



Safe Routes to School Program Launched

Does your child view the world from the back seat of your car? He or she is not alone. On average, children spend more than an hour a day in a car, not including time on the school bus. Part of that hour in the back seat may be spent getting to school, and the child's memory of the trip is little more than a blurred image through the windshield.

The alternative is a walk or bike ride to school that connects a child directly with his or her neighborhood. It's an opportunity to explore, to meet neighbors and business owners, and to have fun with friends along the way. It's an experience that is sadly missing from many children's younger years as they are chauffeured from home to school. Research is revealing that a child's mental health is impacted by the diminished ability to independently experience and learn about the world around them.

Concerned over both the mental health and the growing rate of obesity among Carlisle's youth, the Carlisle Area Health & Wellness Foundation launched a Safe Routes to School initiative at Mooreland, Hamilton and Newville elementary schools in early 2008. The goal is to create a community partnership that would reinstitute the routine of walking and biking to school as an important part of a child's daily physical activity.

So why do parents drive their kids to school

instead of allowing them to walk 15-20 minutes each way? The barriers cited most commonly by parents surveyed are traffic danger and adverse weather. Other top concerns raised by parents in the study area included convenience, safety concerns, after-school activities and the age of children.

Many of these concerns can be overcome through efforts by the community to improve the safety and walkability of Carlisle's neighborhoods. Over the past year, Safe Routes to School task force teams comprised of school administrators, teachers, parents, municipal officials and safety enforcement officers evaluated existing conditions at each of the three participating schools. Land Logistics Group, a land use planning consultant with expertise in SRTS Programs and walkability assessment, provided the necessary guidance and tools to get the job done.

With baseline data in hand, the teams developed strategies aimed at getting kids back on the sidewalks. Some of these strategies focus on physically improving the walking environment, making crosswalks more visible, fixing sidewalks, adding better traffic signals at dangerous intersections and slowing down traffic through the use of traffic calming devices.

Additional strategies include educating and engaging students, parents and the community. One particularly popular idea is the

walking school bus. Volunteers act as walking bus drivers, each taking a shift or two per week. Volunteers simply walk a designated route at a designated time, leading a group of students to and from school.

The Borough of Carlisle applauds the work of the Carlisle Area School District and looks forward to supporting improvements to sidewalks, streets and intersections identified as high priority and examining key traffic safety issues.

If you are interested in learning how you or an organization or agency can get involved, please contact the Carlisle Area Health and Wellness Foundation at 717.960.9992.

Did You Know...

There are many benefits to a child who walks or bikes to school including:

- Richer connection to and appreciation of community
- More alert behavior in school
- Improved self image and independence
- Better health
- Lower chance of traffic-related accident (fewer cars traveling near school)
- An opportunity for quality time between parent or guardian and child

Carlisle Borough Enters Into Elm Street Agreement

On February 12, 2009 Carlisle Borough Council entered into a Cooperation Agreement between and among the Redevelopment Authority of Cumberland County (RACC), the Downtown Carlisle Association (DCA) and the Downtown Neighborhood Connection (DNC). The agreement outlines the duties and responsibilities of each organization as it relates to the recently approved DCED Elm Street Operating Assistance Grant.

The DNC is a local non-profit formed in 2005 to spearhead the Elm Street Program.

This volunteer group works in neighborhoods surrounding Carlisle's commercial district to help improve and strengthen residential neighborhoods.

Through the collaborative efforts of the DNC, DCA and RACC, the Borough of Carlisle was successful in obtaining a \$235,000 grant through DCED. According to State guidelines, the monies must be used to hire a full time Elm Street manager and provide funding assistance to residents in the Elm Street designated neighborhoods. Both the manager and the program will be overseen by the Downtown Carlisle Association, the Borough's main street organization.

Residents in the Elm Street area may apply for grants through the Elm Street Residential Façade Program, a program lodged with the DCA. The program is designed to help homeowners make improvements to their buildings' exteriors.

For more information on this program, please contact the Downtown Carlisle Association at 717.245.2648.