

A stylized landscape with rolling hills in shades of green and brown. A path of white footprints leads from the foreground into the distance, winding across the hills. The overall aesthetic is clean and modern.

Debbie Lang & Robin Kearns

Walking to school:

Are parents aware of the benefits?

Living Streets Aotearoa



We are born to travel. As soon as we have the strength, our bodies carry us to many destinations – crawling around our homes, running around the yard, walking to a friend's house, and eventually hurrying to our automobiles.

McMillan *et al.*, 2006:76

Outline of Presentation

1. Introduction to the research
2. About the school
3. Findings from the focus groups
4. What the findings mean for school travel programmes – some recommendations and ideas

Objectives

1. To examine parents' motivations, decision-making processes and behaviours in relation to school travel
2. To investigate the role that social, psychological and contextual factors play in parental choice for the trip to school
3. To explore parental perceptions of both walking and driving for the trip to school and to determine how these perceptions influence modal choice
4. To uncover the real and perceived barriers to walking to school
5. To contribute to an understanding of school travel behaviour in Auckland in order to inform school travel behaviour change initiatives such as the TravelWise programme

What did I do?

- A case study of Campbells Bay School
- Parent Questionnaires asking
 - Mode of travel
 - Factors influencing their mode of travel
 - Perceptions of their neighbourhood / walking / driving
- Parent Focus Groups
 - Two groups of parents whose children mostly walk to school
 - One group of parents who mostly drive their children to school
 - One group of parents who always used to drive, but now walk

What did I do?.....

- Focused on walking and driving only
- All results split into 'walkers' and 'drivers' for comparison

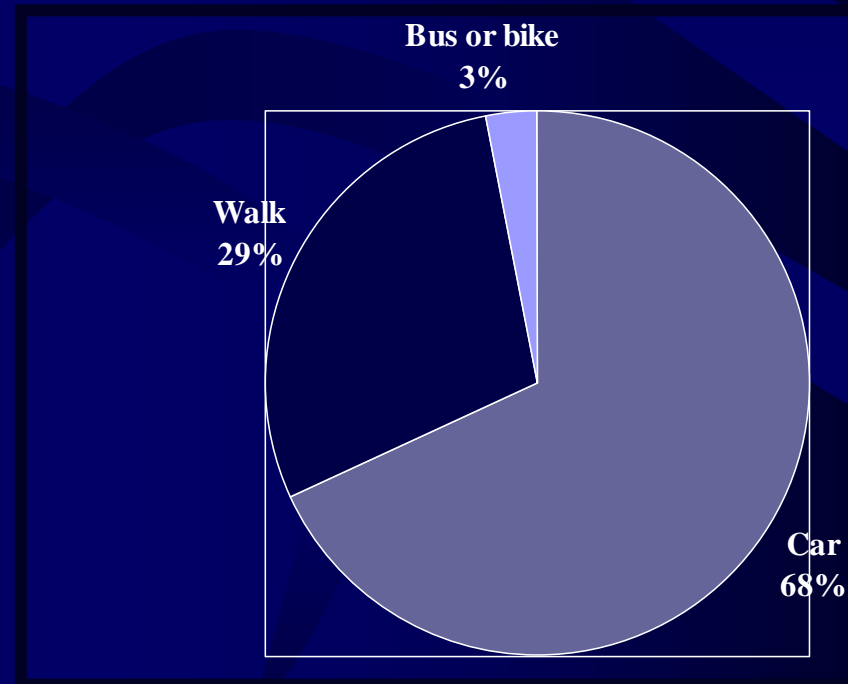
About Campbells Bay School

- Located in North Shore City
- Decile 10 primary school
- Approximately 700 students



School Travel at Campbells Bay

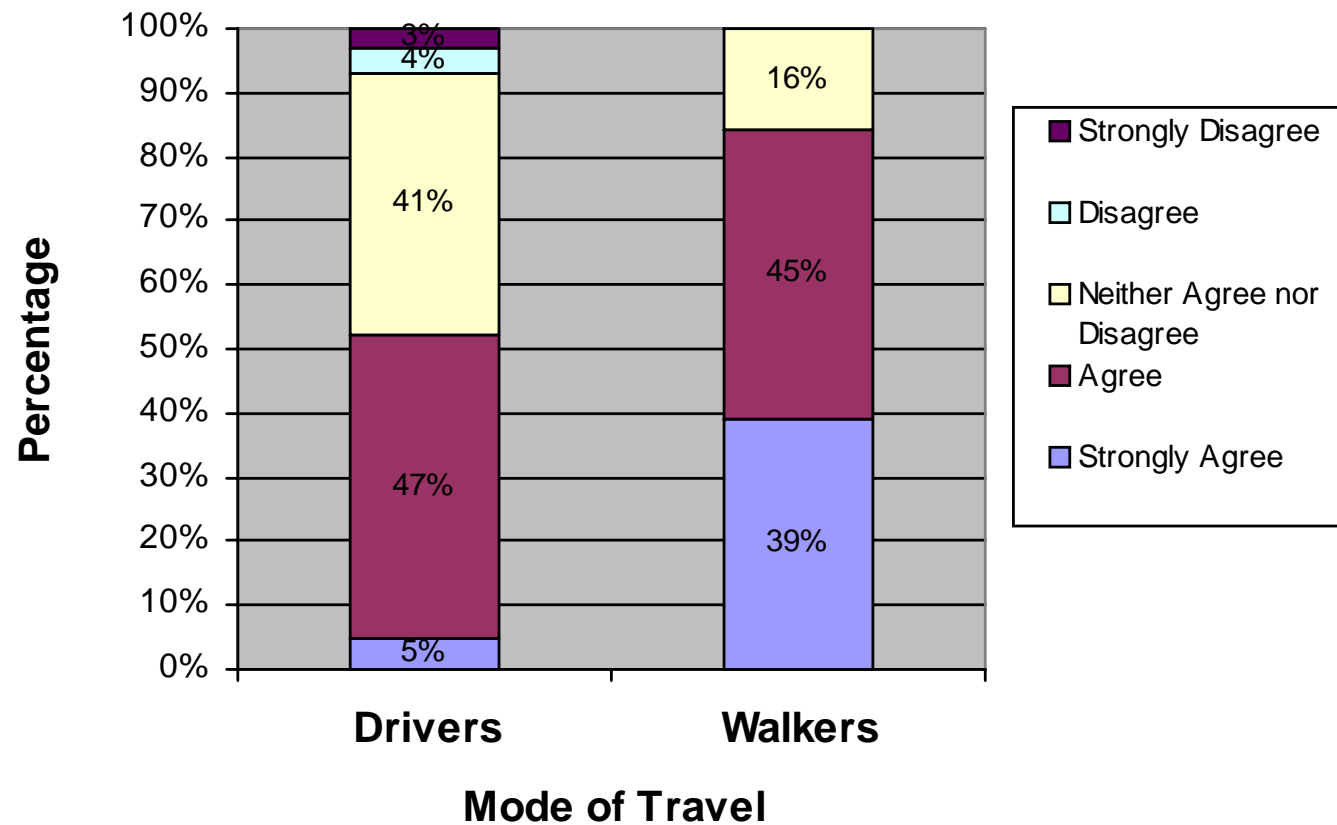
- TravelWise school since 2004 (Plan launched June 2005)
- 61% live within 1km and further 21% live within 2km
- 5 WSB routes
- 1 afternoon school bus route



Questionnaire Results

Perceptions of Walking

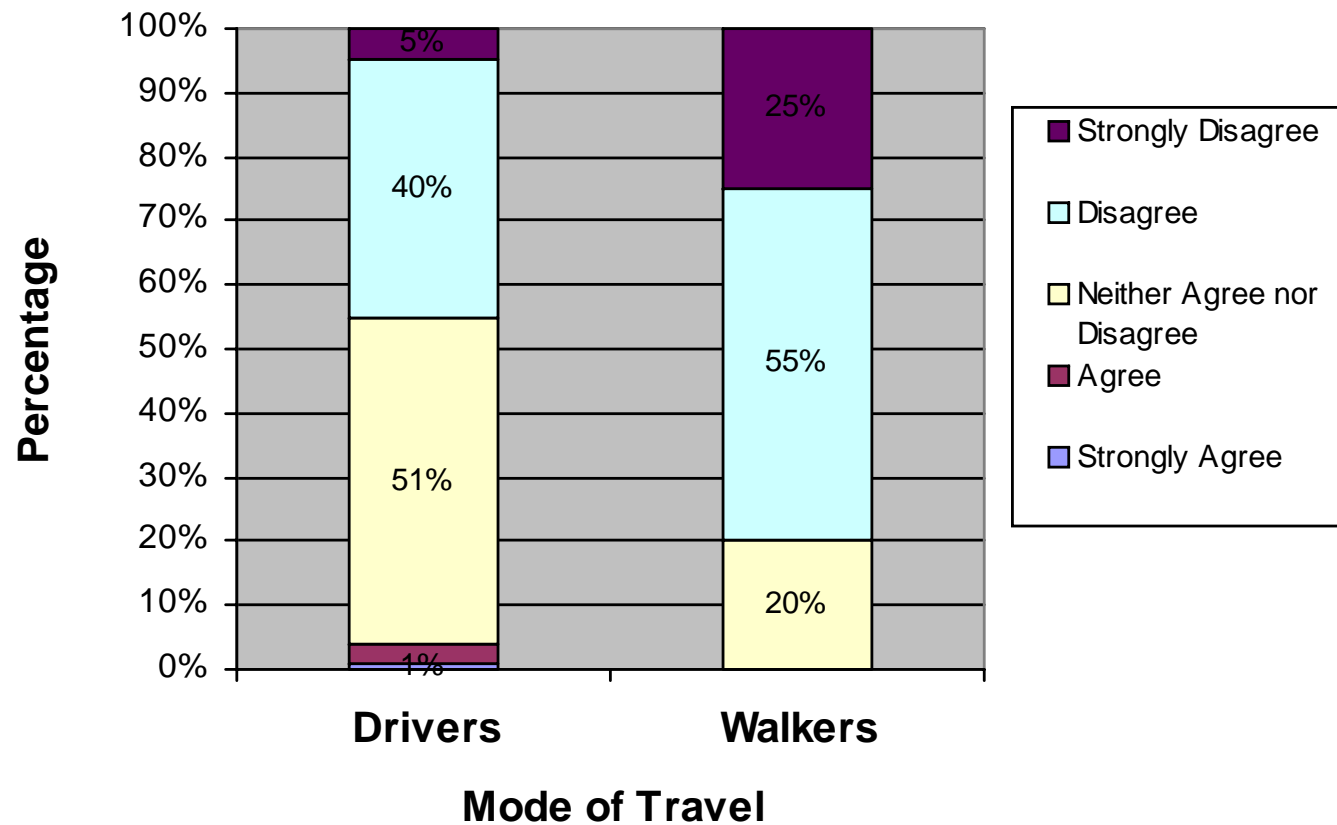
Children should walk to school



Questionnaire Results

Perceptions of Driving

Children should be driven to school



Focus Group Findings

The 'Walkers' Groups

- 5 parents use WSB
- 2 accompany children
- 3 allow children to walk alone

Most common reasons for walking:

- Live close to school (8/10)
- Health and fitness (7/10)

Focus Group Findings

The 'Drivers' Group

Most common reasons for driving:

- Not enough time to walk (4/5)
- Road Safety (4/5)

Focus Group Findings

The 'Changed' Group

- 5 children walk alone or with friends
- 1 parent accompanies child

Why did they drive in the beginning?

- Distance too far for young children (5/6)

Why do their children walk now?

- Walking is healthier / exercise (5/6)
- Children older and more responsible (3/6)

Focus Group Findings

The benefits of walking to School

- Walkers talked about how walking benefited their children
- Apart from fitness, none of the things they talked about had been reasons why they chose to walk
- Many of the benefits of walking to school they only realised once their children began walking
- If they had always driven, they would not have known what their children were missing

Focus Group Findings

Fitness and Health

Walkers Focus Group

Bridget: After about the first week of walking to school, the kid's fitness increased significantly. So there it was, very very quick, between the moaning and the groaning and "I've got sore legs"

DL: So you've really noticed an improvement in their fitness?

Barbara: Oh definitely

Philippa: Yeah you can tell

Caroline: Yeah this lady Amber who is a teacher here at school, she lived in our street and she said in the beginning when you have athletics days you can pick the ones that are walking to school and the ones that aren't

Focus Group Findings

Fitness and Health

Drivers Focus Group

Leslie: ...also I've got a five year old who would be a bit tired if he was walking, he's tired now, but without walking

...

Vicky: ...certainly going home, it's bad enough making her walk to the car, "why did you park so far away (groaning)"

Focus Group Findings

Fitness and Health

Drivers Focus Group

DL: In the surveys people were asked if they thought their kids were missing out on physical activity

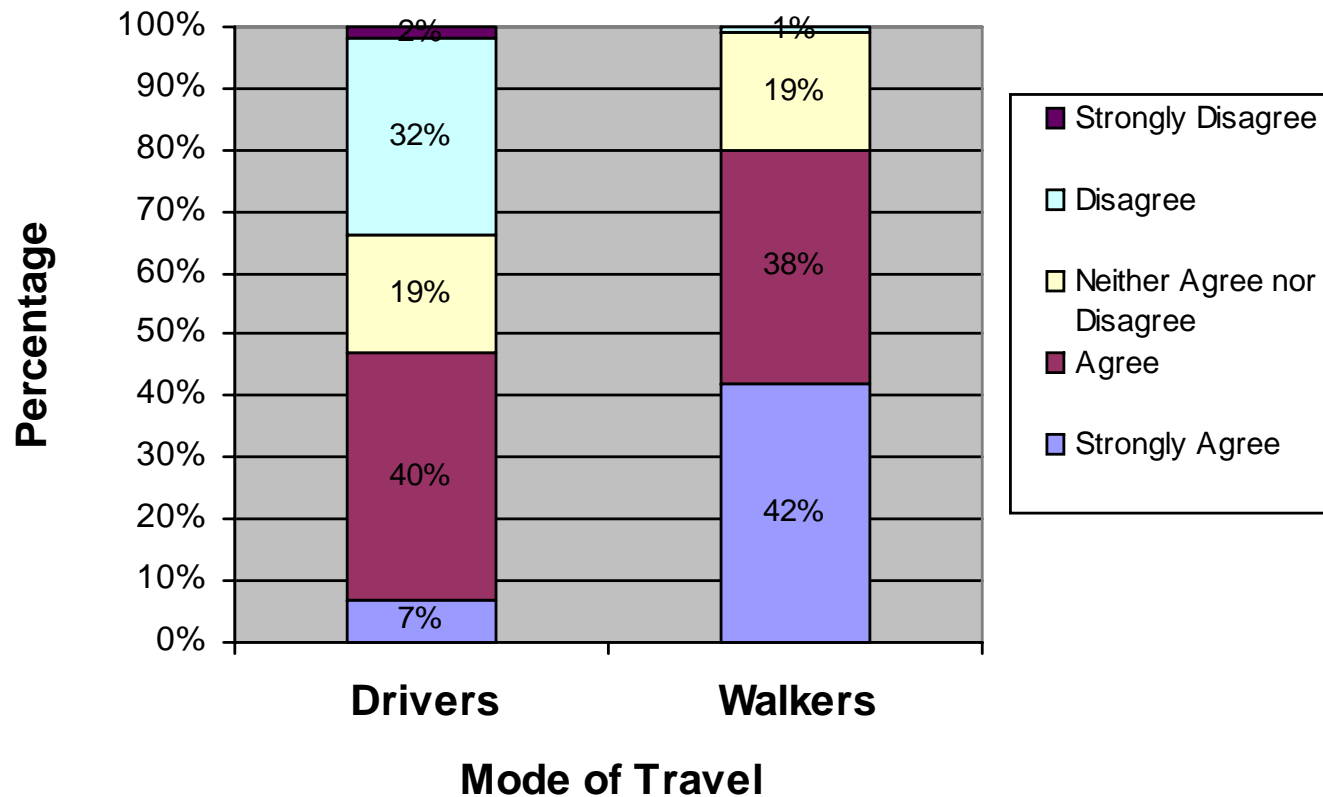
Mabel: Yeah I think they are

Shelley: No they do netball, they do athletics, they do swimming, they do dancing they do...

Questionnaire Results

Perceptions of Driving

Driving children to school deprives them of important daily physical activity



Focus Group Findings

Fitness and Health

- Wide knowledge of benefits
- A catalyst for walkers
- Disparity between drivers

Focus Group Findings

Responsibility and Trust

Drivers Focus Group

Shelley: I would trust my two older girls to walk sensibly. My boy, I can see him putting one foot down the gutter, one foot up or something silly like that on the way and I just think those cars going along East Coast Road....

Shelley: For me, I wouldn't feel safe them walking on their own, I also think they could kill each other

Vicky: Yes

Shelley: like if they got in a fight or something

Vicky: Pushed one

Shelley: that worries me a little bit you know, get in an argument. I just don't completely trust them.....

Focus Group Findings

Responsibility and Trust

Walkers Focus Group

Barbara: Yeah the few times that she has walked home [alone] and I've organised it, she has just you know been taller than a sky tower, and she's been really responsible and she's just loved it. It's been good for both of us

Caroline: They feel that you trust them if you do that [let them walk alone] and I think that's a really big thing

Focus Group Findings

Responsibility and Trust

- Walkers only learned through experience the level of responsibility their children would show walking home from school

Focus Group Findings

Communication

Walkers Focus Group

Sarah: I find it a time to ... you know, that you actually talk to your kid as well ...

Helen: Oh yeah

Sarah: It's really nice and you hear the birds, and "oh what's that mummy?" And you know you can actually talk to them and have a conversation. Whereas if you're driving, as you say, there's so many cars, and you're "hang on a minute", because you're trying to concentrate as to where you're going, and yeah

...

Helen: But that's actually a good point, the talking and communication thing, because with James, being eight, at that age, you know, and boys, they're quite different. Like Karen will talk to me. She'll tell me about her day. James will go, I'll say, "what happened at school today" and "oh I can't remember", or you know, "what was the best thing?" "Lunch." The best thing was lunch....and you know it sort of creates that non-threatening [atmosphere]. You're not looking eye to eye and saying "look right James" ...but we're walking along, chatting, and he starts telling me things that he never would never normally tell, you know...

Focus Group Findings

Communication

Changed Focus Group

Wendy: Mine will come home now and tell me more about it, whereas in the car it would always be “uh agh”, you know. ... they come in and they're chatty, and they're you know, you get itsy bitsy stuff from school, and [they've] walked it off

Focus Group Findings

Preparing for the school day / winding down after the day

Changed Focus Group

Linda: I also think that the kids, it's kind of like an unwinding time, they come home

Wendy: they're happier I reckon

Linda: and they've had a chat with each other or they've run and worked off a bit of energy....I had quite an anxious one, a bit like you were saying...I'd meet him outside and he'd be angry with me or something, all the tension of the day on him, and he'd take it out on me. And so not being there, he just comes home, he's worked it off....

Focus Group Findings

Preparing for the school day / winding down after the day

Walkers Focus Group

Bridget: ...also the after school grumps. My oldest has never eaten lunch at school so he comes home, if he were to get into the car straight after school I would hear all about everything. Some sort of verbal diarrhoea...and everybody would be wrong, it wouldn't matter what it was. There would be all these horrific things that happened at school. Whereas by the time he's got home, I'm past school, I've burnt it all off or whatever and [he says] "what's there to eat?" You know, it's a completely different focus

Focus Group Findings

Community and Social Interaction

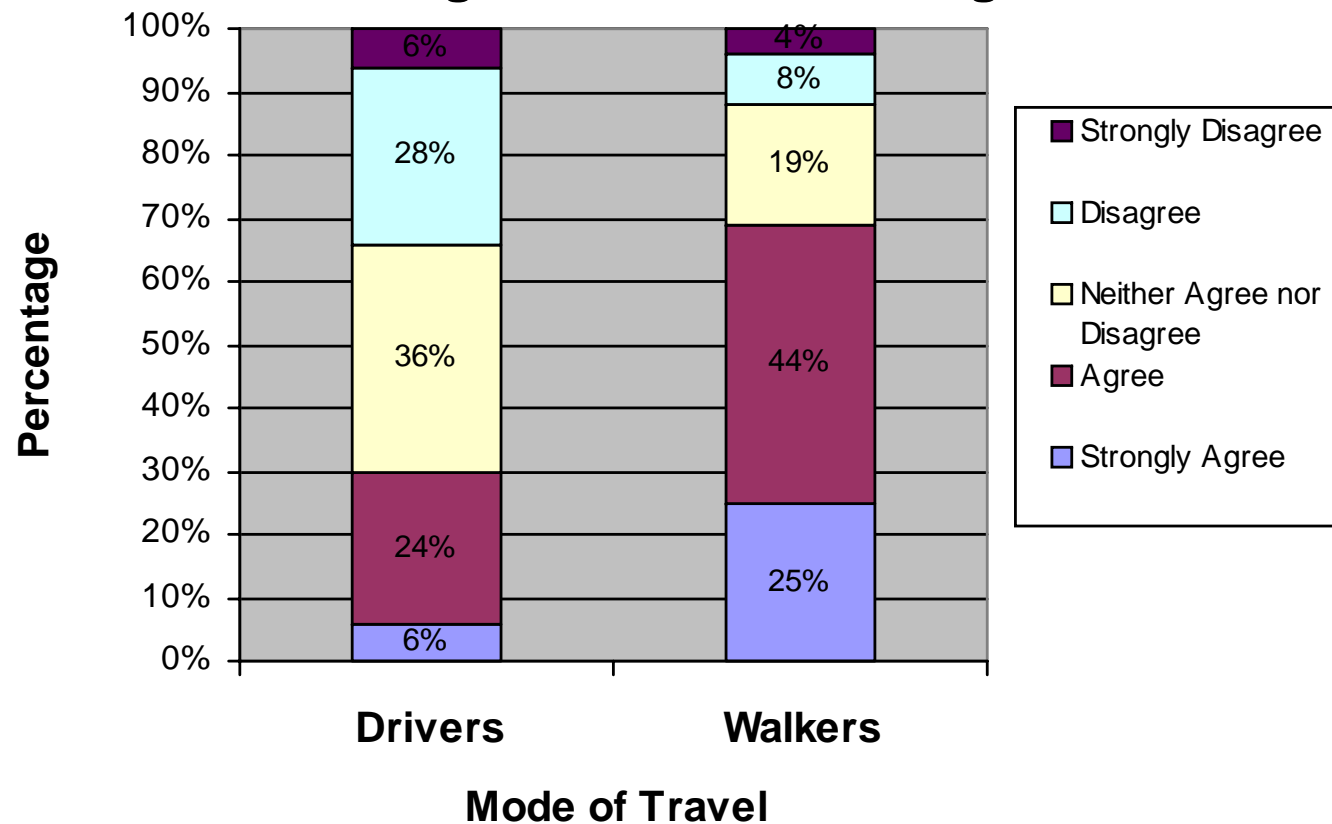
Changed Focus Group

Lucy: Actually, walking up, we walk past a bunch of houses, our neighbours ...and because we're not in a car, I mean everyone else just drives, but we're walking and we actually interact a lot with neighbours on the way. An older woman who's just widowed and you know we go and check if she needs her mail brought in or rubbish or something, you know the kids actually take responsibility to just checking with neighbours, you know other age groups, not just kids. It's actually really nice. And really nice things, I just sort of think the others just drive out and they don't stop to talk, they don't know what's going on. So it's actually been really special, especially cause the new widowed woman, she's um really nice

Questionnaire Results

Perceptions of Walking

Walking to school is an important way for children to get to know their neighbours



Focus Group Findings

Independence

Changed Focus Group

Wendy: I think [walking to school] does spin off into independence side of it. That they are prepared to go, just in other family situations, or when you're out somewhere, and you can say "oh, can you just go and do that, or grab that, or buy that", and they will. They've sort of got that bit more kind of confidence in themselves to be able to go and do something because they're... used to just being able to walk home

Focus Group Findings

Benefits of Walking to School

- Many benefits a “spin off”
- Benefits largely unknown until they started walking
- These ‘unknown benefits’ of great value
- Drivers unaware of benefits “you only know what you know don’t you?”

Focus Group Findings

Social Norms

Drivers Focus Group

Mabel: It's so funny you say that cause I don't think it's a bother with anyone here because we understand the circumstances, but you know my sister, she lives in Papakura and her kids have had no trouble walking to school or anything because they're just like round the corner, and she thinks 'ohhh, ohhh, you mothers drive your kids to school in your 4-wheel drives' and all this sort of stuff

DL: So, do you feel that?

Mabel: Well no, I didn't realise it was a big deal until she said that, we're just used to that sort of life

Vicky: No I just think the people who can walk to school, they're lucky because they obviously live close enough that they don't or you know close enough and it's not a danger and I think that would be great

Mabel: if we could afford a house in Aberdeen Road we would

Vicky: Exactly

Focus Group Findings

Social Norms

Walkers Focus group

DL: For walking in general, you don't feel judged at all?

Joanne: No, no

Jessica: no

Yvette: But I would sometimes question why some people maybe won't walk when they could. But you never say anything. But you just sort of

DL: So parents who drive?

Sarah: Oh definitely. I know people who live closer than I do who could easily walk, who could easily join our WSB and I have suggested it and yeah, and then they still drive.

Helen: I realise people have their own [circumstances] but I must say I'm disappointed, would probably be a better word

Sarah: Yeah, I question

Helen: that why, when petrol is so expensive and we've got all these problems that we all know about and its rammed down your throat and you read about it constantly and the whole world is about this, why do people persist with this you know?

Focus Group Findings

Social Norms

Walkers Focus Group

Bridget: No. But I would say there is a whole lot of paranoid mums out there who think their kids are made out of gingerbread, that's ridiculous...

Focus Group Findings

Social Norms

- Nobody thought there was any social pressure
- Walkers expressed negative thoughts about drivers
- Drivers oblivious to walkers thoughts
- Drivers wanted confirmation that 'most people drive'

Recommendations

1. Make it personal - promote the benefits of walking to school through the personal experiences of other families
2. Reinforce the behaviour of parents who already walk – ensure they fully appreciate what they are doing
3. Provide opportunities for parents to discuss the benefits of walking to school with each other
4. Encourage them to share their experiences with other parents, especially drivers

Some suggestions:

1. Hold a surprise 'thank you for walking day'
2. Profile families who walk in a regular newsletter column with their personal stories
3. Video a group of parents talking about the benefits of walking to school and play as an induction video to new parents
4. Find a parent who is willing to be a guest speaker at parent events and describe the benefits of walking to school for their child
5. Have a notice board or section on website where parents can post their experiences and tell their story about walking. Make it interactive so parents can ask questions about how they manage to walk
6. Hold a competition where parents can submit a story and/or photo that depicts the benefits of walking for their family – publish entries as a 'school walking magazine'

And....

Lots of stories about people walking
will show that lots of people are
walking

i.e it must be the 'normal' thing to do