

Massachusetts Department of Public Health Success Stories



NORTH BERKSHIRE MASS IN MOTION



Safely Connecting School Children to Spaces for Play

SUMMARY

In communities across Massachusetts there are opportunities and spaces for children to play, but high traffic roads and unclear pathways sometimes prevent children from accessing these play spaces. In Clarksburg the elementary school is next door to Veteran's Field, better known as the Clarksburg Town Field. With **Safe Routes to School** as an impetus, North Berkshire Mass in Motion created partnerships in the community to get students from the school to the field in a safe — and even educational — way!

CHALLENGE

With higher than average BMI rates at the Clarksburg Elementary School, increased physical activity during the school day is high priority. Veteran's Field, known to locals as "the town's field," had all kinds of potential as a fun place to play. Sitting adjacent to Clarksburg Elementary School on West Cross Road but separated by an overgrown area, Veteran's Field is a grassy open space with basketball courts, a baseball diamond, and a covered picnic area. The only problem was there was no safe way for children to get there.

Because there are no sidewalks, walking along the busy and dangerous street required the help of the chief of police, flashing lights, and a traffic director at the school's entrance. For this reason, the school only used the field with students a few times a year.

In March 2012, Amanda Chilson, North Berkshire Mass in Motion Coordinator, met with Clarksburg Elementary School's Superintendent and Principal to talk about Mass in Motion's Safe Routes to School initiative. While brainstorming possibilities, they recalled the overgrown trail between the school and field that hadn't been used in many years. The next step was a given — it was time to clear the trail to Veteran's Field.

SOLUTION

Creating partnerships in the community was key for Amanda. The **Berkshire Natural Resources Council (BNRC)** was already working actively to get kids outside and into the woods by cleaning up broken trails, so Amanda brought the land conservation organization onboard. The school and BNRC chose Earth Day 2013 to clear the connector trail. On a sunny day in April, under the leadership of BNRC's trails and outreach coordinator Amanda L'Etoile, classes of students took turns clearing the yards and yards of trail. "I'm glad we're finally doing this," said one community volunteer. "Now the kids won't have to walk on the busy street."

"Mass in Motion has been able to support and work with admirable and motivated 8th grade students that are paving the way. I'm impressed by how this very rural community has embraced all that Mass in Motion encompasses and is making healthier decisions through a collaborative relationship."

AMANDA CHILSON,
NORTH BERKSHIRE
MASS IN MOTION COORDINATOR

For more information, visit www.mass.gov/massinmotion

PARTNERS

Clarksburg Elementary School staff, students, and parents; Berkshire Natural Resources Council; the Clarksburg School Committee; Town Administrator; the Board of Selectmen.

CONTACT

Amanda Chilson

*North Berkshire
Mass in Motion Coordinator*

North Berkshire Community Coalition

achilson@nbccoalition.org

RESULTS

Clarksburg children can now safely and easily reach the field just by walking the cleared trails — no police officer needed. The trail-clearing activity is getting kids to play outside and work together in teams. And when Clarksburg celebrates Bike to School Day, the trail will provide a safe entrance for students who bike to school.

Now that the connector trail project is finished, plans are taking shape for clearing more trails behind the school with a dual purpose in mind: transportation and education. Tying in with Safe Routes to School, kids will be able to meet up at trailheads and walk to school together. The area will also be used to teach kids about flora and fauna, bringing in BNRC to lead walks. A long-term goal is to have older kids lead younger kids, and even members of the community.

FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Another Safe Routes to School project that North Berkshire Mass in Motion is looking into is a crosswalk to the Clarksburg Senior Center, just across West Cross Road. Instead of an overgrown trail, this barrier involves changes to the traffic system. Creating a connection with seniors and students will allow the two groups to work on a gardening project — a thoughtful, healthy way to bring youth and the elderly together.



For more information, visit www.mass.gov/massinmotion