

Bike racks and a walking school bus

Two simple ways to improve kids' chances of being healthy adults

How do you get more teens to cycle to school? KFL&A Public Health has racked up a simple solution.

The lack of theft-proof bike racks—or the lack of any bike racks at all—was identified as a reason many high school students aren't comfortable peddling to school. So, as part of a pilot project, new bike racks have been installed at three KFL&A area high schools: Kingston Collegiate Vocational Institute, Loyalist Collegiate Vocational Institute, and Napanee District Secondary School. A fourth school, Bayridge Secondary School, is also part of the pilot; their racks were installed during recent school renovations.

KFL&A Public Health decided to buy local—purchasing 24 metal racks (which hold eight bikes each) made by students at Napanee District Secondary School. “The Grade 10 and 11 welding students took this on as a school project,” said Debbie O’Grady, KFL&A Public Health’s Physical Activity Specialist and a member of the School Health Team. “They worked very hard and they did a great job. It’s been a ‘win-win’ for everyone.”

“Research shows that more than 87 percent of children and youth are not active enough on a regular basis to meet Health Canada’s guidelines of 90 minutes of daily physical activity,” said Debbie. “Active transportation—any form of transportation that requires you to be physically active—is an effective way to get kids moving. It is also kind to the environment.”

KFL&A Public Health is in the midst of an evaluation to determine if the bike racks are effective. “I was at one of the schools recently and the racks were completely full,” said Debbie, “so that’s a very good sign.”

What kind of bus has no wheels but lots of feet?

It’s a walking school bus, a great way to get kids to school actively and safely. Students at Winston Churchill Public School have been catching this particular bus for several years now.

The basic concept is simple. Children living in the same neighbourhood walk to and from school together along pre-defined routes. More children join the group as it moves along.

“At Winston Churchill, there are 14 students in Grades 5 to 8 who are trained walking school bus leaders; they make sure the group stays together and safe,” said Betty Betts, a Public Health Nurse and member of KFL&A Public Health’s School Health Team.

“A walking school bus,” said Betty, “boosts children’s physical activity level, it benefits them socially and, unlike the motorized version, it’s environment-friendly.”

“We know that only 36 percent of Canadian children walk to school even though 68 percent of them could walk the distance in 30 minutes or less.”

“Winston Churchill has had a great experience with this and we always encourage other schools to get involved. They can either set up a walking school bus themselves, or we would be happy to help.” For more information, call the Raise a little health information line, 613-549-1232, ext. 1102 or visit www.saferoutestoschool.ca

“Both these initiatives—the bike racks and the walking school bus—promote physical activity,” said Debra Vine, Public Health Nurse with the Motiv8 initiative at KFL&A Public Health, which encourages eating well, getting fit, and living life.

“Our target audience is adults,” said Debra, “but sometimes children can pass on their healthy habits to their parents.” And, said Debra, “if today’s kids get used to the idea of walking or cycling to school, they may remain active over time and reverse the current trend towards obesity. They may grow up to be physically fit adults with healthy lifestyles and a low rate of chronic disease.”



An initiative by KFL&A Public Health

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