



Growing Up Boulder: Young People's Ideas for 15-Minute Neighborhoods

Overview

During the 2014-2015 academic year, Growing Up Boulder (GUB) worked with children and youth to identify youth's perspectives on what makes an ideal neighborhood. This project, called "15-minute Neighborhoods," was initiated in response to the city of Boulder's ongoing movement to create neighborhoods where many local services and goods are accessible within a 10 to 20 minute walking radius.

vista village



GUB partnered with local schools and after-school programs to work with their respective communities. The project involved the following participants:

- GUB team: Two GUB coordinators, five adult volunteers, and one intern
- Thirteen 3rd graders from Whittier International Elementary School (WIES), and two English Language Development teachers
- Four 9-11 year olds involved in the Youth Services Initiative (YSI) after-school program at the Manhattan public housing site
- Eight 6th and 7th graders from Casey Middle School's (CMS) "Leadership class"

GUB facilitated a series of activities with each group that invited youth to explore their neighborhoods and begin to think about what characteristics make a better neighborhood. The purpose of these activities was to find meaningful data that the city could incorporate in future designs.





METHODS

Children as Experts

GUB volunteers, teachers, and staff engaged with children and youth using a variety of methods. Children were asked to draw their current neighborhoods for reflection. Volunteers asked neutral questions to guide children's drawings such as, "Where do you go to play?," "Do you do errands?," and "Where do you go?"



Neighborhood Walk With Photovoice

Growing Up Boulder volunteers went on a neighborhood walk with children and brought cardboard frames painted red on one side and green on the other side. Groups began by walking 15-minutes in one direction in order to understand how far the radius of a 15-minute neighborhood extended from a child's point of view. During the walk, children framed neighborhood elements around their school or neighborhood that they liked with the green side and elements they didn't like with the red side. Volunteers documented their findings by taking photos and notes.



Ideal Neighborhoods

In small groups, children selected icons of neighborhood elements that would be part of an ideal neighborhood and placed them on a map of the blocks near their school or housing site. Children then took turns selecting icons and explaining why they thought it belonged in an ideal neighborhood. After receiving their classmates' agreement, children glued the icon to a map.





STUDENT GROUPS

Youth Services Initiative (YSI)

Growing Up Boulder volunteers worked with elementary school aged children attending an after-school program at the city's Youth Services Initiative Manhattan (YSI) site, which serves children living in Boulder's affordable housing units. Through three sessions covering the three project activities, children were invited to explore design options for a more walkable, fun, and inviting neighborhood.

YSI children focused on their apartment complex, the area most familiar and accessible to them. The Neighborhood Walk took them farther than they are typically allowed to go on their own, as dictated by their families. Their observations were most salient and suggestions most constructive within about one block of their homes. There was no "15-minute" neighborhood available to these children; a 2-minute neighborhood was a more accurate description of how the children independently use the space surrounding them.





STUDENT GROUPS

Casey Middle School

Growing Up Boulder volunteers worked with 8 “Leadership class” students in 6th and 7th grade from Casey Middle School to identify positive and negative aspects of their school neighborhood. Casey M.S. students came from different city neighborhoods, and therefore focused on the area around their school.

Students were engaged in 5 sessions, including 2 neighborhood walk activities, and another session when students made posters that solicited feedback from their peers about nearby amenities, perceived safety, and modes of transit to school. Finally, children presented to city staff members from GO Boulder and Community Planning.





STUDENT GROUPS

Whittier International Elementary School

Thirteen third graders in WIES' English Language Development classes came together to participate in three 15-Minute Neighborhood activities led by Growing Up Boulder volunteers. Students shared their ideas to city staff, city council members, and University of Colorado professors.

Most of the WIES students live in the San Lazaro trailer park at 55th street and Valmont and come from families that speak Spanish at home. The Neighborhood Walk and Ideal Neighborhood activities focused on the area they all share around their school.





FINDINGS

One of the most important findings from the Growing Up Boulder 15-minute neighborhood walk is that young children (elementary school aged and younger) are often not allowed to travel a full 15-minute walk from their homes; a 15-minute neighborhood doesn't exist for them. Instead, most are allowed to access amenities only within the direct vicinity of their housing complex or mobile home site. The implications for this finding are that parks, open space, goods and services need to be located next to the housing area in order for the majority of children to access them.

For middle school youth, safe walking and biking routes were most important. Students wanted improved pedestrian and bike crossings, as well as places to travel and hang out that felt safe from harassment. All ages wished for well-maintained areas and disliked signs of neglect.

The following specific recommendations emerged from the three groups of children studying 15-minute neighborhoods:

Attractive Features for 15 Minute Neighborhoods

- Play amenities within view of children's homes (YSI)
- Play equipment (CMS, WIES, YSI)
- Crosswalks and other traffic controls meant to keep people safe (CMS, WIES)
 - "The flashing sign makes crossing safer. It makes cars more aware that this is a school zone." – CMS
- Local businesses (CMS, WIES)
- Trees (WIES, YSI)
- Athletic fields (WIES, YSI)
- Safe and welcoming public space (CMS)
 - "More kid friendly, and safe places to go on Pearl Street and Farmer's Market" – CMS

Problematic Features to Avoid

- Intersections (CMS, WIES)
 - "There are always cars that start beeping at cross walkers" – CMS
 - "This cross is too long and wide. Does not feel safe, might crash while crossing" – CMS
 - In response to a 5-point intersection: "People in the cars are always in a hurry. Crossing the street is confusing because they are coming from too many places." – CMS
- Graffiti (CMS, WIES)
 - "It looks like unprofessional and that we don't care about the community."
- Litter (CMS, WIES)
- Placement of trash bins (YSI)
 - Children suggested relocating the trash bins away from the front doors of the apartments, or distributing them differently to contain the smell of garbage.

FINDINGS

- Abandoned space (YSI)
 - Currently, a field and abandoned tennis court exist behind the RTD bus stop. Reuse and repurpose that site to provide both hard and soft play areas. Ideas generated include a skate park, a parkour course, and a batting cage.
- Unkempt play facilities (YSI)
 - Maintain soccer goals, the netting currently has holes in it that let the ball through.

Relevant Websites

- [http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/SGA Boulder-Colorado_Cool-Planning-Next-Steps-Report.pdf](http://www.smartgrowthamerica.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/SGA_Boulder-Colorado_Cool-Planning-Next-Steps-Report.pdf)
- https://www-static.bouldercolorado.gov/docs/3rdStation_EEA_TransportationConnections-1-201410271435.pdf
- <https://www.eugene-or.gov/1218/What-Are-The-Benefits>

Acknowledgments

This project was possible thanks to the time and dedication of the following individuals:

- School partners
 - Tamar van Vliet and Alysia Hayas (ELD teachers at WIES)
 - Lester Lurie (Casey Middle School)
- University of Colorado
 - GUB coordinators: Mara Mintzer and Tori Derr
 - GUB intern and volunteer: Morgan Huber and Sarah Bartosh
 - Professors: Louise Chawla and Willem van Vliet
- Photographers
 - Stephen Cardinale, Sarah Bartosh, and Oscar Saucedo
- Community volunteers
 - Danica Powell (Trestle Strategy Group), Darcy Varney Kitching (Places Make People), and Lori Carlucci
- City partners
 - City council members: Mary Young and Jan Burton
 - Planning, Sustainability and Housing Department: Caitlin Zacharias and Jean Gatz
 - Transportation Division: Oscar Saucedo, David Kemp, and Matt Jones
 - Parks and Recreation: Jeff Dillon, Doug Godfrey, Alexis Moreno and her team