



Free your Feet Evaluation 2011

Key findings and recommendations



BHF National Centre
physical activity+health

Making physical activity a priority

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- “Free your Feet” is a week long, incentive-based walking campaign which aims to increase awareness of walking as a mode of travel and to increase the proportion of secondary school age children who walk for the journey to and from school.
- The initiative was delivered in over 300 secondary schools in the UK between May and July 2011.
- Schools were provided with a number of resources including: a DVD (and PowerPoint presentation) highlighting the benefits of walking and explaining the initiative (which was shown to pupils prior to the Free your Feet week), posters and banners, record cards and an incentive (£50 voucher).
- During the Free your Feet campaign week pupils taking part in the initiative documented the walking they did for the school journey on the record card. At the end of the week pupils submitted their record cards to be entered into a prize draw to win the £50 voucher.
- The Free your Feet campaign is part of Living Streets’ Step Up project, which is funded by the Big Lottery and is being delivered as part of the national Travel Actively Portfolio.

Evaluation of Free your Feet

- Loughborough University was commissioned by Living Streets to evaluate the Free your Feet initiative.
- The main purpose of the evaluation was to learn about the experiences of schools in delivering Free your Feet and the experiences of pupils participating in Free your Feet.
- Data were collected from two main sources: a survey with the Free your Feet co-ordinator in each school (conducted and reported by the BHF National Centre for Physical Activity and Health, Loughborough University) and five qualitative case studies (conducted and reported by the Institute of Youth Sport, Loughborough University).

School Co-ordinator Evaluation

- School co-ordinators from all participating schools were invited to complete a survey which assessed the administration of the initiative, pupil participation, and the resources provided through the initiative. The survey was completed by 129 schools (39% response rate).
- Of the responding schools, 80% agreed there were suitable routes available for students who chose to walk for the school journey and most respondents agreed their schools already had policies in places which were supportive of students walking for the journey.
- The top two reasons schools decided to take part in “Free your Feet” were to promote healthy lifestyles and walking for the school journey. The initiative was also thought to be supportive of schools’ Health Living and Eco-friendly agendas and provided a platform for whole school collaborations and discussions about walking and healthy lifestyles.

- A high proportion of schools reported that most of the pupils who could walk to school already did so.
- Participants in the initiative were predominately from the younger year groups (years 7-10).
- The timing of the initiative (Summer Term 2010) was thought to be difficult for many schools due to the workload of staff at that time of year and the absence of many pupils, particularly in the older year groups, who were on school trips, exam leave or work experience.
- School co-ordinators thought the campaign included professional looking materials and liked that everything needed to run the campaign, including the incentive, was provided.
- A high proportion of co-ordinators agreed the resources provided (DVD, posters, banners) were age appropriate but also noted some resources were less suitable for use with older pupils.
- School co-ordinators felt the DVD portrayed negative student behaviours and delivered messages that were contradictory to school uniform policies. In addition, some felt the DVD was too long.
- There were problems with pupils not returning their record cards, either due to apathy or loss of the cards, and there were concerns over how honest pupils were when completing the record cards.
- Many pupils and students did not respond positively to the offer of one high value incentive for the whole school. It was thought that more prizes of a smaller value would encourage more pupils to participate.
- It was noted that many students, especially older pupils, already cycled to school and this behaviour needed to be acknowledged or rewarded also.
- School co-ordinators agreed pupils enjoyed taking part and perceived that pupils had increased their knowledge of the benefits of walking to school and increased the amount of walking they did on the school journey during the Free your Feet initiative.
- A high proportion of school co-ordinators believed the initiative was successful and that their school would participate if it was run again in the future.
- As a result of these findings, the following key recommendations are made:
 - Review the timing of the initiative to ensure older pupils are able to take part and there is sufficient capacity for staff to successfully undertake and promote the initiative.
 - Review materials to ensure they are suitable for use in schools and are in accordance with school policies regarding behaviour and standards of uniform.
 - Provide a variety of materials, in different formats, that are suitable for different age groups and allow for tailoring for individual schools (e.g. to add the dates of the initiative, the nature of the prize draw).
 - Consider ways to increase the honest completion of record cards and improve the return rate (e.g. an online record card).
 - Provide a more flexible incentive such that schools can choose how to conduct the prize draw and reward participation in the initiative.
 - Make provision for pupils who cycle to school to be included in the initiative.

Qualitative Evaluation with Young People

- The purpose of the qualitative evaluation was to explore young people's experiences and opinions of the FYF challenge and accompanying resources (DVD, PowerPoint, poster, resource card, prizes) and to identify ways in which the challenge could be improved in future years.
- A case study approach was adopted, involving focus groups with pupils, and access to survey data from a 'hands-up' survey conducted by all schools involved in the initiative was made available to the research team.
- Five case study schools were selected, representing four of the Government regions in England. Visits to schools involved pupil focus groups with years 7/8 and 9/10 pupils. Thus, where possible, two focus groups were held in each school (one with pupils from Y7 and 8 and one with pupils from Y9/10). In total, 62 young people (39 girls and 23 boys) participated in nine different pupil focus groups.
- Most young people could recall taking part in the FYF challenge and were able to identify some of the benefits associated with walking all/part of their journey to/from school.
- The young people were, in general, complimentary about the initiative. Negative comments tended to be made when young people had walked to school prior to the initiative, if they lived too far away to walk or had to cross a dangerous road. Another criticism concerned the record cards young people had to complete to indicate how many minutes of walking they had done; it was felt that these were sometimes dishonestly completed just so a young person could enter the prize draw.
- The young people were complimentary about the PowerPoint presentation, but most had not seen the DVD.
- A number of suggestions were made to improve the posters (although they were generally well received and most pupils could remember seeing them). For example, it was felt the posters could be bigger, the writing could be bigger and more informative and that incorporating a familiar face might be a good way to promote the challenge.
- The majority of young people had not completed the record card or handed it in for the prize draw (most had been lost or the young people had forgotten to complete them). They were, however, complimentary about the cards stating they were informative and easy to use. Thus, it was suggested that there be a small reward for handing in the cards and more prizes in the prize draw to act as an incentive.
- It was not easy to assess the impact of the FYF challenge on the young people involved (the national hands-up survey should be able to portray a more accurate picture). A general trend, however, was that those who walked anyway (often a high proportion of the group) continued to walk to/from school; those who lived a long way from the school and normally had a lift/took the bus attempted to walk for some or all of their journey; and some continued as they had before, either walking some or none of their journey. They all seemed aware of the advantages of walking and some appeared motivated to walk more as a result of the initiative. Those that had

engaged in the challenge stated that they had enjoyed it and some found the calorific information on the back of the record cards particularly informative and useful. There was no real impact noted for walking other than from/to school and this may be an area that could be focused on in future years.

- A number of incentives (i.e. prizes for the prize draw) were suggested by the young people. These tended to be certain sums of money, vouchers (music, iTunes and books), tickets (cinema, concert, travel) and chocolate/sweets (although most groups suggesting this acknowledged that it would be counterproductive). One suggestion made by a number of young people was for the prize to be related to exercise or walking; thus, a bike, new trainers, shoes and sports kit were believed to be appropriate prizes.
- As a result of these findings, the following recommendations are made:
 - Encourage walking throughout and beyond the FYF week
 - Improve the accuracy of returned record cards
 - Consider ways in which return rates of the record cards could be improved
 - Better promote the FYF challenge at all levels (schools, pupils, parents)
 - Improve the resources (taking into account the suggestions made by the young people)
 - Make the challenge more competitive (for some)
 - Increase the number of challenges per academic year
 - Consider ways of including older pupils in the promotion and management of the FYF challenge week.

