

Title

The Walking School Bus

Short description

The project is set in the city of Heidelberg and targets the primary school children. The "walking school bus" is a group of school children at least in the beginning accompanied by a voluntary adult ("a bus driver"), walking the way to school together. They can "get on and off the bus" at certain places ("bus stops"). The aim of the project is to teach children the traffic rules, to give them confidence to make their way from home to school and back on their own later on, and to offer them some exercise before classes start. This way, they are more balanced and concentrated and can satisfy their communicational and social needs. An additional benefit is the CO₂ savings that result from less car traffic in the school area. Important success factors for the project are firstly the schools' participation and secondly the parents' willingness to accompany the groups of children on their way to school. In case of an accident, children as well as volunteers are automatically covered by an insurance of the county Baden-Württemberg during the project.

Topic

Moving – active mobility

Characteristics (type, level)

Intervention, Local/Regional

Country/Countries of implementation

Germany

Aims and Objectives

The aim is to get school kids to go to school by foot which contributes to their health. Also, the objectives are for children to learn about their surroundings, make practical experience in road traffic (traffic safety) and through their common path to school create social ties and encourage friendships (social competence) and environmental protection. What is more, the aim of the project is that children gain practical experience in road traffic, in order to give them confidence later on to make the way from home to school and back alone.

Target Group

The prime group which is targeted are the primary school children of Heidelberg, especially first-grade pupils. Also, the groups of teachers are involved who function as contact persons at the participating schools, and the parents who support the walking school buses voluntarily.

Status

Ongoing

Start and Completion dates

2009 – today

Lifestyle and Behavior Change

This practice contributes to lifestyle and behavior change to the extent that parents do not drive to school (less traffic, less O2 emissions) and young children get more movement which also results in them being more balanced, can concentrate better, and thus have higher learning abilities. At this point it needs to be stressed that it is vital to the project that parents are informed about the project early on – informational letters and project flyers are distributed with the registration formulas in order to ensure that parents are familiar with the program straight away. This seems to be the only way to make sure they don't even start driving their kids to school but instead take the time to practice the way to school with them.

Effects on:

<p>Health and Wellbeing</p>	<p>This practice provides regular exercise which is healthy: the daily footpath promotes motor development, improves the oxygen supply and prevents obesity. The children are more balanced which also has a positive impact on their concentration and thus their learning ability. Moreover, on their way to school, the children' natural need to communicate can be nurtured before the lesson. This offers the possibility to make friendships and train social behavior. It promotes the independence of the children through the achievement of the school path itself. What is more, the children also get to know their own surroundings better, their spatial thinking and sense of orientation are promoted. The daily training renders the children safer and competent/confident in traffic. In this way, longer paths to secondary schools can be better achieved later on.</p>
<p>Vulnerable populations</p>	<p>This practice saves the parents time and money. Also, social integration takes place on the mutual way to school.</p>

<p>Environment</p>	<p>While this practice has an impact on many areas – health, social competence and transport safety – it also offers the possibility to actively contribute to environmental protection by foregoing the use of a car and have a direct impact on the CO2 emissions due to less traffic.</p>
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Initiated and/or implemented by

The University of Heidelberg, the city of Heidelberg, the Working Group “Clever unterwegs” (clever on the road), and the health authority of the Rhein-Neckar-Kreis are working together to ensure that appropriate offers are set up at as many schools as possible.

Stakeholders and sectors involved

- City of Heidelberg, Amt für Umweltschutz, Gewerbeaufsicht und Energie with the Agenda-Büro and the Arbeitskreis clever unterwegs is the main coordinator in the Heidelberg borough of the project, communication about the walking school bus
- Rhein-Neckar-Kreis, Gesundheitsamt mit dem Praxisbüro Gesunde Schule
- Institut für Sport und Sportwissenschaft Universität Heidelberg
- Verkehrsverbund Rhein-Neckar is responsible for financing the creation and setting up bus stop signs (where necessary)
- VCD Kreisverband Rhein-Neckar
- Polizeidirektion Heidelberg/Verkehrserziehung plans the routes for the walking school bus
- Consultation of school management
- Staatliches Schulamt Mannheim
- City of Heidelberg, Office for School and Education

Financial support

Human resources for the overall project coordination and public relations are offered by the city of Heidelberg. It also finances flyers which are given to the parents of first-year pupils. Verkehrsverbund Rhein-Neckar bears the expenses for the signs. High visibility vests are sponsored by ADAC.

Evidence-base

Only half of the children reach the daily movement recommended by the WHO. Scientific studies confirm that this is mainly due to a massive decline in physical activities in everyday life. School sport alone cannot help. A more active lifestyle is required. This practice allows that, in that physical activity starts even before classes have begun.

According to statistics, children who are taken to school by their parents by car are involved in about 20% of morning traffic accidents. This number can be significantly reduced by the

children walking to school at an early age with parental/adult guidance. Since the walking school bus usually consists of groups, which are very visible thanks to their high-visibility vests everyone is wearing, the walking school bus can be better seen by drivers and other road users even during autumn and winter months.

Main activities

The practice is quite simple: with the walking bus a group of children walk from home to school and (partly) back home after class; due to the varying ends of lessons the pupils often get home in a different way. The bus driver is, at least in the beginning, an adult volunteer (usually a parent) who accompanies the children on their way. Just as a regular bus, the walking bus runs along a fixed timetable and stops on the way to school at the agreed bus stops. The group goes past these at fixed times and the pupils can “get in and out”. The stops can be indicated with appropriate signs. In the best case, there is a coordinator who, in the event of illness or prevention of the bus driver, coordinates the deployment of the volunteers.

Furthermore, all schoolchildren are insured during school events as well as on the paths to and from their schools under the statutory accident insurance. Should a child despite all the security measures at school be injured, statutory student insurance will take effect. Parents and other adult accompanying persons also benefit from a statutory accident insurance cover if they take on tasks for the school. E.g. as a school helper, as a companion to the walking school bus or as a school bus attendant (on behalf of the cities, municipalities, school associations or school bus carriers).

The school is obliged to notify to the Unfallkasse Baden-Württemberg of any accident of the child as well as the adult companion. The county of Baden-Württemberg also covers insurance for volunteers.

Evaluation

Currently, no evaluation is carried out.

Main results

The most important results are the reduction of motorized private transport due to the lower numbers of parents bringing their kids to school and the extra activity the kids can profit from each morning.

Key success factors and barriers

Success factors: The most important success factors were first of all the primary schools’ participation in the project, but also the parents’ participation – both with regard to their interest in making use of the offer and to their willingness to make themselves available as “bus drivers”. Apart from that, the communication between school management, parents and teachers was a key success factor.

Barriers: A possible obstacle was motivating the schools to be a part of the project. For this, a coordinator must be found in each school to serve as a contact person for parents.

However the greater obstacle lay in finding parents who are willing to accompany the children as “bus drivers”. Here societal changes that took place in the last years showed insofar as both parents are working and therefore have little time flexibility.

INHERIT Perspective

This project has been chosen for inclusion because it has theoretical potential to improve both health & wellbeing of pupils due to additional movement when walking to school and to reduce proximal and distal pressures in the environment due to reduced greenhouse gas emissions, as they are not brought to school by their parents in a car. The intervention creates the opportunity and motivation for behaviour change by offering the “model” of the walking school bus which is supported by the local schools. At the same time, it actively develops the capabilities of young pupils to behave securely on the street.

More information

- **Project brochure:**
https://www.heidelberg.de/site/Heidelberg_ROOT/get/documents_E-918811683/heidelberg/Objektdatenbank/31/PDF/Nachhaltigkeitskonzepte/31_pdf_Folder_Laufender_Schulbus_2014_k2.pdf
- **Sustainability page of the city of Heidelberg:** *www.heidelberg.de/nachhaltig*
- **Mobility projects on primary schools in Heidelberg:**
<http://www.heidelberg.de/hd,Lde/HD/Leben/Mobilitaetsprojekte+an+Heidenger+Grundschulen.html>

Contact

Amt für Umweltschutz, Gewerbeaufsicht und Energie, Prinz-Carl, Kornmarkt 1, 69117 Heidelberg, umweltamt@heidelberg.de, tel.: 06221 58-18000 and 58-18010