

MIKE MCROBERTS WALK THIS WAY

WHEN IT COMES TO ROAD SAFETY AWARENESS, THE NEWSHOUND HAS HIS KIDS ON BOARD

To help Kiwi children survive their daily journey on New Zealand's often dangerous roads to and from school, *Woman's Day* has run a Campaign for Kids, focusing on road safety. Here in our third and final part, we talk about a practical and safe way many city kids travel to school.

Mike McRoberts is a TV3 newsreader, award-winning journalist, reporter from the world's hot spots ... and quite possibly New Zealand's most famous school bus driver!

Off to school

Several days a week, rain or shine, Mike "drives" the waka waewae, the "walking bus" his son Ben, seven, and daughter Maia, five, catch to school every day.

Mike heads off from his home for the short walk to school, stopping outside homes along the way to collect more youngsters, pausing to check his passengers, then

moving on to the next stop.

The 10 or so children traipsing after him stop their chatter while Mike and the bus' other adult conductor – who walks at the rear of the group – check it's safe to cross roads.

Ticket to ride

They carry on like this until arriving at the school gate

'You know that they enjoy it, and they're being looked after'

where, just like passengers on buses with wheels, they all have their tickets clipped.

It's not that the children have to pay for the ride – the tickets are to show how far they've each walked with the waka waewae.

"The schools are great at encouraging exercise," says Mike. "They give them tickets

which you clip at the end of your trip and when the kids have so many tickets clipped, they get a little prize.

"They also get certificates in assembly, and they work it out as to how many kilometres they may have walked.

"Ben, for instance, got a certificate last year for having walked from Auckland to

Taupo in a year, which is great. It's a real achievement for them, there's a sense of pride."

With more than half of all Kiwi kids now driven to school, the country's 400 walking school buses, taking more than 4000 children to and from school, are helping to reduce traffic, boost kids' fitness and teach road safety messages.

And passenger numbers are growing fast. Last year, Auckland had 190 walking buses, but that number has grown to 210 already this year.

Driving it home

Mike became a walking bus driver when Ben started school.

"The waka waewae went straight past the front gate, so we thought this would be a great idea.

"The good thing is the children get to meet other kids who aren't their age – who may be a wee bit older in the school – and they end up being their buddies, so it's a really good community thing.

"If you've got the time – and I'm lucky enough with my hours that in the mornings I'm usually free – to walk your kids to school, it's a lovely thing."

Before Maia started school, she was just as excited about joining the waka waewae as



'Bus driver' Mike leads the way for daughter Maia, five, and son Ben, seven. Far left: With fellow *3 News* presenter Hilary Barry.



she was about her first day.

"One of the great thrills for starting school for Maia was being able to come on the waka waewae with Ben and Daddy!

"She had been itching to get on the waka waewae and she had her tickets and everything a week before she even started school."

Benefits for all

Walking buses also have advantages for parents, who don't have to worry about racing to school to pick up or drop off their children.

"So that's an extra half-hour at the end of the day which is pretty good. And you know that the kids enjoy it and they're being looked after, so it's peace of mind too."

Adds Mike, "As well as being good exercise for the kids, it's good exercise for me. I really like the aspect of having half an hour in the mornings with no stress." **WD**

BY KATHRYN POWLEY

ON THE BUSES ...

BENEFITS

- Safety, convenience, environmentally friendly and kids love them
- Healthier, fitter kids, less traffic around schools and parents spending less money on petrol
- Children, especially five to eight-year-olds, learn valuable road safety skills needed to walk independently
- Stronger communities resulting from children and adults on the bus getting to know each other.

GUIDELINES

- Buses tend to have one adult for every eight children, up to a maximum of 50 children
- Just like real buses, walking buses have a carefully planned route, a driver roster, and run on schedule – rain or shine
- Children can catch the bus every day, or only on days that suit the family.

SET ONE UP

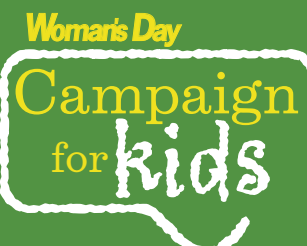
- Visit Land Transport New Zealand at [www](http://www.landtransport.govt.nz/travel/school/walking-school-buses).

[landtransport.govt.nz/travel/school/walking-school-buses](http://www.landtransport.govt.nz/travel/school/walking-school-buses), or phone (0800) 699 000 for a resource kit with a step-by-step guide to establishing your own walking bus

- Enlist support from fellow parents by putting a note in your school newsletter arranging a meeting
- At the meeting, sort out possible routes, drivers, volunteers and schedules
- Many local councils support walking buses and some provide funding. Contact your council's road safety coordinator, who can

check that your proposed route is suitable

- Seek a response from the school community through a survey or meeting. Encourage interested parents to contact the coordinator
- Finalise the bus' details – give it a name – and get started!



GET GEARED UP

Geared NZ kids' raincoats, launched by Wellington mum Anna Southon, are 100 per cent waterproof coats and vests in fluorescent lime for high visibility during the day, and sporting reflective tape for night. Sold through many schools, they can also be bought at www.gearednz.co.nz.



To be in to win one of five Geared NZ coats, write your name, address, phone number, email address (if you have one), and child's age on the back of an envelope and send to: **Woman's Day/Raincoat Competition, Private Bag 92512, Wellesley Street, Auckland, by August 10.**

PICTURES: NIELS SCHIPPER