



INFORMATION REPORT

TO: Mayor and Members Board of Health	WARD(S) AFFECTED: 2, 3 and 4
COMMITTEE DATE: May 7, 2012	
SUBJECT/REPORT NO: Photovoice: Engaging Students in School/Neighbourhood Planning BOH12007 (Wards 2, 3 and 4)	
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Council Direction: N/A

Information:

Photovoice is a community engagement activity that uses photographs and videos to capture information on neighbourhoods through the “lens” of the people who live there. In the spring of 2011, approximately 50 students in grade four to eight from three elementary schools in the Hamilton-Wentworth Catholic District School Board (HWCDSD), Holy Name of Jesus, St. Patrick, and St. Ann-Hamilton, took part in a photovoice activity. The students used digital cameras to capture the issues they experienced regularly on their walk to and from school. Students identified a range of issues in their neighbourhoods such as garbage and graffiti, a lack of safe road crossings, and intimidating people and structures. Conversely, students also identified the parts of their neighbourhoods that were positive and “reflected elements of a welcoming and vibrant neighbourhood such as green space, parks, gardens, culture, art, and diversity.”¹ As a result of the initiative a stronger, unified message was taken to stakeholders and community partners which led to facilitated discussion and participatory action planning to improve neighbourhood safety and pride. Public Health Services’ support and involvement in photovoice participatory research has provided a model for school travel planning nationally by other organizations.

In September 2011, a seminar hosted by Hamilton Public Health Services, Metrolinx, and the Ontario Heart and Stroke Foundation at the Nicholas Mancini Centre brought

together approximately 40 of the elementary school students who had participated in the photovoice project. Students shared experiences and undertook action planning around the issues they identified in their communities. Adult facilitators with local knowledge and experience from the City of Hamilton, HWCDSB, and community groups helped guide discussions among students.¹ The photovoice activity was included as one component of the *Stepping It Up* pilot project (www.metrolinx.com/schooltravel) when project staff recognized the need for a different methodology to engage students in higher need schools. The feedback from the three participating HWCDSB elementary schools was very positive, resulting in the schools requesting an audience with decision-makers to present their findings. This request supports the purpose of implementing a photovoice activity within these school settings: to enable social change, stimulate debate and promote action around community issues that are integral to community well-being and quality of life.

The *Stepping It Up* pilot project has involved 16 Hamilton elementary schools and up to 15 schools in Peel Region. The project in Hamilton is supported by the HWCDSB, HWDSB, the City of Hamilton, Metrolinx, Green Communities Canada and the University of Toronto, with funding from Transport Canada.¹ The project aims to improve the journey to and from school for those walking and using other active modes of travel, encouraging more of this behaviour while also supporting travel by school bus and public transit, where needed. While the *Stepping It Up* schools participating in the Hamilton photovoice activity already had high levels of students walking or using other active ways to get to school, they identified systemic social and environmental issues in their neighbourhoods as barriers to students walking safely and comfortably. Photovoice aims to bring those identified issues to light and to create an action plan with community stakeholders to improve local conditions.¹

The Neighbourhood Development Strategy (NDS) was created in November 2010 to address health and well-being inequities identified in specific Hamilton neighbourhoods by a variety of community reports. The NDS is currently developing neighbourhood actions plans, which build on the strengths and address the needs in targeted Hamilton neighbourhoods. As the three schools who participated in photovoice are within the NDS neighbourhoods, the information collected by the students will add an important children's perspective to the broader-based data collected through the neighbourhood planning process. The photovoice activity has been shown to successfully engage students in identifying the strengths and issues facing their neighbourhoods, while leading them through a process of developing and taking ownership for solutions that build healthier neighbourhoods. The NDS also engages residents and key stakeholders in community building; consequently, the NDS is a natural partner to continue the photovoice experience.

Therefore, the NDS will be engaging a further three schools, within the targeted neighbourhoods, to complement the information in three other neighbourhood plans. The activity will be facilitated by the three Community Development workers assigned to

those neighbourhoods. A placement student from Mohawk College and nursing students from McMaster University working with Public Health Services staff will provide additional support. The final neighbourhood plans will be completed in the fall of 2012.

References

1. Metrolinx. *Stepping It Up Project: Hamilton Student Photovoice Fall 2011 Report*. (2011). Online:
www.smartcommute.ca/media/uploads/pdf/HamiltonStudentPhotovoice2011.pdf

Resources:

Stepping It Up: Hamilton Students Talk a Better Walk Using Photovoice

Learn how students in Hamilton used Photovoice techniques to raise the issues they experience on their walk to school. See how students' photos and ideas are used to start conversations, connect with community partners and help kick-start neighbourhood revitalization.

Video: www.youtube.com/watch?v=KG4e5txF1r8

Webinar: gcclive.wimba.com/launcher.cgi?room=stp_2011_1115_1204_46