

## **Desperately Seeking Safety- Safe Routes to School- from courtship to marriage**

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When schools elect to join the Safe Routes to School program we tell them that they are marrying into the road safety family and that there are no divorces. For the continued success of the program we need to continue to satisfy our partners.

So - what are the secrets to maintaining this successful partnership?.

### **The Courtship**

The Safe Routes to School program has been an integral part of DTEI's commitment to road safety in primary schools for the past 10 years. Safe Routes to School aims to improve the road safety of children travelling in their local area. The program involves a collaborative approach between our department, local councils, primary schools and their teachers, parents and students. All members have clearly defined roles and expectations.

The council and DTEI provide the engineering support - that is, the physical improvements such as footpath and crossing upgrades that may be required on public footpaths surrounding the school.

The responsibility of the school is to teach road safety with resources and support provided by DTEI. Schools are invited to participate in the program in cluster groups and it is a local decision if they decide to join or not – road safety education is not a compulsory part of the curriculum in South Australia.

Although we currently have almost 200 primary schools participating in the program, we do need to market and promote the benefits our program to attract new partners.

### **The Engagement**

Schools are engaged through a deliberate process that ensures clear understandings of the commitment to the program by all parties. An initial meeting with the Principal outlines the general structure and responsibilities. It is followed with a 20 minute presentation by the DTEI Program Manager and the Education Consultant to the entire school staff. This is an important part of the process, as all members of the teaching staff in the school must commit to teach road safety in their class. Therefore it is important that the all of the school staff are aware of the roles and responsibilities of the various parties and are happy to commit to the partnership between the school and the transport department. We make it very clear at these staff meetings that the relationship they are entering into is a marriage and that there are no divorces!

### **The Marriage**

For schools, the marriage is consummated by a full day training session where schools send up to four teachers to be trained in the use of the road safety educational resources. The teachers leave the training at the end of the day with two documents.

1. A Road Safety Action Plan that shows the units of work that need to be taught by each class at the school to address their school's specific road safety needs.
2. A vision statement, which is essentially a school's policy document confirming their school's commitment to teaching road safety.

At this training we ask that two of the four teachers act as Road Safety Focus Teachers. The role of the Focus Teacher is to be the primary source of contact between the school and DTEI and to ensure that road safety teaching is undertaken in each class in the school.

### **Keeping the partners happy**

DTEI spends a considerable amount of time, energy and money in attracting and committing schools to the Safe Routes to School program. Maintenance of that commitment in these days of overcrowded curriculum, constant

incursions on teaching time and accountability for student learning is an essential aspect of the program's continued success in South Australia. We continue to engage with our schools and demonstrate keen interest in innovative teaching and learning strategies used by teachers to ensure that the teaching of relevant road safety continues. It is crucial that our program is seen by schools to have an attractive 'edge' and that teachers know that their work is valued.

### **How this is done**

#### **Relationships with DTEI**

Members of the Safe Routes to School team invest a great deal of time and energy in building and maintaining personal networks and relationships. The program has a dedicated Education Consultant, so teachers know that there is a person who has the brief to provide program assistance at any time. This means that teachers have support, which results in making their job easier. We leverage the fact that the South Australian education community is small and there is considerably less than "six degrees of separation". As a result, there is a strong sense of commitment by many of our teachers and many of our road safety focus teachers have been in that role for more than 5 years, some for as long as 10.

#### **Training and development nights- Regional and Metropolitan**

Three times a year, road safety focus teachers are invited to training and development evenings. These evenings consist of 90 minutes of presentations, which include an update from DTEI's Education Consultant, an invited speaker and presentation by an invited school, that demonstrates good or innovative practice in teaching road safety. This is followed by a meal and networking time. To add to the attractiveness of the night, venues such as the Stamford Plaza or the Adelaide Convention Centre are selected. For country teachers, release time for travel and hotel accommodation are offered and funded by DTEI. These considerations provide real incentive for teachers – attractive incentives are rarely offered – and they encourage a good level of attendance by country representatives. These evenings are always well supported. Of the 300 focus teachers who were invited to our most recent night in August, 150 attended. Training and development nights are also held in regional centres such as Port Lincoln and Mount Gambier which are too far from Adelaide for attendance at weeknight sessions.

### **Succession Planning**

At the end of each school year, all participating schools are contacted to ensure that the focus teacher will remain at the school. If a focus teacher is leaving, that teacher is asked to nominate a replacement and a half day succession planning is offered to the new focus teacher. This ensures that both the local knowledge and the program knowledge aren't lost. Experience has shown that it is ideal to have two focus teachers per school and, in some cases in large schools, three focus teachers. In a number of cases, teachers have transferred from one Safe Routes to School site to another and become the focus teachers in their new location.

### **Renewing our vows**

Next year the focus of our program is being expanded. For the past 10 years our program objectives have been purely road safety. As of 2009 we will have a new educational resource titled "way 2 go" that integrates the synergies of road safety and active travel. The content of the resource will broaden and increase. For example, students will learn about the impact of the car in a road safety context as well as from an environmental perspective.

There will be better integration of DTEI's education resources, relevant to the needs and programs of each participating school. For example, we will aim to give students the skills to walk safely to school and then encourage them to do so by helping schools establish a Walking School Bus. A main reason for this is the increasing interest from schools in both the health benefits and the environmental benefits of active travel.

As part of the expansion process we will need to revisit our existing 180 Safe Routes to School sites and modify their existing three year road safety action plans to become a five year active travel plans.

Road safety will remain an essential part of what we deliver but, from 2009, schools will have a greater range of optional programs such as bike education, walking school bus and the green travel challenge to enhance their commitment to safety and health education for all students.

The courtship, engagement and marriage will continue .....