



## Come and join a Walking School Bus!

- Forget about car congestion at the front of the school!**
- Improve your child's road safety awareness and skills!**
- Enjoy the fresh air and scenery along the way!**
- Reduce your greenhouse gas emissions and save money!**
- Make some friends and have some fun!**
- Get some exercise!**

The Walking School Bus (WSB) program seeks to address a number of different issues. A large number of Australian children are currently overweight and their numbers are increasing each year. Fitness levels are on the decline. Nationwide approximately 70% are driven to and from school and never acquire the ability to navigate the suburbs in which they live, let alone develop adequate pedestrian and "street smart" skills. Schools are congested morning and afternoon with cars, parking is a problem as is the safety of students.

The WSB addresses these issues by organising the supervised walking of school students by parent volunteers to and from school in "walking school buses". According to interest and demand, walking routes are established around the neighbourhood and students picked up by volunteers at various points along the way. Those children who live some distance from the school are encouraged to be dropped-off at the start of a WSB route in order to walk with their friends. Most WSB routes take about 20 – 30 minutes to reach school.

Each WSB route would have two parent volunteers walking with children at any one time. All volunteers receive a short induction session to ensure that they are familiar with the program and know the routes, must undergo a police check and wear a fluorescent vest when walking. All routes are checked beforehand to ensure that they are safe and contain no hazards. The YWCA of Canberra provides public liability and personal accident insurance.

Walking school buses proved very successful around Australia and overseas. Approximately 20% of Primary schools in Canberra participate in the WSB program. The majority of WSBs run between two and five days per week. All those involved in the project (both young and old) stress that participating is great fun, that they have made new friends, learnt more about their neighbourhood and feel more confident navigating the streets.

The ACT WSB program has won a number of awards:

- First place in the Health and Wellbeing category of the Territories section of the *National Australia Bank Volunteers Awards 2006*
- First place in the Sustainable Transport category, *ACT Sustainable Cities Awards 2006*
- Runner up (TAS/NT/ACT), Large Organisation Category, In recognition of outstanding achievement in demonstrating best practice volunteering, *2007 NAB Volunteer Awards*

Your school is currently considering implementing the Walking School Bus program. All members of the school community will receive a questionnaire with the next school newsletter that invites them to indicate whether or not they would be interested in participating in a Walking School Bus. The results will be evaluated and Walking School Bus routes established if there is sufficient interest.

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