



Feet to the Street for Walk to School Week

Belfast Healthy Cities is supporting Walk to School Week, which takes place from Monday 18 to Friday 22 May. It aims to “encourage children to take to their feet and discover the health, social and environmental benefits of walking to school.”

In Northern Ireland, the week is organised by Travelwise NI, an initiative of the Department for Regional Development. Travelwise NI wants children to see how much fun there is when they walk to school with their friends or parents. It encourages children to “consider the significant contribution they can make to their health and their environment by choosing to travel by a method other than a car.”

CEO of Belfast Healthy Cities, Joan Devlin said

“The World Health Organization recommends that children and youth aged 5–17 should get at least 60 minutes of moderate- to vigorous-intensity physical activity daily and recognises walking as an important activity. When the majority of schoolchildren are not reaching these levels of activity, this excellent initiative encourages them to get active.

“As well as the obvious benefits for physical health, walking to school allows children to get to know their neighbourhoods better. It promotes their independence and increases their confidence, while helping them to feel more connected to their community. This supports good mental wellbeing, while making sure children feel included in their city.”

She added,

“Belfast Healthy Cities is currently consulting on *A Call to Action: Shaping Healthier Places for Children in Belfast*. Based on priorities identified through engagement with 3,000 children and families from across the city, it sets out a vision for Belfast as a child friendly place. It also outlines indicative actions designed to begin addressing the priorities identified by children.”

A Call to Action is seeking to start a conversation about creating good quality child friendly places in neighbourhoods across the city. Belfast Healthy Cities is encouraging organisations from all sectors as well as the public to take part in the consultation, which aims to:

- gather stakeholders’ perspectives on child friendly places
- respond to the issues raised by children and
- identify organisations who can take action to create good quality child friendly places

Further details of the consultation are available at <http://belfasthealthycities.com/shaping-healthier-places-children>

The consultation is open until **Friday 26 June**. Following consultation, the next step will be to develop a strategic approach, including an action plan that will respond to the priorities identified during the consultation process.

Notes:

1. Further information on Walk to School Week can be found at <http://www.nidirect.gov.uk/walk-to-school-week>
2. WHO Global Recommendations on Physical Activity for Health
http://whqlibdoc.who.int/publications/2010/9789241599979_eng.pdf?ua=1
3. The priorities identified by children consulted for *A Call to Action: Shaping Healthier Places for Children in Belfast* were Greenspace; Open space; Clean & safe environments; Liveable & connected communities and Reduced traffic. They were collated to form Children's Voices- A Charter for Belfast
<http://belfasthealthycities.com/sites/default/files/publications/ChildrensCharter-A4.pdf>