

Victoria Walks Smart Steps initiative supports teachers, parents, the school and the community to help children become healthier, happier and more active by walking. The Smart Steps resources can be easily adapted, used individually or in combination to suit local need.<sup>1</sup>

## INTRODUCTION

In Term 4 2013, Yinnar Preschool agreed to become a pilot preschool for the implementation of Smart Steps for Preschools, under the guidance of Healthy Together Latrobe (HTL). Yinnar is a small rural town in Latrobe Valley that has a strong sense of community, and is well known throughout the area for its sporting abilities. It consists of a main street that houses the general store, post office, butcher, take away, RSL, Bowls Club, Scout Hall, CFA, Town Hall, Anglican church, Primary school and of course a Preschool.



## AIM

To increase the number of families walking and cycling to preschool through the use of Victoria Walks Smart Steps for Families resources.



## METHODS

A letter was sent home advising the parents of the Pilot Project, and asking for their cooperation and participation. Parents were told that there would be an area allocated at the preschool where bikes and scooters could be safely left.

A pre pilot checklist, developed in conjunction with the preschool teacher, provided baseline data on who was already walking and cycling to Preschool.

Using the Victoria Walks Walkability Checklist, a HTL team member assessed a walk route from the preschool to the middle

<sup>1</sup> <http://www.victoriawalks.org.au/smartsteps/families/>

of town, identifying hazards, facilities, and safety issues. The Preschool Teacher and HTL team member decided that getting the preschool children to conduct the walkability check was not a viable option.

The route assessment identified that:

- The footpaths were safe and even
- There was plenty of shade, seating and toilets along the walk
- A school crossing existed in the area with a clear view to drivers
- A 40km zone extended along the whole walk, and
- There are many venues that could be used as safety venues if required.

A chart was created by the HTL team member for children to place a sticker on each time they walked/cycled to preschool.

Children began walking/cycling to preschool at the commencement of the new term.

At the end of each week, the children were provided with a Victoria Walks Smart Steps for Families Activity Sheet for them to try out over the following week

A celebratory disco at the preschool was organised on the last day of term to recognise the children's efforts and achievements.

At the end of term, parents were provided with a short questionnaire to be filled out at home and returned. The purpose was to gather their feedback on the Pilot, and seek their view on the value in rolling it out to the other preschools in the area.

## RESULTS

The pre pilot checklist identified that only 8 of the 28 preschool children were already walking or cycling to preschool.

The Preschool Teacher reported that the sticker chart was working really well and children quickly filled their sticker chart. The teacher also reported that the children loved the challenge of walking and cycling

to and from preschool and the activity sheets that were sent home each week.

Parents were being pestered to walk, and many children were late for preschool because they just "had to walk"!

8 of the Victoria Walks Smart Steps for Families activity sheets were distributed to families, not only giving the children incentive to get out and about, but also giving the family an opportunity to do something together that benefits their health.

By the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> week, a walking group had formed and they were meeting at the local footy oval, 1.5 km out of town. Over the length of the pilot many more parents joined this walking group, and it became a great way for the parents to become more socially connected as well as physically active.

Of families that had children at both preschool and primary school, many found a central place to park and walked to their children's venues for the day.

At the celebration each child was presented with a show bag that contained a skipping rope, balloons and a big thank you for their efforts. Each child was so excited to be part of something bigger, and they were ready to party.



## **OUTCOMES:**

- At the commencement of the Smart Steps for Preschools Pilot there were 8 / 26 children walking or cycling to preschool on a regular basis.
- At the end of the Smart Steps for Preschools Pilot there were 23/ 26 children walking or cycling to preschool on a regular basis.
- Feedback from parents was that they liked the "Nature Walk Bracelet" Activity Sheet the most.
- Parents ended up walking with other parents along the way, and that an informal walking group was formed.
- Parents would like more walking routes mapped for them.
- Parents found participating in the pilot to be a positive experience.
- Parents found that they needed to be more organised each morning to walk, but were happy to do so.
- A walking route has been mapped from the local footy oval to preschool on the Walking Maps website.
- A resource folder has been created for use in other preschools when requested.



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