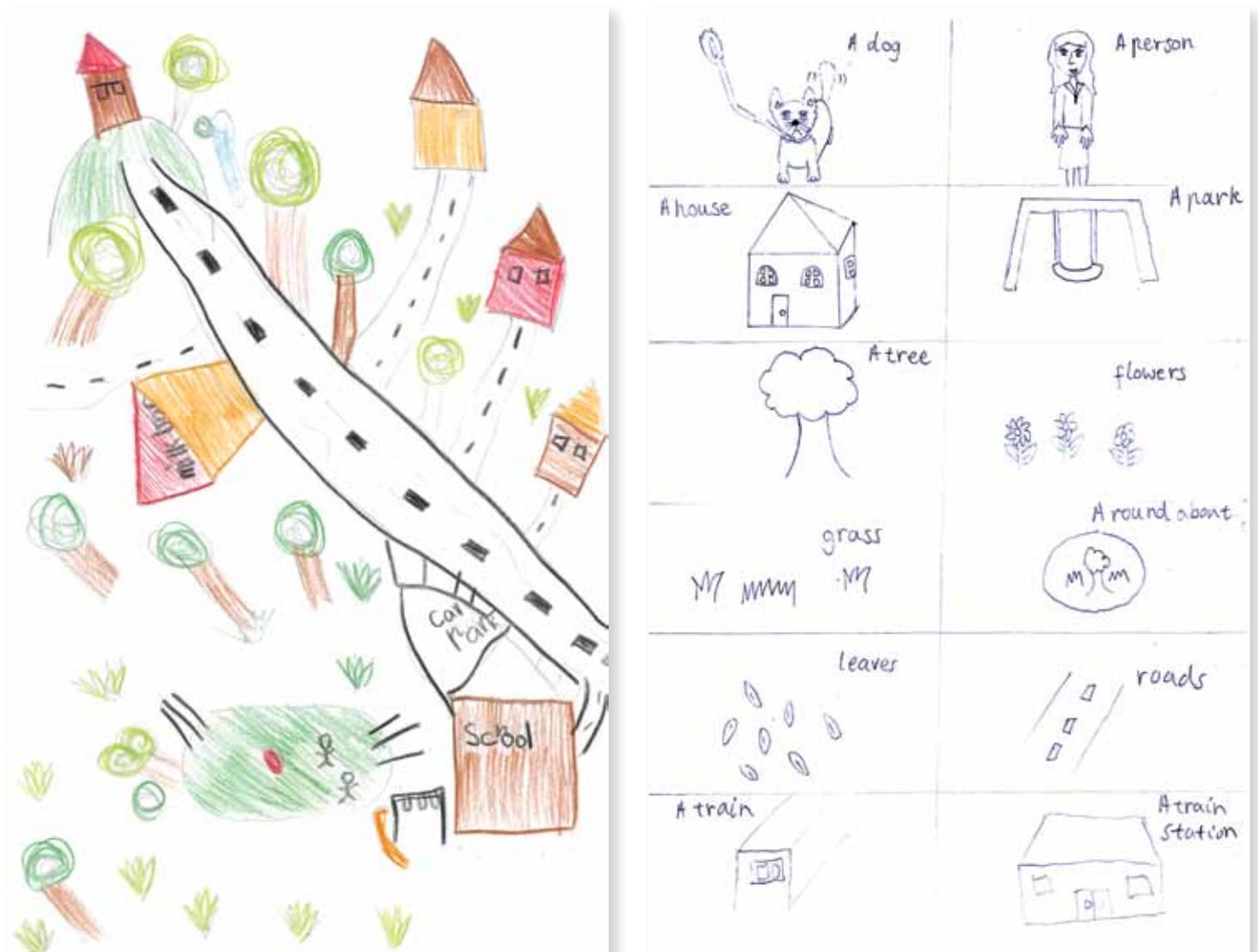
- greater detail of their immediate neighbourhood
- street names, identified friends' houses and described people who lived in houses they didn't know (for example grumpy lady's house, someone's house, strange peoples house)
- people who were happy and active.

Children who were driven to school included:

- the car as the central image
- images that were very abstract and lacked linkage with each other
- fragmented images: children divided the page into windows and with different images in each one.

It appears that encouraging or supporting children to walk to or from school provides them with a more connected and detailed understanding of their neighbourhood. This may in turn increase the likelihood that they will move about it independently.

**Figure 1: Drawings by a child who walked to school (left), and one who was driven to school (right)**



# References

Davidson, K, Werder, J, Lawson, C 2008, 'Children's active commuting to school: current knowledge and future directions', *Preventing Chronic Disease: Public Health Research, Practice and Policy*, vol. 5, no. 3, pp. 1-11.

Department of Health and Ageing 2004, *Australia's physical activity recommendations for 5-12 year olds*, Canberra, Department of Health and Ageing.

Garrard, J 2009, *Active transport: children and young people. An overview of recent evidence*, Victorian Health Promotion Foundation (VicHealth), Melbourne.

Peddie, B & Somerville, C 2005, *The ghost of TOD's past: Schools reconnecting*, Paper presented at the Transit Oriented Development Conference.

World Health Organization 2010, *Global recommendations on physical activity for health*, WHO, Geneva.

## Photography credits

**Page 11** ©Steven Pam

**Page 13** ©Bendigo Advertiser, February 2010

**Pages 18 and 19** ©John Brown Photography



Victorian Health Promotion Foundation  
PO Box 154 Carlton South VIC 3053 Australia  
T. +61 3 9667 1333 F. +61 3 9667 1375  
[vichealth@vichealth.vic.gov.au](mailto:vichealth@vichealth.vic.gov.au)  
[www.vichealth.vic.gov.au](http://www.vichealth.vic.gov.au)

ISBN: 978-1-921822-22-3  
October 2011

