

Arrive OnLine®
A Web Based Road Safety and Injury Prevention Resource.

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ABSTRACT

The overwhelming representation of **young drivers** involved in fatal and injury accidents throughout Western Sydney provided the impetus for a new, 'out of the box' approach to road safety.

Research undertaken with young people indicated that current and existing road safety strategies work to some extent, but their sustainability or interest potential is limited. Their reach tends to be short-term with limited capacity to engage the target group.

Focus group discussions showed that for younger age group (13 to 17 years) an internet based learning tool would be of great value. The older age group (18-25 years) an internet resource would probably not be a tool they would access. Once a license has been attained, young people over 18 years tend not to be amenable to further information about driving and safety.

The **Arrive OnLine®** project is the world's first scenario based internet accessed resource that has the potential to provide the user with a random collection of road-based experiences under various pre-programmed circumstances. Thereafter, a multitude of variables can occur where the decisions made from reacting to random occurrences determines their ability to arrive at the end of their journey. AOL offers a sustainable long-term option for the delivery of road safety information accessible to young people world wide.

YOUNG DRIVERS

In 1999 Road Safety Program Coordinators from the Western Sydney Council areas of Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Penrith¹ developed the concept of an '*experience based road safety initiative*' primarily focused on pre and young drivers in Western Sydney.

In the Western Sydney Region of Councils (WSROC) area, Learner and Provisional driver/riders account for 23% of all fatal and 25% of all injury crashes. This is proportionally significant in that they only represent 14% of the population (WSROC Strategic Plan for Road Safety 2010).

¹ Penrith City Council was involved in the initial developmental phase of the project.

A number of the Local Government Areas in Western Sydney are rural in nature. Some of these communities have to deal with poor public transport options, particularly on the weekends and at night. For this reason, many prefer to drive themselves for both work and/or socialising and in some cases there are no other alternative transport options.

Recent statistics for the Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury LGAs indicate that for speeding alone, young drivers represent over 30% of crashes. These young people are often driving on high speed roads without the benefit of experience and without considering the contribution of fatigue and other factors.

For young people, gaining a license provides a level of freedom that enables them to move around freely without being dependent on public transport, parents or friends. Collectively, all these factors provided an impetus to develop a resource that would 'reach' the target group.

There are many factors which contribute to young drivers crashing: inexperience; overconfidence; risk taking; fatigue; peer pressure; alcohol and other drugs. All these factors have been taken into consideration during the development of **Arrive OnLine®**.

RESEARCH

The target audience for this project was originally intended to be youth aged 17-25 years further broken into sub groups consisting of 17- 20 years and 21-25 years. It was found, however, that it was also useful to consult younger people aged 15-17, who may not yet drive, but who nevertheless travel in cars with friends and family, and who would be looking to gain their licenses as soon as they were old enough.

Initially, an internet linked CD-Rom was planned but it was decided that given the relatively easy access that young people have to computers (through schools, libraries, home etc) the resource would be Internet based. At the time of the research the project was being referred to as the *3D Drink, Drug, Drive IT Project*. With the decision to be Internet based it was agreed to rename the project **Arrive OnLine®**.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that young people were not particularly amenable to existing road safety messages. For this reason it was decided to apply for funding to undertake local research to determine how they would like to receive road safety information.

In 2000 funding was obtained from the NSW Roads and Traffic Authority to engage the University of Western Sydney's Institute for Cultural Research, to undertake a series of focus groups to determine an appropriate medium for the delivery of road safety messages.

The research included a total of 6 focus groups, two in each of Blue Mountains, Hawkesbury and Penrith LGAs conducted within a range of social and economic settings with young people of both sexes in age groups 15-17, 17-20 and 21-25 years.

Main points to emerge from the focus group are as follows (Redshaw 2001):

- ◆ For younger age groups – possibly from as young as 13 years and up to 17 years - an internet linked CD Rom would be of great value whereas for the older age groups – 18-25 years – an internet linked CD Rom would probably not be a tool they would access. Once a license has been attained young people over 18 years tend not to be amenable to further information about driving and safety. Young people under 18 years, on the other hand, are more interested in getting information about cars and driving and are more likely to be looking at the internet. A large number of teenagers have access to computers at home and/or at school. When young people leave home, however, they are not as likely to have access to computers as easily or to use them to surf the internet. Younger teenagers do tend to surf the internet for interest and for study as well as with no particular aim (ABA, 2000).
- ◆ The other reason why an internet linked CD Rom related to road safety would be useful for younger teenagers is that the focus groups showed a lack of awareness of road safety issues generally amongst this age group because they were not driving. It would therefore be recommended that the 3D Project deal with wider road safety issues for the pre-driver teens such as passenger and pedestrian related issues, and connect these with drug and alcohol related consequences, as well as for those learning to drive. At this stage there is a greater likelihood of giving information that young people are more amenable to receiving, than when they have a drivers license.
- ◆ A regional focus appears to be of prime importance in offering youth an initiative that is relevant to their needs and familiarity with their area. Young people in the focus groups referred to local initiatives as helpful to them and something they could relate to.
- ◆ It is also recommended that the project create opportunities for discussion about thinking and attitudes related to driving and dealing with peer influence, drunk drivers and passengers and to some extent challenging parent/sibling/friends' behaviours, for young people. This could mean for example, raising questions about these issues in ways that promote discussions amongst groups of young people, providing group activities for young people to engage in together which encourage discussion at school, home or youth centres, and or online discussions.

The target audience for this project as qualified by the research is youth aged 13-17 years. The resource provides relevant information to young people in the years both prior to, and after getting their drivers licence.

As well as providing road safety information for learner and young drivers, this resource is a valuable tool for anyone looking for road safety information from the most basic through to tertiary level.

Before embarking on further development of the project it was important to determine the future growth and development of IT technology. At the time (2001), research indicated that (Redshaw 2001):

- An ABA report on internet usage reported on the increased use of internet in Australian households overall. It states that children's internet usage increased with age, with 58% of children between 5 and 12 having access compared to 86% of children of high school age. Young people use the internet at least once a week, but higher proportions of teenagers use the internet on a daily basis than children under 12. The most frequent usages were for work and study related activities, internet sites related to interests, and surfing, with young people more likely to surf with no particular aim in mind.
- With increases in the use of internet and computer related activities it is clearly a form of access to young people if it can be used in ways that appeal to them and fit into their usage patterns. Young people have access to computers through home, school, youth centres and libraries. Though not all make use of the internet, it is an increasing trend for this age group.
- A recent National Office for the Information Economy (2001) study found that families with children were frequent users of the internet particularly for study purposes as well as for convenience of communication and accessing services that would not otherwise be obtained.
- The Prime Minister's *Backing Australia's Ability: Innovation Action Plan* and the Labour Party's Knowledge Nation policies both emphasise an increased input into information technology including online curriculum in schools. There is clearly an increasing emphasis on internet use for education purposes and a need for online content to suit the needs of young people.

Clearly, an Internet based resource was the way to go.

GOAL

The goal of the **Arrive OnLine®** Project is to increase the knowledge of risk factors associated with drink driving, speeding, fatigue, driver behaviour, seatbelts and other causes of crashes, by providing relevant information to interactively and innovatively challenge perceptions of risk and its consequences. The project is managed by the Road Safety Program Coordinators of Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury City Councils. **Arrive OnLine®** intends to:

- 1 *Provide relevant information that will interactively and innovatively challenge perceptions of risk and its consequences in the target group*

- 2 *Develop a scenario based program, information resource and reference guide that will engage the target group and the sub cultures within that group*
- 3 *Provide a resource for road safety & health educators, professionals, students and the general community*
- 4 *Develop an internet website to provide links to relevant and approved internet sites*

The **Arrive OnLine®** Web based program is an innovative approach to road safety. As opposed to being clinical and didactic, this program is firmly structured to involve the user through a hierarchy of environments, situations and four scenarios that provide: choice, randomness, consequences and then feedback.

This is not a game but a 'real world' environment where the decisions of a user will have tangible outcomes and results within the programs. There is no win or lose. There are situations and outcomes and with those outcomes comes a learning experience supported by 'results' and specifically directed links to highly relevant information – relevant to the outcome achieved within the scenarios experienced.

Diagram 1 illustrates the basic concept of **Arrive OnLine®**

The goal of any driving or road user experience is to 'arrive'. Whether to a party, a friend's home or schoolies week. When we use a motor vehicle upon a road we plan to arrive at our destination. Unfortunately such a goal is often not achieved amongst the youngest of our road users and hence the real need for this program. The 'On Line' aspect of the project is a tangible contemporary means to not only allow for the mass access to this program but to guarantee its currency and legitimacy.

Arrive OnLine® encapsulates the goal of the Project Management Team of embracing new and developing technologies with which our youth are heavily involved and to tap into the youth and technology 'culture' as a result. In this way the project can be accepted as part of the mainstream culture and hence be more available for use by the target group than if it were a video program or a CD in isolation. The dual concepts of 'arriving' and being 'on line' are achieved by this clever approach to contemporary road safety education.

The Project Management Team of the **Arrive OnLine®** program is committed to the development of an effective educational tool for road safety education. If one negative attitude were changed to a positive or one area of misinformation rectified, then the project would be a success.

However, it is not the intention of the Management Team to place significantly lower or easier to achieve benchmarks as their gauge for success. To the contrary, the **Arrive OnLine®** project is potentially able to provide a new decision based educational paradigm for road safety education based on the concept of personal control and responsibility.

OUTCOMES

This project was officially launched and went 'live' in August 2004. As young people log on to the site they are asked to provide information in regard to age; gender; license status and postcode. This provides us with a method of tracking the number of 'hits' on the site as well as a basic demographic of the users.

A report is currently being developed outlining results for the first 12 months of activity.

In terms of working partnerships, this project has introduced a new player into the community based road safety arena. Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury City Councils have, through the Local Government Road Safety Program, been working with Animated Biomedical Productions (ABP) a company which develops unique, high-end 3D medical animation, illustration and multimedia solutions for professionals in the fields of medicine, healthcare, biotechnology and law. In a move that has resulted in a very successful partnership, ABP agreed to develop the animation for **Arrive OnLine®** which was a significant move away from their usual business.

Once the resource went into development, funding was provided by Blue Mountains and Hawkesbury City Councils. However, following the development of the first of the four scenarios, ABP have provided funding to complement the development of the second scenario.

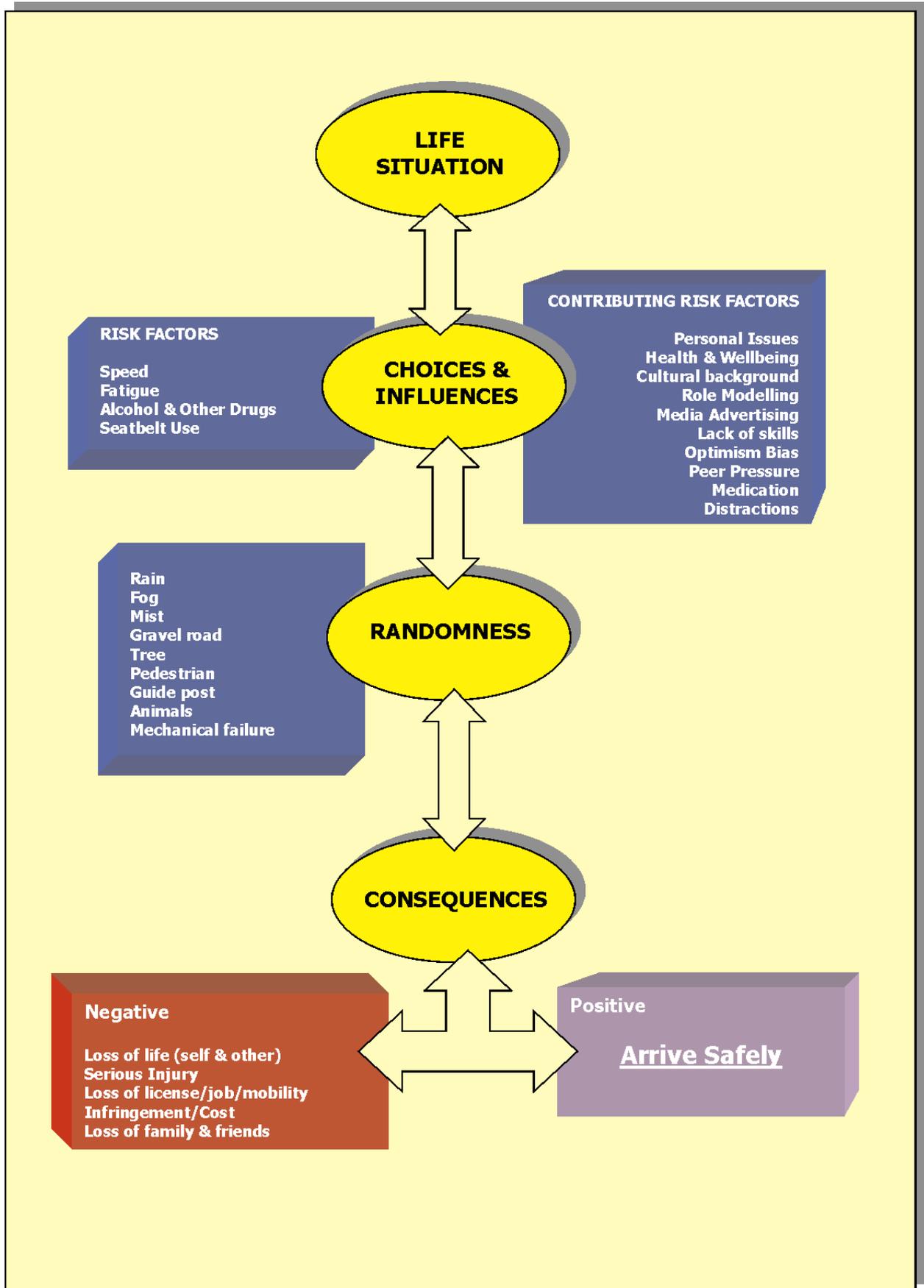


DIAGRAM 1

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