

Title

WOW – the year round walk to school challenge

Short description

WOW rewards primary school pupils who walk to school at least once a week with a monthly collectible badge. Journeys are recorded daily on either an online platform called Travel Tracker, or on paper wall charts. The badges are designed by pupils in an annual badge design competition and made in the UK from waste plastic from the manufacture of yoghurt pots. Teachers and Class Monitors help logging journeys and awarding badges. WOW provides free monthly curriculum-aligned learning resources and assembly presentations.

Topic

Moving (active transport)

Characteristics (type, level)

National

Country/Countries of implementation

UK

Aims and Objectives

WOW aims to help children to develop healthy lifelong habits by encouraging primary school children and their parents/carers to walk to school. Other objectives are to improve road safety and pedestrian experience, improve social cohesion, improve health and wellbeing and quality of the environment.

Target Group

Primary school children and their parents/carers

Status

Implemented on a continuous basis

Start and Completion dates

1997 - now

Lifestyle and Behavior Change

In WOW – the year-round walk to school challenge scheme, children record how they travel to school using an online platform called Travel Tracker, or on a class wall chart. Pupils that walk at least once a week every week of the month will receive a collectable badge. There are 11 badges to collect, one for every month of the school year. The badges have a different theme each academic year (e.g. Our Healthy Planet) and the designs are chosen from pupils' entries to the WOW Badge Design competition, a national art competition which receives thousands of entries.

Effects on:

Health and Wellbeing	WOW encourages a modal transport shift to walking that increases physical activity among children and their parents/carers. More children walking to school also means reduced congestion and improved safety at the school gate as well as better local air quality and reduced CO2 emissions.
Vulnerable populations	The WOW scheme is an inclusive scheme that can be run in all types of primary school, in both rural and urban locations, as well as in schools with children with special educational needs and disabilities.
Environment	46 % of children aged 5-10 in England travel to school by car and 46% walked (data from Department of Transport, Transport Statistics Great Britain: 2015, Gov.uk) so there is a scope for a focus on walking to school “to achieve significant modal shift.” Source: Living Streets Expert testimony for NICE. 21% of UK domestic greenhouse gas emissions were from transport in 2014, up from 15% in 1990 (data from Department of Transport, Transport Statistics Great Britain: 2015, Gov.uk). Shifting from car travel to walking to school contributes to efforts to reduce air pollutants associated with travelling to school by car.

Initiated and/or implemented by

Living Streets, the UK charity for everyday walking, initiated the practice as part of its programme of activities to encourage walking.

Stakeholders and sectors involved

Schools and charitable sector (Living Streets); local authorities.

Financial support

Living Streets has received funding from the Department of Health and the Department for Transport to roll out WOW in areas which experience both deprivation across a range of indicators and high rates of child obesity. Schools outside of these funded areas can buy WOW resources themselves, local authorities can buy resources for their schools, and businesses can sponsor schools to run the scheme.

Evidence-base

The health benefits of walking to school are a key driver for the project: for example, “*children who travel by walking use twice as many calories as those who travel by car*” (cited in National Institute for Clinical Excellence Expert testimony Living Streets).

Main activities

WOW rewards pupils who walk to school.

Evaluation

Several evaluations have been carried out on WOW, including by Wavehill Consulting in 2009, the Centre for Local Economic strategies in 2015, and by Capita (2015).

For the evaluation of Living Streets WOW scheme published in 2009 by Wavehill Consulting, the methodology “involved speaking to key stakeholders and 30 School Travel Advisors, and also a ‘hands up’ and ‘stand up’ survey in 341 schools.” The evaluation received data from 889 classes and 23,450 school children. Wavehill reported on numbers and % of children surveyed walking to school; % children walking to school participating in WOW; numbers and % of children surveyed entering a drawing/painting competition to design badges used in the scheme; % of children surveyed who walk with other family members.

More recently the Centre for Local Economic Strategies (CLES) conducted an SROI study, published in 2015. This involved a sample of 36 pupils from 3 schools who were asked to estimate the level of walking to and from school they had undertaken before and after involvement with the project. They were then asked further questions about the potential impact on their general well-being as a result of walking more frequently to school, and their perception of the attribution of these impacts that were due to the project. The school children included a cross-section including:

- Those who had been involved with the Walking to School project;
- Those who had changed their walking habits as a result of their involvement in the project;
- Those children whose walking habits had stayed the same, in spite of involvement with the project.

The CLES SRI 2015 assessed health, social connections, independence, confidence.

Capita conducted an economic appraisal of the 3 year Living Streets Walk to School Outreach Programme. This economic appraisal used various inputs including internally-collected modal shift data. Modal shift is the key indicator. Impacts assessed included: changes in congestion, infrastructure, accidents, local air quality, noise, greenhouse gases, health (walking)

Main results

Wavehill report 2009: In WOW schools surveyed, 59% of girl and 60% of boys (as % of total school population) walked to school compared to 51% in the general population according to the 2007 National Travel Survey.

19% of children surveyed started to walk to school because of WOW.

82% of children who walk to school participate in WOW.

Teachers and classroom staff found WOW easy to administer, and children understand it and want to participate in it.

23% of children surveyed walk to school with either mother or father

The CLES 2015 report found that for every £1 spent there is a £4.30 social return on investment.

The study reported: improved health, increased confidence, greater independence, improved social connections (time with friends).

The 2015 economic appraisal conducted by Capita of the DfT project: modal shift data for this project was collected using baseline and follow-up hands-up surveys in schools. This was managed internally, and carried out across all participating LAs. The study estimated that 200,000 children put their hand up across the three years of the project. Overall they observed an increase in walking modes – all the way, scooting or ‘park & stride’ – of 23%, and a decrease in pupils being driven of 32%. For more recent projects hands-up surveys have been replaced by an online monitoring tool ‘Travel Tracker’, which pupils complete themselves each morning in class to record how they travelled to school. This (modal shift) is the key indicator.

Key success factors and barriers

Success factors: Children enjoy the scheme, according to the evaluation report 84 % of girls and 83% of boys would rather prefer to travel to school by walking or bike than by bus or car.

Costs to schools are low and teachers find it easy to administer,

Barriers:

Securing funding for fully-funded roll out of WOW.

Reaching the key decision maker in the school to make the case and bring them on-board

Developing relationships with Local Authority partners to identify and support the recruitment of target schools

Making the case to schools already or considering participation in similar behavior change schemes/events

Making links to school curriculum / identifying opportunities to validate why a school should participate (e.g. The Pupil Premium, Mode shift STARS awards, Healthy Schools)

Drop off in WOW participation due to changes in school staff, school capacity or school priorities.

INHERIT Perspective

The intervention is included because it encourages a modal transport shift to walking that increases physical activity among children and their parents/carers. More children walking to school also means reduced traffic congestion and improved safety at the school gate as well as better local air quality and reduced CO2 emissions. Therefore there is potential to improve health and the environment, and to improve health equity. By encouraging walking WOW makes changes to the environmental state (air quality), to exposure and experience through behaviour change.

More information

Living Streets WOW : <https://www.livingstreets.org.uk/what-we-do/projects/wow>

NICE guidance Expert Testimony 1 <https://www.nice.org.uk/guidance/ph41/evidence>

Wavehill Consulting, Evaluation of WOW scheme 2009 Executive summary

A 2015 SROI study, also by CLES, of the DfT project (external report, plus internally-produced summary)

A 2012 evaluation by Wavehill of a Department of Health funded WOW project

A 2015 evaluation by CLES of a Department for Transport funded WOW project

How to get more children walking to school: A best practice guide by Living Streets

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