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Kid Friendly Cities...continued from page 47.

being of children front and centre in their policy and planning in some respect.

Dr. Bridgman says that just about any university town can be relatively kid-friendly with its diverse population, access to cultural amenities, great libraries, nature and play spaces, and good transportation options. And she says *her* favourite kid-friendly small town is Victoria Beach, Manitoba. "People leave their cars – 2,000 plus – in the parking lot by the front gateway," during the summer months and then get around on foot. She continues, "The scale of the place is small and family-oriented," and "...kids can walk, run, and bike freely."

WHERE AND HOW TO GET ONE?

You don't have to move to get a more kid-friendly community. Or, if you do move, you don't have to move to Victoria Beach. My friend Maureen Gainer moved her family of six to a more walkable neighbourhood in their same city specifically so she could allow her kids to walk to school on their own. The first day, she worried. On the second day, one of the other mothers on the street stopped by to ask about her decision to let them walk alone. And by the second week, two other families started letting their kids do it too.

There are a variety of ways to help your existing community become better at meeting the needs of all ages. These include creating transportation options such as walking and biking routes that connect where people live and where they go to school, work, and play; accessible outdoor *and* indoor play spaces that meet the play needs of young children, older children and even adults; and occasions for people of all ages to have fun and celebrate together. While it is noble to have parents advocating for large-scale opportunities, it's also valuable to pursue the small things: closing off your street once a year for a neighbourhood block party, asking the city to consider equipment for older children and adults at the playground or changing your routine in order to walk your kid to school so that they can begin to do it themselves one day. As parents we instinctively know and the research assures us these little steps add up to health benefits, security, and general well-being for your children and the whole community. ●

- 📖 *Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv
- 🌐 Youthful Cities - www.youthfulcities.com
- 📄 UKID Index of Urban Child Development - www.cityindicators.org/ProjectDeliverables.aspx
- 📄 Building Child Friendly Cities: A framework for action - www.unicef-irc.org/publications/416

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