

Crossing Guards Needed!

by Maureen McGarry

Cooler mornings remind us that fall has arrived. They might also remind us of walking to school as a child. Remember the days of jumping over the cracks in the sidewalk, or riding our bike back and forth to school?

Another reminder of the season is increased congestion while driving through busy school zones. Speed limit signs that read “when children are present” are a reminder to slow down and pay more attention. If available, a crossing guard might be working at the crosswalk in the school zone to help guide vehicles and pedestrians. It is always reassuring to see a focused adult directing the flow of traffic and guiding young children across a busy street.

“The Humboldt County DHHS Public Health received a grant to provide consistent training and expand to areas that need Crossing Guards,” says Jennifer Weiss, Senior Planner for the Natural Resources Division of Redwood Community Action Agency. “We have developed a pilot program for Eureka City Schools that is slated to begin at Grant Elementary School as soon as we have enough volunteers. Eureka City Schools is very invested in Safe Routes to School.”

A Volunteer Crossing Guard manages traffic and is stationed in a school zone to aid pedestrians. These volunteers temporarily stop the flow of traffic so pedestrians can safely cross an intersection. The required hours can be a perfect fit for a retired senior volunteer. Peak traffic hours where volunteers are needed at Grant Elementary are from 7:30 to 8:15 in the mornings on Mondays through Fridays, from 1:10 pm to 2:15 on Mondays, and 1:55 to 2:55 pm on Tuesdays through Fridays.

“We are looking for volunteers to make the program successful. There is also a need for back-up volunteers in case someone is sick or can’t make it,” reports Weiss. “Volunteer Crossing Guards provide so much value to their community. They get respect from parents and students, and the experience gives volunteers a great sense of connectedness in the community.”



A recent volunteer training in Fortuna for crossing guard volunteers was offered by Safe Routes to Schools.

Photo by Jennifer Weiss of Redwood Community Action Agency.

Through this program, free trainings are offered with the guidance of California Highway Patrol and other law enforcement officers. All crossing guard equipment is provided. Afternoon crossing guards are the most needed.

Along with the need for help in the congested school zones in mornings and afternoon hours, more attention has been focused lately on alternatives to driving children to school. Currently, in Humboldt County, only 13 percent of school children walk, bike, or skate to school. Parents drive because of long distances to schools and lack of time due to working parents and busy lifestyles.

Safe Routes to Schools is a national movement that encourages schools and transportation departments to work together to improve the ability of families and children to walk and bike to school and get exercise. Studies have shown that children who are physically active on the way to school burn off some of their excess energy, and are more able to settle down and focus on lessons. Less cars results in safer roads and less use of carbon-producing fuel.

“Senior volunteer crossing guards are real community builders,” says Melanie Williams, a bicycle enthusiast and member of the Arcata Traffic Safety Committee “They build a bridge between generations as they make it safe for school aged children and their families to plan routes to school which include walking and riding together as a family or with classmates. By being ‘the friendly face at the corner’, these volunteers make exploring the neighborhood, smelling the flowers, and noticing the seasons a part of the next generation’s experience.”

As crisp autumn mornings replace the warm days of summer, and we rise early and pour that cup of coffee, consider volunteering as a crossing guard. For more information, contact Melody Mallick, Health Education Specialist with Humboldt County DHHS at 707-441-5549.