

DROP FIVE AND SAVE LIVES IN THE CITY OF STIRLING: COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION IN ROAD SAFETY

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ABSTRACT

Key words: community participation; road safety; comprehensive approach; reducing speeds

Community participation is an integral part of a comprehensive approach to road safety, however it is challenging to foster.

The City of Stirling in Western Australia has taken up this challenge to engage meaningful participation from residents in road safety.

The City was the first local government in Western Australia to employ a Road Safety Officer whose sole responsibility is road safety issues, resulting in the establishment of a Road Safety Advisory Committee. The Committee has started implementing its first project - Drop Five and Save Lives in the City of Stirling with the objective of fostering community participation in strategies that encourage motorists to reduce travel speeds.

This paper will examine research into the barriers to facilitating community participation, using the establishment of the Road Safety Advisory Committee and the management of the Drop Five and Save Lives project as practical examples of strategies to address these.

INTRODUCTION

Community participation is an integral part of a comprehensive approach to road safety, however it is challenging to foster.

The City of Stirling in Western Australia has taken up this challenge to engage meaningful participation from residents in road safety.

The City was the first local government in Western Australia to employ a dedicated Road Safety Officer. As a result the City has established a Road Safety Advisory Committee which meets on a monthly basis to plan, implement and evaluate road safety activities as determined by their action plan.

The Committee comprises community representatives, elected members, stakeholders and City staff. It has started implementing its first project - Drop Five and Save Lives in the City of Stirling with the objective of fostering community participation in strategies that encourage motorists to reduce their travel speeds.

This issue was identified as a priority for action from traffic crash statistics and expressed community needs.

This paper will examine research into the barriers to facilitating community participation, using establishment of the Road Safety Advisory Committee and management of the Drop Five and Save Lives project as practical examples of strategies to address these.

COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION AND ROAD SAFETY

Community participation has for a long time been recognised as an integral part of a comprehensive approach to improving public health (Marschell 2004; Secker-Walker et al; Stockels 1996; McKenzie-Mohr 1999). Increasingly it has been acknowledged to be a significant contributor to improving road safety, (Howat et al 2001; Hingson et al 1996; Kinney 1998; Pettet et al 2003; Cairney 2002) and has been recognised as a strategy to ensure effective implementation in the Western Australian Road Safety Strategy 2003-2007 (Road Safety Council 2003).

Community participation is understood to influence and reinforce social norms and beliefs impacting upon the behaviour pattern of the community (McKenzie - Mohr 1999). This is affirmed in psychology research, which has found that people look to others to determine how they should behave in differing situations and behave similarly (Pittsburgh, Carnegie & Asch 1956; Cialdini & Goldstein 2004). In regards to travel speeds a study by Haglund and Aberg (2000), found that a individual driver's behaviour was closely related to the behaviour of other drivers, and those that perceived others to drive at excessive speed were also more likely to speed themselves.

Road safety strategies are more likely to be supported by the community when they are able to be actively involved in working towards solutions (Howat et al 2001). Fostering community participation also encourages communities to take some responsibility for road safety problems and ownership of the solutions (NHTSA 2002). Community responsibility and ownership has been found to improve the results of interventions and their sustainability (Kinney 1998) and are an integral part of strengthening community action, which is a key principal in the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (World Health Organisation 1986).

Marschell 2004, concludes in her study on citizen participation and the neighbourhood context, that increasing participation is critical to the improvement of local public goods and services (education services, road and community safety) and that there is a need for governments and community organisations to do more to recruit volunteers. Significantly it was found that in communities where the residents were more socially and politically engaged, problems with goods and services were less likely to be cited.

BARRIERS TO COMMUNITY PARTICIPATION

Whilst community participation is recognised as an important element of a comprehensive approach to road safety, it is challenging to foster, with many barriers limiting the likelihood or capability of community participation.

Barriers identified in the literature to community participation generally and for road safety include:

- Reduction in social capital (Howat et al 2001; Marschell 2004)
- Lack of time of community members (Howat et al 2001; Krieger et al 2002)
- Lack of leadership (Howat et al 2001; Kinney et al 2001)
- Lack of relevant skills and knowledge of community members (Howat et al 2001; Kinney 1998; Boyce & Geller 2000)
- Adherence to one planning approach (Howat et al 2001; Kinney 1998)
- Inappropriate program focus (Howat et al 2001; Kinney 1998; Boyce & Geller 2000)
- Inappropriate program evaluation (Howat et al 2001; Kinney 1998; Boyce & Geller et al)
- Lack of funds and resources (Howat et al 2001; Boyce & Geller 2000)
- Lack of sustainability (Howat et al 2001; Kinney 1998)

A number of other factors have been found to enable community participation in the literature including:

- Good recruitment practices (Marschell 2004)
- Provision of meaningful opportunities and arrangements for community participation (Marschell 2004; Schulz, Krieger & Galea 2002)
- Relevant interventions implemented in a timely fashion (Marschell 2004; Boyce & Geller 2000; Schulz, Krieger & Galea 2002)
- Use of an explicit action plan with visible and tangible benefits from implementing these (Schulz, Krieger & Galea; Boyce & Geller 2000, Krieger et al 2002; Kinney 1998)
- Setting and monitoring the use of appropriate rules (Kinney 1998)
- Tapping into, connecting and valuing the core teams networks to increase reach into the community (Kinney 1998)

Recognising these barriers and enablers and identifying and implementing appropriate actions to address and advance these will help unlock the potential for community participation to impact road safety action. The City of Stirling for the past 12 months has worked towards fostering meaningful participation by addressing these factors. This paper looks at the City's progress so far.

HUMAN RESOURCES

The City of Stirling is the first Local Government Authority in Western Australia to employ a full-time Road Safety Officer whose sole responsibility is road safety. Their role is to coordinate road safety initiatives and liaise with schools, school community groups and other community groups, education and other government organisations and individual members of the community to develop, encourage involvement in, and promotion of, road safety strategies and initiatives. They are required to support Council's Road Safety Advisory Committee by identifying road safety issues in the community, providing information about successful strategies to address these issues and assist with the development and implementation of these programs.

The employment of an officer by the City of Stirling makes certain there is a person with the time, relevant skills and knowledge to identify appropriate issues and the strategies to address these, and evaluate the committee's activities. This ensures that the programmes initiated by the community are relevant and implemented in a timely fashion and that their time is valued with identifiable results. Furthermore the officer provides a starting point for the provision of resources with the ability to identify and secure funding available for their initiatives.

THE ROAD SAFETY ADVISORY COMMITTEE

The City of Stirling Road Safety Advisory Committee is governed by a Terms of Reference which enables them to set appropriate rules and monitor their use.

As defined in the Terms of Reference their aim is to:

- Encourage and promote to all road users the safer use of roads.
- Be aware of existing and potential road safety issues and to address these by developing, implementing and evaluating appropriate strategies.
- Engage and foster community involvement in traffic safety matters.

The committee endeavours to achieve its aims through:

- Providing a means of participation and communication between the community and the City of Stirling in matters pertaining to road safety.
- Raising community awareness of road safety issues and initiatives for local communities.
- Facilitating community planning, development and implementation of road safety programs and promotions.
- Developing programs and initiatives that target specific groups and road safety issues in the community.
- Identifying road safety issues, pursue and review road safety strategies that can be adopted by the City.
- Identifying Black Spot projects, crash problems and location, poor road user behaviour and to develop new or utilise existing initiatives to address these.
- Providing feedback on relevant issues to organisations such as RoadWise, the Office of Road Safety and Western Australia Police.
- Identifying and seeking funding to implement road safety projects.

The Road Safety Advisory Committee was formed in August 2004 after recruitment of relevant stakeholders by direct contact, Councillors through official council processes and community representatives through community newspapers.

Community members were asked to write an expression of interest letter to apply for one of the four positions prescribed in the Terms of Reference and a selection matrix was developed to select these members from all applicants. The matrix scored applicants based upon their knowledge of road safety, relevant skills and experience with local governments. Of particular concern to the City of Stirling was the representativeness of the committee considering our size and population. Therefore the matrix also ensured that the resulting members lived in a broad cross section of localities within the City. Whilst initially the City was successful in doing this the

resignation of two members and their subsequent replacement has resulted in a conglomeration of members from the western areas. This hinders the ability of the committee to reach some sections of the community as the members do not have networks in which they can tap into to facilitate participation. As an example there has been a proliferation in the distribution of bin stickers in the western suburbs of the City due to a large number of volunteers being sourced from the community representatives living in these areas. However it has been more difficult to recruit volunteers in the south east corner of the City and as such whilst there are stickers there, there are not as many.

The committee's chairperson must be selected from the Councillors representatives, who from experience on council has well-developed leadership skills. They are provided with support and advice from the City's Road Safety Officer and the Traffic Engineer. This ensures there is appropriate leadership and road safety expertise to support the committee's endeavours. The committee meet once a month to ensure continuity and help facilitate sustainability of the committee in the long-term.

Use of an explicit action plan with visible and tangible benefits from implementing the activities has been identified to enable community participation and as such the Committee have developed an action plan which, links to the WA State Road Safety Strategy "Arriving Safely" and is endorsed by Council. The WA State Road Safety Strategy was developed from best practice selecting those activities which have been proven to have the greatest potential to reduce road trauma. Therefore by linking the Committee's action plan with WA's Road Safety Strategy ensures that the activities they implement are appropriate and evidence based.

There are 27 individual action items in the plan under the following categories:

- Countering Drink Driving
- Increasing Restraint Use
- Speeding and Reducing Travel Speeds
- Protecting Vehicle Occupants
- Safer Modes of Travel
- Improving the Safety of Roads
- Committee Promotion
- Schools
- Employee Road Safety

All individual actions are provided with an evaluation strategy and the committee have prioritised these actions, acknowledging that funding and resource availability may restrict their ability to implement the entire plan. Their first priority was the development of a campaign that encourages motorists to reduce their travel speeds.

DROP FIVE AND SAVE LIVES IN THE CITY OF STIRLING

Speed is identified in the WA Road Safety Strategy as a one of four behaviour most commonly associated with traffic crashes and recommends public education and promotion and advocacy initiatives to address this issue (Road Safety Council 2003). In WA during 2001, speed was considered a factor in 38% of fatal traffic crashes and

in the metropolitan area it was considered a factor in 19.5% of all police attended traffic crashes. Of these 36.5% were fatal traffic crashes, 23.8% were hospitalisation crashes, 12.3% were medical attention crashes and 23.4% were property damage only crashes (Legge Gavin & Cercarelli 2004).

The large majority of road safety complaints received by the City of Stirling are about the speed of vehicles using local and local distributor roads. All of these complaints are handled as per guidelines described in our Traffic Management Policy. The policy requires that all locations subject to a complaint regarding the speed of vehicles be investigated with traffic counts. The results of counts are then evaluated against the policy to determine eligibility for engineering works. If a site is considered to meet the criteria to warrant action then options are considered and the location listed for traffic calming works as appropriate. In the majority of cases locations don't meet the policy and residents feel that their concerns have not been addressed.

Considering the statistics, the City's complaints from residents and its identification in the WA Road Safety Strategy the committee identified speed as an appropriate priority area for action. As a result they developed the City of Stirling Drop Five and Save Lives project (D5&SL), which aims to encourage motorists using our roads to slow down through the implementation of community education strategies that foster community participation in road safety and reduce the social acceptability of speeding. For the purpose of this paper, the focus will be limited to those activities, whose objective relate to community participation.

D5SL uses innovative strategies for addressing the issue of speeding that require the active participation of our residents in their implementation. It is believed that the programme provides a number of meaningful opportunities for participation at many levels. Whilst laying the foundation for the City to build a community culture that contributes to residents taking shared responsibility for improving road safety in their street or local area. The key areas for participation are described below.

Please Slow Down Consider Our Kids Bin Stickers

Over 10,000 "Please Slow Down Consider Our Kids" Mobile Garbage Bin Stickers have been distributed at targeted locations and others at residents' request by volunteers and residents. The targeted locations were widely distributed throughout the City on roads where there have been a number of complaints. These roads commonly have high volumes with connectivity to district distributors and primary distributors. A number of these sites also have schools and recreation facilities. When stickers are distributed, each household receives a leaflet, with information about the stickers and the consequences of speeding. The intended target of 15,000 bin stickers and leaflets will reach approximately 20% of households in the City of Stirling.

Reducing Travel Speeds Art Competition

Residents and high school students designed artwork to promote the "Drop Five and Save Lives in Stirling" message. Winning entries were used to create banners and posters, which have been displayed at shopping centres, our libraries and on banner poles on two district distributor A roads in the City.

The Neighbourhood Pace Car Initiative

The Neighbourhood Pace Car initiative was developed by David Engwicht of Creative Communities International and launched with some success by some local governments in the United States and the United Kingdom and the City has adapted this programme for our use. It encourages residents to sign a pledge promising to always drive within the speed limit. For this they are provided a bumper sticker that identifies them as a Pace Car driver. As a pace car driver, speed limits are strictly adhered to. Because the pace car driver is driving at the speed limit, the cars behind are also encouraged to drive at the speed limit.

The programme encourages those who sign up to promote the programme to their family, neighbours and friends and the pledgees will be supported by the City in this with provision of promotional materials and regular Pace Car Updates issued by post or email.

The programme which has only recently been launched has been widely promoted through the City's communication channels (newspapers, website, static displays at libraries and shopping centres, brochures at community centres, City newsletters, direct mail to complainants) with a competition as an extra incentive to recruit participants. It is envisioned that the City will continue to promote the programme in this manner throughout the 2005/2006 financial year whilst continuing to look for better opportunities to recruit members. In the second stage of the launch planned for November 2005 partnerships with stakeholders and community groups will be actively sourced to help recruit more members.

Evaluation

The City of Stirling and the Road Safety Advisory Committee believes that appropriate evaluation is an essential requirement of any road safety project and as such it is included in the their Terms of Reference. As such an evaluation linking directly to the D5&SL projects objectives was developed in the early planning stages. The evaluation plan for the fostering community participation in road safety objective is as follows:

- Create a database of all community groups and individuals who show interest or participate in programs.
- Keep a record of the number of bin stickers distributed during the project.
- Record when the bin stickers are deployed in targeted streets, and check to ensure they have been appropriately placed on the bins
- Record the number of requests from individual schools and residents for bin stickers
- Record the number of pledges to join Pace Car
- Record information regarding when and where displays are implemented during the campaign.
- Record the number of posters distributed and their location.
- Record when and where the winning artwork is displayed in banner form.
- Record number of entries into the Poster/Banner design competition.
- A post – implementation survey distributed via mail to 200 people and through the City's website to measure :
 - Awareness of campaign strategies
 - Resident satisfaction with the activities implemented in the campaign

- Efficacy of residents to participate
- Satisfaction with the opportunities for residents to participate in the project (e.g. entering competitions, requesting and receiving campaign material)
- Traffic counting to measure traffic speed at 10 randomly selected bin sticker locations and compared with traffic counting results collected in the past to identify if there has been any changes to the 85th percentile speed since the use of the stickers.

Whilst it is identified that appropriate evaluation is necessary and efforts are made to ensure that it is completed, it is recognised that it is difficult for local road safety programmes to do so (Cairney 2002). As such it has proven impossible for the Committee to measure long-term outcomes based measures such as a reduction in traffic speed across the entire road network, or if there has been a reduction of speed related road crashes for the D5&SL project. To get around this, the Committee were careful to set appropriate behavioural objectives in the planning stages, which they and the City have the ability to successfully measure. Further research and development of appropriate evaluation strategies for community and participatory interventions by research bodies would assist the City and like organisations to address this barrier.

CONCLUSION

Establishment of the Road Safety Advisory Committee and the implementation of the Drop Five and Save Lives project has successfully provided the groundwork for increasing community participation in road safety in the City of Stirling, by overcoming a number of barriers identified in the literature.

The continued removal of these barriers by the sustained implementation and extension of the D5&SL and other interventions as they are developed will further increase participation in road safety by the community, leading to a culture of shared responsibility and ownership for road safety.

As these norms are developed the community will contribute to improving road user behaviours and play a significant role in the reduction of road trauma in the City of Stirling.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Funding for the Drop Five and Save Lives in the City of Stirling project was provided by the Community Road Safety Grants Programme, administered by RoadWise on behalf of the Road Safety Council and the National Safety Council of WA Trust Fund (administered by the RAC).

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