

Incentive Programs – Is There Potential for Application in Young Drivers to Promote Safe Driving Behaviours?

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Biography

Anne Deans is the Executive Officer for Youthsafe, a non-government organisation committed to reducing serious injuries in young people aged 15-25 years on the roads, in the workplace and in sport and recreational settings. Anne started at Youthsafe as a consultant in health management to undertake an organisational review. Anne then took on the Executive Officer's position moving ahead with the recommendations involving a broader injury prevention focus.

Prior to Youthsafe, Anne was Assistant General Manager of the Motor Accidents Authority. Anne also worked at central and regional offices of the NSW Department of health and came from a physiotherapy background involving clinical, advisory and management roles. Anne's committee work includes her current positions as President of the Physiotherapists' Registration Board, The University of Sydney Rehabilitation Studies Unit Advisory Committee member and Kidsafe NSW Branch Council member

Abstract

Youthsafe commissioned Patrick Shanahan of Elliott & Shanahan Research to conduct a study on the potential of incentive programs to promote safe driving behaviours in young people.

This paper examines the key results of the study which involved a literature review, twenty interviews with stakeholders working in road safety and/or health promotion and consultation with young people. The youth consultation process was qualitative and exploratory comprising ten mini group discussions and ten paired interviews with young males and females aged 16-20 years and resident in rural and metropolitan NSW.

This paper summarises many of the practical difficulties in implementing incentive schemes and in gaining acceptance of them by the young driver target group. It also provides information on what issues need to be addressed for incentive schemes to be meaningful and achieve some measure of success

1. BACKGROUND

Traditional road safety approaches involving engineering solutions, education and enforcement do not necessarily increase the *desire* of a driver to be safe. The Roads and Traffic Authority of NSW drew attention to this issue, particularly in relation to young drivers, with commentary in 2000 that there are few incentives and rewards for young people to drive safely¹.

For many years incentive schemes in the road safety arena have been subject of discussion, as exemplified by proceedings of an international symposium conducted by the Traffic Injury Research Foundation of Canada in the early 1980s, which concluded that the concept of incentives generally received a positive response but major information gaps needed to be filled before incentive programs could be designed and implemented on a large scale.

Particularly with demonstrable successes of incentive schemes in the workplace, interest and discussion about incentive schemes in road safety has increased. In 2000 a strong advocate for incentive schemes, Professor Gerry Wilde from Queens University in Canada, addressed a Motor Accidents Authority of NSW seminar suggesting that due to experiences with safety incentives in industrial settings as well as transportation, traffic safety policies may well benefit from this approach².

It was against this background that Youthsafe in 2001 commenced a feasibility study into incentive schemes to promote safe driving among young drivers. This study comprised two parts. The first part of the study involved a literature search exploring definitions of incentive programs, theoretical considerations, components of incentive schemes, incentive scheme models, incentive programs already implemented, difficulties associated with implementation of incentive schemes and experience with incentive schemes in the occupational health and safety arena. The second part of the study, and focus of this paper, involved consultations with youth focus groups, stakeholders and road safety professionals. Elliott and Shanahan Research consultants were contracted to undertake and report on the consultations.

2. METHOD

The consultative part of Youthsafe's exploration of incentive schemes was a qualitative, exploratory study and consequently did not have a statistical basis. Responses from both young people and stakeholders/road safety professionals were diagnosed, interpreted and analysed to determine appropriate directions and recommendations regarding potential development of incentive schemes for young drivers.

Mini group discussions and paired in-depth interviews allowed for emotional as well as rational considerations to emerge for analysis.

Consultations with Young People

Youth reactions were sought to the following broad issues:

- Reaction to the idea of an incentive scheme.
- Perceived attractive incentives.
- Foreseeable problems, issues, barriers to an incentive scheme.
- Motivating safe driving in young people.

Ten mini group discussions and ten paired in-depth interviews were undertaken in a semi-structured way with young drivers across five geographic areas as follows:

Sydney Western Suburbs, Sydney Other Suburbs, Maitland, Coffs Harbour, Dubbo. Males and females aged 16 to 20 years were included in the study. There were four to six participants in each mini group with varied cultural and ethnic backgrounds represented and as great a diversity as possible of youth sub-groups. Participants included young drivers with Learner's permits, Provisional licences, Full licences and a few young people not yet holding a permit or licence but intending to obtain a permit in the near future. Gender and age was used to determine group makeup in a way that would best reflect different driving experiences and was more likely to elicit honest responses.

Consultations with Stakeholders and Road Safety Professionals

Stakeholder and road safety professional responses were sought on the following:

- Awareness of, or involvement with, any current incentive programs.
- Perceived benefits of incentive schemes.
- Suitable incentives.

- The most appropriate administrator of incentive schemes.
- Potential problems or issues in using incentive schemes to promote safe driving.
- Strategies to address young driver safety issues.

Twenty face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted. Organisations represented during the study ranged across:

- Government departments with an interest in road safety in NSW, other Australian states and New Zealand.
- Health services.
- Universities.
- Police.
- Driver trainer groups.
- Insurers.
- Consumer representative groups.

3. RESULTS

The key strength of an incentive scheme was perceived to be that it was a refreshing change from a punitive system. While young people saw incentive schemes as delivering a 'bonus' rather than a trigger or motivator for behaviour change and fraught with problems in practice, there was constructive comment about appropriate characteristics of incentives. An incentive should be:

- Perceived as valuable and meaningful to the target group.
- Relevant to driving.
- Goal-oriented, as opposed to being an unannounced reward.
- Delivered immediately following the behaviour that requires reinforcing.
- Delivered periodically and at specific milestones throughout a young driver's early driving career to sustain positive behaviours (eg built into the Graduated Licensing System – GLS).

Young people considered 'freedom to choose' an appropriate incentive to be important reinforcing the need to consult with specific target groups to accommodate the great diversity of youth.

While 'negative consequences' of irresponsible driving still came across as having a greater impact than 'positive reinforcement', unfamiliarity with a new approach and uncertainty as to how it might work appeared to be influential factors in the study.

Risk taking is a complex behavioural issue. While incentives have a place it is unlikely that they would influence certain aspects, for instance unintentional risk taking related to factors such as poor skills development and inexperience, unless the scheme could address these eg by incorporating skills development.

Of the various 'models' for incentive schemes discussed with young people in the study a 'reward points scheme' received the most positive response. This model, similar to Frequent Flyers, involved the awarding of points for each year of accident and infringement free driving with a capacity to accumulate points over time or to redeem points to purchase products or services such as petrol, holidays etc. This was seen as relevant to driving, providing young drivers with some freedom of choice and providing potential for continual improvement.

4. CONCLUSION

Before this study, incentive schemes to promote safe driving behaviours in young people had not been explored nor reported on to any significant extent. The study confirmed that conceptually there is significant support for incentive programs to promote safe driving in young people. However in broad terms a young driver incentive scheme is unlikely to be meaningful and influence the behaviour of all young drivers – we are reminded that youth is not an homogenous group. The study reinforces the value of a specific target and suggests that there may be benefit in extending the notion of incentive schemes into a specific community or regional context, or developing different incentive schemes with specific messages for defined young driver sub-groups. The following steps were suggested as a guide in the development of targeted young driver incentive schemes:

1. Determine the target group.
2. Ascertain the attitudes, behaviours, beliefs and motivations of the target group.
3. Obtain input from the target group on likely incentives.
4. Modify incentives in accordance with youth responses.
5. Determine the most meaningful ways of communicating about the incentives scheme to the target group – communications concept testing is recommended.
6. Pilot test the proposed incentive scheme with the target group.

For a copy of the research report '*A study of youth and stakeholder reactions to an incentive scheme to promote safe driving among young drivers*' please check the Youthsafe website www.youthsafe.org or contact Youthsafe on phone (02) 98094615 or email coord@youthsafe.org.

References

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Keywords

Incentive scheme, young drivers, safe driving behaviours