



# Veterans Pursuing Degrees Pound the Pavement with Local Kids

## ORANGE COUNTY

### Public Health Issue



- Florida has the highest Pedestrian Danger Index in the country<sup>1</sup>, according to transportation surveys and census data compiled by Transportation for America, a nonprofit advocacy group.
- Due to economic circumstances, inner-city kids may be at greater risk for developing obesity. Healthy food costs more, making healthy meals takes time and effort, and safe places for physical activity and recreation are often inaccessible.
- Walking in a “Walking School Bus” requires no cost and it provides a healthy and safe means of transport to school.

**“We should contribute maximum energy to direct children away from the penitentiary and toward the universities. The Walking School Bus project provides guidance from a young generation of veterans to children who may otherwise be led into a darker life of crime.”**

—Dr. Alzo Reddick, *Soldiers to Scholars* founder

### Program Action

Helping children safely travel to and from school on foot or bicycle was a core focus of the two-year Florida Communities Putting Prevention to Work (CPPW) project, funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. One partnership to emerge from this involved CPPW, the Orange County Health Department, and the University of Central Florida’s *Soldiers to Scholars* program. *Soldiers to Scholars* is comprised of former military men and women who are receiving financial aid toward higher education courses in recognition of community service; namely, in mentoring young people. The program founder and director, Dr. Alzo Reddick, decided to adopt CPPW’s Walking School Bus (WSB) model to provide a volunteer opportunity and to assist the children of an inner-city apartment complex with a challenging situation—no school bus to transport them to and from Eagle’s Nest Elementary.

On International Walk to School Day in October 2011, an Orlando Police Safety Officer gave volunteers and parents a basic pedestrian safety training. CPPW provided safety vests, signs and other educational materials. Before long the WSB was a self-sufficient program. The kids are given a wholesome breakfast each Wednesday morning before heading to school, and they receive incentive items for every five walks taken. A coordinator delegates responsibilities, logs participation and keeps track of materials. Standard Operating Procedures were written for others to follow in the event that usual volunteers are absent. Dr. Reddick views this project as an opportunity to reach a vulnerable population of children and encourage them to be safe, smart, upstanding citizens. He refers to the men and women who volunteer every week as “mentors” in the journey to reach this goal.

### impact

- An average of **20-30 students** participated in the Eagle’s Nest Elementary WSB during its first year.
- Parents from **neighboring areas** who regularly see the group of walkers have **inquired** about how their children may join.
- The **Orlando Sentinel** featured this story in a **front-page article** on Orange County transportation cutbacks and filmed a short **video** of the WSB group.

### CONTACT

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<sup>1</sup> Dangerous by Design 2011. <http://t4america.org/docs/dbd2011/Dangerous-by-Design-2011.pdf>

