



GroundsWell
Transforming our cities from the ground up



Belfast
A World Health Organization
Healthy City



DELIVERING CHANGE: 2024-2025 Update





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Belfast Healthy Cities is a partnership organisation providing a platform for intersectoral collaboration to improve health and wellbeing for the Belfast population. Belfast has been a leading city within the World Health Organization (WHO) European Healthy Cities Network since 1988. A key role for Belfast Healthy Cities is to support partners in the city by providing evidence, capacity building and piloting new approaches and ways of working to improve health and wellbeing and reduce health inequalities.

GroundsWell Consortium

The GroundsWell Consortium is a team of researchers, local communities, implementers and policymakers who aim to better understand and evidence the role of green and blue spaces within wider social, economic, environmental, cultural and health systems. GroundsWell's research activity is based in Edinburgh, Liverpool and Belfast, where it is being led by researchers at Queen's University Belfast. A key aim of GroundsWell is to encourage, enable, and collaborate on community-engagement and community-led research. To facilitate this, GroundsWell launched a Community Innovation Fund programme, where community organisations could be supported in implementing programmes and evaluating impact.

Learn more about the GroundsWell Community Innovation fund here <https://www.qub.ac.uk/sites/groundswell/>

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HEALTHY PLACES, HEALTHY CHILDREN 2024-2025 PROJECT

Following training in May 2024 ten primary schools in the Greater Belfast area used the Healthy Places, Healthy Children resource, as part of a small, funded cohort of trained schools for the 2024-2025 academic year. Students worked through the lesson plans in each unit to understand what makes an environment healthy versus unhealthy and analyse their own local area, including conducting a walk assessment around that area. Following this learning the students developed a project proposal and case of evidence showing how they would plan to make changes within their school environment to make it healthier. The projects were focused on improving an identified space on the school grounds to foster more opportunities for spending time outdoors to improve both their physical and mental health. The schools were provided small grants to implement their projects, thanks to our partnership with the GroundsWell Consortium, Queens University Belfast.

The schools planted blubs, trees, and fruits, bought outdoor games for use during lunch breaks, started an anti-dog fouling campaign, installed mud kitchens, added outdoor seating, purchased cycling and scooter storage units, and improved green spaces around the school for more outdoor learning, relaxation and play. Each school has also developed their own Community Charter as a call for action that each child has the right to green spaces, time outdoors and healthy environments, to name a few. While the projects have been developed and delivered by Key Stage 2 (ages 8-11 years old) classes, the whole school community will benefit from the projects and in some schools the project has resulted in each class year receiving their own planting box, the creation of a school gardening club and ongoing maintenance jobs for each year group.

Furthermore, these primary school green space projects have shown many benefits to the whole school community in terms of increasing knowledge and access to and use of outdoor spaces, particularly related to greening. At a feedback workshop with participating primary schools, teachers shared that by using the teaching resource children had a better understanding of what makes an environment healthy versus unhealthy, and a curiosity to explore how their local environment can promote health. Children who were interviewed all expressed their enjoyment of getting to spend more time outside working on these projects and spending time with each other. Teachers reported that children have benefited from learning how key decisions are made in their local community and feel empowered to use their own voice to advocate for a healthier environment. Teachers also strongly believe that these projects will have a lasting legacy for the whole school, allowing classes each year to benefit from more time spent outdoors whether that be planting gardens, maintaining these green spaces or enjoying the additional seating and outdoor games, and providing more opportunities for physical activity and building social connections. As the trees and gardens bloom each year, they will help green the urban landscapes on the school grounds, allow children and staff to spend more time in nature and look out the windows into green environments, all of which is beneficial for mental health. Thus, these projects, will help improve both the physical and mental health of the whole school community.



**HEALTHY PLACES,
HEALTHY CHILDREN**

PROJECT CASE STUDIES



SPRINGHILL PRIMARY SCHOOL, BELFAST

Healthy Places, Healthy Children Proposal

Springhill Primary School has created and set up a new growing and sensory garden. This space allows children to grow their own fruit and vegetables, which can be used in school or potentially taken home. The garden helps pupils develop a deeper understanding of how food grows, encourages healthy eating, and promotes sustainable living through hands-on learning and care for the environment.

The garden will be a lasting, shared space where pupils across all year groups can continue to grow and care for their own plants and vegetables, encouraging responsibility, teamwork, and a connection to nature. It will also open the door for an after-school gardening club and a pupil-led gardening team, giving children further opportunities to develop leadership and practical skills.

"Already, many of the P6 girls have taken the initiative to water the trees and plants daily, showing a growing sense of self-management and pride in their work. In the long term, the garden will become a peaceful space where pupils can come to read, relax, and enjoy the environment they've helped create - something they can be proud of for years to come."

Mr. Allen P5 Teacher, Springhill Primary School, Belfast

How does the project influence: Climate, Health and/or Place?



The Growing Garden will provide students with access to develop their understanding of growth and health within eating and their lifestyle. Classes will be able to grow plants, fruits, and vegetables to eat and use within other areas of the curriculum (potato printing and cookery club etc). This will allow pupils to understand how they can live a healthier and more sustainable lifestyle, which can then be maintained throughout their lives.

What are the top 5 benefits of using this teaching resource and completing this project?

1. Engaging
2. Fun
3. Inspiring
4. Educational
5. Active

Children Should
have the right to
be heard!



Children Should
have access to
healthy food and
water!



Children Should
have access to
nature and green
spaces!



Springhill
Primary School

Every child should
have the right to
play!



Healthy Places, Healthy Children Proposal

At St Joseph's Primary School, the children decided to plant spring bulbs in the eco garden, which should grow back year after year. The children recognised that over the summer break, a lot of the plants died, but every year, the bulbs return. The children have distributed bulbs to all classes, to give them experience planting and looking after plants, and to help improve the number of pollinators that come to their school. The children also ordered some signage for the garden, to give more information to classes about the different plants and animals that they have within the grounds. This will hopefully make the eco garden a more interactive and more effective space for learning. By improving the raised beds and signage in the eco garden, the school hopes to encourage classes to use this area more often. This will encourage more time spent outdoors in the fresh air and will hopefully lead to more opportunities for exercise during the school day. Increased time in nature should hopefully also lead to benefits for children's mental health and wellbeing.

How does the project influence: Climate, Health and/or Place?



Planting bulbs will impact climate change, due to the fact that while blubs do not reverse climate change, they do contribute to climate resilience and sustainability. For example, blubs help absorb carbon dioxide during photosynthesis, improve soil structure and biodiversity and provide crucial food for bees and insects.

This project impacts health because gardening is a form of exercise, promoting health and planting and watching blubs grow can be good for your mental health by reducing anxiety and depression.

The project has a positive impact on place because bulb blooms are often a symbol of seasonal change, bulbs are used to beautify an area and gardening encourages community engagement and social bonds.

What are the top 5 benefits of using this teaching resource and completing this project?

1. Boosts children's mental health
2. Enhances learning and engagement
3. Teaches environmental awareness
4. Promotes healthy habits
5. Builds community and teamwork

Family



All children should have the right to be loved and have a family

Every child should have an open space within walking distance of their home:

Open Space



A

Child

Rights

All children should have Nurturing fresh and healthy food.



Good Food

Every child should be able to go to school and learn.



Education

BALLYCRAIGY PRIMARY SCHOOL, ANTRIM

Healthy Places, Healthy Children Proposal

The students at Ballycraigy Primary School decided to create a project that would benefit both health and their school environment. The students in the social communication classrooms were chosen to make this project happen. The school is a “Take 5” school, which is a school that has been recognised for its commitments to improving mental and physical health by implementing the 5 Steps to Wellbeing which are Connect, Be Active, Take Notice, Keep Learning, Give. The class wanted to have more fun and time in their playground, as they know that it is good for us all to spend more time outside. However, this is not always “fun” when it is very cold and wet. The children also wanted their mums, dads and granny’s to be more comfortable while they are waiting for them to finish school.

The younger children were able to complete the site walk and come up with a few potential sites. Once the site was picked, they were able to use IT to search for inspiration as to what they might like. Also, using Google Earth and some research online they found some key products and decided what areas they would like to be used more. The older pupils were then able to help source the equipment they would need, such as a fire pit and seating area. They researched online what they might like to add to their school garden and playground and discussed how they would like to make a little “Waiting area” for some of the parents. This was a great learning opportunity to look for value for money as well as ironing out the finer details like where they were able to get the goods delivered, and where could they try to support local suppliers. The older children were also able to complete their own drawings of the benefits of the programme and helped create our class community charter.

How does the project influence: Climate, Health and/or Place?



This project influences both health and place. As a “Take 5” school the school promote the importance of “Take Notice” and the benefits of “Being Active” outside. We have a teacher in the school who is a trained forest school instructor, and all teachers have been trying to adapt little elements of that into their practice and include it in their outdoor learning. When the pupils developed the idea of a fire pit, they were amazed that they could actually put one on the school grounds. When they presented their ideas to the Eco-Ordinator and Forest School trainer they were delighted! This addition would help take lessons to a whole new level and can now be used by the whole school throughout the year.

What are the top 5 benefits of using this teaching resource and completing this project?

1. Engaging
2. Inspiring
3. Being able to deliver on ideas and making them happen
4. Developing something that all can benefit from
5. Supporting local business



GREEN SPACE

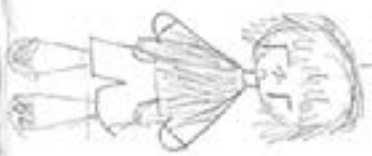
Community



Liveable communities



Topic is safe
only answering



I like fire.

I want to touch it.

People don't.



Clean Safe environments



EUSTON STREET PRIMARY SCHOOL, BELFAST

Healthy Places, Healthy Children Proposal

Euston Street Primary School is situated in inner east Belfast and has very few areas of grass and plants. There is a tarmac playground which surrounds the school. Recently, the school purchased some trees in pots to enhance the play area with greenery. The children have very much enjoyed these trees but feel more plants, trees and flowers are needed to truly make the space one that feels part of nature. The pupils agreed that using this funding to purchase more trees and plants in pots (as there are no soil beds in this area) would make the outside area of the school a much healthier and happier place to be. It would benefit the pupils in that they would have a more attractive area to play in, they would be able to watch and observe the changing appearance of the trees and they would develop a greater understanding of the role that wildlife plays in helping our climate.

The project was carried out with one of the P5 classes. They became very engaged and enthusiastic in exploring the school area and community and thinking about what makes their environment a healthy place to live and what parts of their community are not so healthy and could be improved. The class enjoyed taking photos of what we found and compiled these in a Pic Collage format. They were able to talk about their thoughts as a class and worked hard to listen to other people.

The children had lots of suggestions for how they could improve their school environment, but they knew they would have to be selective and prioritise. The class had good quality conversations, and some pupils were particularly confident to argue for or against different ideas. The class finally agreed that more trees would be the best use of the funding. The class hopes they can enjoy all the benefits that the trees will offer to their school. They love that they will be leaving a legacy for future year groups to enjoy. They also love that they will be able to walk past the school in the future when they have moved on and be able to look at the trees and know that they played a part in creating a much healthier environment for the generations to come.

How does the project influence: Climate, Health and/or Place?



This project will influence positively in all three of these key priority areas. Trees play a hugely important role in our environment in how they contribute to clean air and prevent flooding after heavy rainfall. They also promote a variety of wildlife in terms of insects. Through having fresher, higher quality air we then can have a much better chance of reducing illness. There is also strong evidence that spending more time amongst greenery significantly helps our mental health. Adults and children with strong mental health are then going to be able to contribute to society in a much more meaningful way. It is amazing to see how children interact with plants and trees and how much they can learn from watching how they change through different seasons.

“From the many times I have walked around our playground with pupils it never ceases to amaze me the variety of stimulating and insightful conversations I have had with young children relating to trees. We cannot underestimate their value.”

Ms. Harper, P2 Teacher, Euston Street Primary School Belfast.

What are the top 5 benefits of using this teaching resource and completing this project?

1. Developing awareness of what factors make an environment healthy or unhealthy
2. Allowing opportunities for creativity
3. Great opportunities for working in small groups and developing talking and listening skills
4. Being able to develop an understanding of how planners work and what processes they have to go through
5. Having the ability to see the project right through from planning to actually seeing the final result





Children
have the right
to less
traffic.



Children have a
right to more
green spaces.

Euston Street Primary School Charter Our Rights

Children have a
right to Clean Spaces
and Clean air.



Children have a right
to Safe Parks.



Children have a
right to safe
streets.

MERCY PRIMARY SCHOOL, BELFAST

Healthy Places, Healthy Children Proposal

At Mercy Primary School the girls identified the need for cleaner footpaths outside their school and the amount of dog's dirt had been identified as a major issue. Their project was based on creating posters and signs encouraging people to pick up dogs' dirt and rubbish and also increasing the number of bins in the vicinity. Additionally adding planters and flowers to their green space. They also spoke about the use of their space inside of the school and the need for better storage for their scooters and bikes.

The Primary 5s discussed the need for more awareness of the dangers of dog's dirt gathering on the road outside of the school. After taking part in their walk around their local area, it was obvious that this was a serious issue that needs addressed. The class designed posters, encouraging people to pick up their dogs' dirt, reminding them of potential fines and the dangers it poses to children. They also discussed what was needed in terms of their play equipment and making sure their bikes and scooters were well looked after. The class researched several scooter storage units and decided on the design that would best fit their school playground. The children agreed that their green space would benefit from additional plants and flowers, making it a more enjoyable place for us to play and relax.

How does the project influence: Climate, Health and/or Place?



This project influences Climate, by encouraging Mercy Primary School girls to use scooters, bikes, and similar modes of transport, therefore reducing their carbon footprint. This project influences Place by improving the environment in which we live, move, work, learn and play.

What are the top 5 benefits of using this teaching resource and completing this project?

1. This project made students aware of the importance of living in a healthy city.
2. The students developed an awareness of the changes they can make and the impact those changes can have on our surroundings.
3. We enjoyed the range of the practical and written activities as well as online resources.
4. The students enjoyed working in pairs and in groups, sharing thoughts and ideas.
5. The students felt like they had a say and felt like their voices were being heard and opinions taken on board.

Mercy Primary Community Charter

Mercy

Children Should have access to
Clean Water and Nice Streets.



NO LITTERING



Children Should have access to
Parks and open Spaces that are
accessible by foot and bike.



Children Should have access to a safe
place to walk, Cycle or play in their area,
with limited traffic.



Children Should have access to Clean Streets
and foot paths.

HOLY CROSS GIRLS' SCHOOL, BELFAST

Healthy Places, Healthy Children Proposal

At Holy Cross Girls' School the class decided to create an outdoor meditative garden space which would be accessible to primary 4,5,6 and 7 every break and lunch time.

The students identified a lack of outdoor green space in the local area. They wanted to create a space outside that can be used regularly by as many girls as possible.

Girls in key stage two spend breaktimes and lunchtimes outside on the MUGA (multi-use games area). This space, while bordered by trees, is a flat play space with some limited seating. The site has a small, paved area and a small grass area. The school had a mud kitchen and some wooden seating which had become run down and broken in parts, through weathering and misuse. As part of this project the class has renovated this space and created an area where girls can sit and chat and take time to connect with one another. They can use the mud kitchen and enjoy nature and wildlife. This will benefit the mental health of our students, most of which come from the very urban surrounding community.

How does the project influence: Climate, Health and/or Place?



This project will have a positive impact on health and place. The area is designed to be a space outside for reflection and connection. The benefits of outdoor education are well documented and embedded in the ethos of Holy Cross Girls. The school is a forest school and has a very well-resourced KS 1 area which is open for use at break and lunch time, the girls in Primary 5 felt this was lacking when they moved to KS 2.

The class identified quiet reflective spaces in the local community and how they benefited the people that used them and wanted to recreate this type of space in school. They also thought this could be a space for connection. If someone is sad or worried the bench could be a designated buddy bench, for someone who needs a chat or a friend.

The girls also noted a lack of spaces for nature in the local community. Any playgrounds were mostly paved/tarmac surface with a lack of green open space or trees. The project includes planting wildflowers in the grass to attract birds and bees. The class are also planning to put up bird and insect identification signs to make the most of the mature trees that line the playground. All of which will improve the space and work toward climate adaptation.

What are the top 5 benefits of using this teaching resource and completing this project?

1. The resources are comprehensive and easy to use, they give focus and structure to the unit of work.
2. Quick and convenient for teachers - all the resources are there for the teacher to use and adapt as they see fit.
3. Flexibility, while the resources provide a framework there is also flexibility, it is quite easy to follow the interests of the children and encourage self directed learning.
4. Gives a real life context for students to work on these key transferable skills - problem solving, collaboration etc.
5. Gives the students an opportunity to develop as citizens and contributors to society, learning about how important decisions are made on a city-council level and how these decisions effect them.



Every child has a right to:

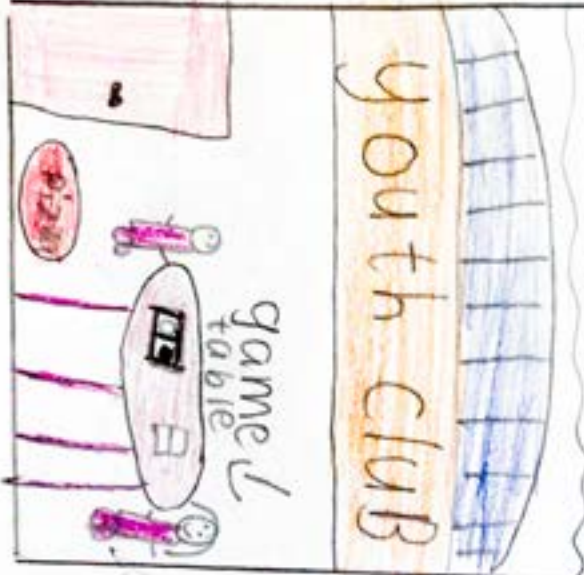
1} A Park near to them to "play" outside.



2} A local Shop "that sells healthy food."



3} A local youth "club"



4} A local leisure "Facilities to keep fit and pursue hobbies."



5} A "Safe Place to live"



KNOCKNAGONEY PRIMARY SCHOOL, BELFAST

Healthy Places, Healthy Children Proposal

Knocknagoney Primary School set out to utilise their garden space and develop it into an inclusive area that can be accessed by pupils, parents and the community. The garden is small and underdeveloped and sits on the outskirts of the school building. It is accessed from the side entrance of the school by parents to collect and drop off pupils.

The garden is a small L shape, the outskirts of the garden are surrounded by iron fencing and housing and the inner area is dedicated to large waste/ recycling bins. The idea was to create an area for growing your own vegetables by purchasing seeds and bulbs. Develop flower beds into a multisensory area and create a clear walking pathway for pupils, parents and the wider community to access. The class hoped to shield the dedicated bin areas with trellis panels and planters. To enhance the look of their sitting area within the garden the class painted these items in their school colours and named these "Friend Benches". Lastly, to attract new wildlife, some bird tables would be beneficial for pupils to carry out observations.

This project will make a significant difference to pupils with disabilities and support neurodiversity/ Special Educational Needs pupils. It will provide a safe space for pupils who may be overwhelmed or may be unable to access the playground for various reasons, including disability, and to harness nature through sensory engagement.

The class will be able to promote the development of this space through word of mouth, their school website and social media platforms. The school has recently established a families & tots group and this space will aid the promotion and increased use of the space within our local community.

The children have enjoyed growing their own vegetables and this linked in perfectly to the Human Body World Around Us topic by encouraging healthy eating. Through this project the children were also able to buy an 'insect hotel' and fantastic wildlife signs which identify different types of bees and birds. This was able to increase the children's wildlife knowledge and increase biodiversity within the ECO Garden. Some children enjoyed painting our "Friend Benches," to make them brighter and more colourful, these will be used by many children in the future.

How does the project influence: Climate, Health and/or Place?



The school is centred in between many housing areas with little or no grass space. The class hopes this project will give the pupils access to an outdoor area which will benefit social and emotional needs, giving pupils a safe space to explore.

What are the top 5 benefits of using this teaching resource and completing this project?

1. Enhanced Learning Opportunities- The pupils were able to engage in hands-on, cross curricular learning.
2. Environmental Awareness- The children developed a stronger understanding of sustainability, ecosystems and the importance of biodiversity.
3. Teamwork and Responsibility- The class were able to work collaboratively, take on roles, and feel a sense of ownership and pride in their shared project.
4. Encouragement of Healthy Eating- The classes current World Around Us topic is the Human Body and have been looking closely at Healthy Eating. This project allowed the class to put this into practise by growing our own fruit and vegetables which sparked an interest in nutrition and healthy eating habits.
5. Supporting wildlife- Through this project children were able to buy an 'insect hotel' and fantastic wildlife signs which identify different types of bees and birds. This was able to increase the children's wildlife knowledge and increase biodiversity within their ECO Garden.

Children should have access to clean space to explore and play outdoors.



Children should have access to areas with less traffic pollution and traffic noise.



Children should have access to a safe place to play and learn.



Children should have access to a green space in their areas and neighbourhoods.



Children should have access to wildlife

KNOCKMORE PRIMARY SCHOOL, LISBURN

Healthy Places, Healthy Children Proposal

At Knockmore Primary School, after working through the teaching resource units the thread that was coming through from all of the children was that they wanted more trees and green space. They decided upon a Community Charter reflecting that children should have access to green, safe and clean environments, this charter inspired other schools in the project to create their own. The children then thought about where and how they could create this type of environment, an area for everyone to benefit from and they decided they would like to transform what was a "Fairy Garden" in an area of the school grounds into a "Forest Area". They also thought something they would like to include in the forest are woodland steps for safe access, more trees and forest plants.

The children worked together to plant ferns, bluebells and snowdrops. The children purchased den building equipment with the funding, a bird and leaf identification board for the woodland, bugsville (a bug hotel), logs to make a campfire, tree stumps to sit on and a couple of hammocks. The children enjoyed watching the area come up to life and have suggested things they could do to enhance the area further and the class is hopeful to implement more of these ideas. The Bluebells came up well this year and the children now hope to plant more next year as they have named the space "Bluebell Woods." The next steps is to problem solve together how best to maintain the space so it can be used year after year to benefit the school community.

How does the project influence: Climate, Health and/or Place?



The planting of trees and forest plants in the area will help to contribute to tackling climate change by absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere and therefore help to play a part in reducing global warming. The trees will also help to restore biodiversity in the area. Through providing a natural environment for woodland wildlife and insects and generally make our local environment a better place.

Also, the forest area with the trees in it will not only provide a pleasant green space for everyone to enjoy in the school but also the local community surrounding the school facing it, will benefit from this pleasant green space to look at. A walk among the trees enhances one's mood, reduces stress and improves one's mental wellbeing. Which is something the class wants for everyone in their school and community. This forest area

will help the children connect with nature and enhances the air quality, as trees purify the air and provide us with oxygen to create and sustain our lives. The trees will also absorb odours and other harmful gases.

The project will improve the environment in which the children live, move, work, learn and play in by making it healthier. It will provide opportunities for all of the children in the school to explore a forest environment and provide a green space to play and learn in, as well as make the environment and this local space an area for everyone in the local school and community to benefit from.

What are the top 5 benefits of using this teaching resource and completing this project?

1. It allowed the children to lead with their pupil voice on an area in their local environment that they wanted to change or transform to create a healthier place for everyone to enjoy.
2. The children got to see the process of completing such a project and the various units and sections of the resources were brilliant for leading the children through each stage of the process.
3. The teaching resource brought the classes topic of 'Where We Live' to life - it allowed the children to apply their thinking skills across the curriculum to create something that would enhance their local environment and the children really engaged with the resources;
4. Our school environment has been enhanced and the children feel a connection to the area and a responsibility to ensure it is used, looked after and maintained.
5. The children are proud of their project and what they have planned and then brought through to this stage.



Our Community Charter

Created by the pupils of

Knockmore Primary School



Children should have access to:



...nature and green spaces within walking distance from school.



...a clean space to explore and play outdoors.



...a clean and attractive environment to learn and play in.



...a safe place to play.



...wildlife.



GroundsWell
Transforming our cities from the ground up

A Special Thanks to The GroundsWell Consortium

"The Healthy Places, Healthy Children Teaching Resources allows children to develop a deeper understanding of the connections between their built environment, health and planning. It allows them to learn how decisions are made in their local community and empower them to understand how they can play a role in shaping these decisions. The school green space and outdoor projects developed by the students as a result of this teaching resource will leave a long legacy and benefit the whole school community, increasing access to the benefits of urban green spaces for all. We appreciate the support GroundsWell Consortium has provided, without it the school projects would not have been able to come to life."

Belfast Healthy Cities Team

