

GUB's Child-Friendly City Map Abstract

How designing a child-friendly map can lead to a more sustainable city.

Growing Up Boulder (GUB) is developing the nation's first child-friendly city map. We have convened a collaborative of 30 nonprofits, city agencies, and schools to use participatory action research (PAR) to design a map featuring child-friendly locations and transit throughout the city. This free, bilingual map will go home with all elementary and preschool children in the Boulder Valley School District before summer vacation.

Both the map's features and the map-making process meet the city's sustainability and resilience goals of social, environmental, and economic sustainability. Our commitment to social sustainability is embedded in our participatory planning approach, which uses a variety of methods to gather voices of children with disabilities, limited financial means, and from immigrant and minority backgrounds. More than 700 children and families contributed to the development of the map.

GUB's map supports environmental sustainability in several ways. First, it contains child-identified wild and outdoor spaces, including hiking trails, lakes and parks, in order to connect children and families to nature. Research shows that children must have personal interactions with nature if they are to become future environmental stewards. Also, by highlighting child-friendly biking, walking, and busing routes, sustainable transportation becomes fun and accessible. To make walking and biking even more engaging, school classes will develop scavenger hunts and geocaching adventures for the map. Finally, the map contributes to economic sustainability by emphasizing free or low-cost activities. Only cultural and recreational locations are included on the printed version of the map, so that all families may take advantage of the city's amenities.

An overarching goal is to make families and city planners aware of our community's child-friendly assets, as well as barriers, in order to design a more sustainable, child-friendly city. Through documentation and evaluation of the process, GUB hopes to establish a transferrable PAR model for other cities and facilitate workshops for those looking to bring a similar project to their city or community.