

Safer School Precincts - The Power of Partnerships in Creating Change

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Abstract

It's not always safe or easy for kids to walk, cycle, and scoot to school in Australian urban and regional environments. Parents make decisions about primary school age children's travel modes based significantly on their perception of their child's safety (personal and traffic related).

The South Australian Government's **Way2Go** program's partnership model works with 261 schools and 43 local councils to develop context specific, community led School Travel Plans with identified actions to create and sustain safe school precincts.

The presenters will outline the process involved and share evaluation tools, related research, key learnings and examples.

Overview

Aggregated **Way2Go** data (2014 – 2018) from the program's primary schools indicates that 52% of children live within two kilometres of their school. In Australia the rates of children walking and riding to primary school have declined from 70% in the 1970's to a current rate of 30%. During the same period broader social trends have included higher car ownership, increased workplace participation by parents and increased parental concerns about safety.

Traffic congestion and aberrant driver behaviour for the 30 minutes at the start and end of the school day is the bane of most school principals and council traffic engineers lives! If even 20% of the students who live within 1 kilometre of their school rode, scooted or walked to school a noticeable safety benefit would occur. **Way2Go** commissioned research findings indicate that families who drive to school perceive the school precinct to be more risky than those who actually walk, ride or scoot with their children. ¹

Parental concerns about road safety is another important barrier that can be addressed through a combination of built environment modifications, public education and programs. There is strong evidence that parental attitudes are a primary determinant of their children's participation in this form of physical activity. (Duggan et al, 2018) ²

Walking and cycling accompanied by an adult or older sibling for all or part of the way to school facilitates the transition from dependent to independent travel and is key to the development of children's safe traffic behaviours. What can governments and communities do to support families and children to use active travel modes for school journeys?

The **Way2Go** multifaceted model has the overarching goal of creating and sustaining a community culture of active travel. Components include school surveys (parents, students, staff), GIS maps of student residential locations, site traffic observations and infrastructure inspections, a practical on-road cycling program for 9 – 13 year olds, training and curriculum resources for teachers, signage and crossing monitor support, bike and scooter storage, resources and initiatives that target families as well as small scale infrastructure improvements in partnership with local councils. Medium term School Travel Plans identify staged actions over time with school communities owning and leading the process.

The presenters will describe the holistic **Way2Go** Lead School model (initiated in 20 new schools each year) and the key role that relationships, connections and community leadership play in planning and sustaining incremental change. Descriptions of lessons learned and successes will include the key role that targeted research and the collection of systematic feedback play along with strategies for working effectively with the complex and focused everyday world of school communities.

References

¹ Garrard J May 2017 Prepared for the South Australian Department of Planning, Transport and Infrastructure: Walking, riding or driving to school: what influences parents' decision making?

² Duggan, M, Fetherston, H, Harris, B, Lindberg, R, Parisella, A, Shilton, T, Greenland, R & Hickman, D 2018, Active School Travel: Pathways to a Healthy Future, Australian Health Policy Collaboration, Victoria University, Melbourne. ISBN: 978-0-6482621-9-0