

'Engaging children and youth in designing places for Active Living' Symposium outcome

Event held on 25 July 2011



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Children and young people represent a vital part of our community and have a large impact on the lifestyle of many of Canberra's households. In a built environment designed around the car, children and youths are at a distinct disadvantage. They are either entirely reliant on parents for transport to many destinations or they are spatially limited to a highly restricted realm with a small number of destinations that are perceived as safe and accessible by active travel means. This is linked to an increase in health problems such as physical inactivity, overweight and obesity. In the ACT children are getting increasingly bigger with 29.1 % of boys and 22.8% of girls aged in Year 6 being classified as overweight or obese (ACTPANS 2007) and nearly four out of five Year 6 children reported levels of physical activity below the national average (ACTPANS 2007). In 2008, the ASSAD survey found that only 15.6 % of ACT secondary school students aged 12 to 17 years participated in physical activity at levels that meet national guidelines.

Therefore, as an outcome of the symposium and seminar we, the participating individuals and organisations, urge the ACT Government to continue the effort of achieving a child friendly city and to collaborate with the community on this important matter by considering the following suggestions:

- We recommend the use of student-led peer-mentorship groups to embed active school travel, as the most effective way to encourage higher levels of physical activity among children and youth in all Canberra schools.
- Young people need to be treated as an integral part of the community mix and not as marginal group within it. Their inclusion should be automatic, not contemplated.
- Streets are important social areas for children: places that are easy to reach, and are free of play-restricting rules. We urge the government to investigate the prospects for designing inclusive and safe road reserves that will significantly lower traffic volumes and speeds through neighbourhoods.
- Trialing "people first" projects e.g. residents-only street access at certain times, to facilitate community development and informal play.
- Overcome the perception of tokenistic youth engagement in planning through a significant shift towards evidence-based consultative outcomes that enable transparency in the translation of youth engagement in policy outcomes.
- Provide leadership through a strong long term monetary commitment, and significantly increase infrastructure conducive to walking, cycling and public transport in the ACT.

We recognise the benefits of a child friendly city and support the Vision of the ACT Children's Plan 2010- 2014. The symposium outcome highlighted some of our current concerns and collaborative thoughts on how we might achieve a child friendly Canberra.

Yours faithfully
Tony Stubbs, CEO
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