

Creating Sustainable Community Partnerships to Promote Road Safety in Schools - Fit To Drive (F2D) Implementation

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Abstract

The integrated F2D model of research, development and delivery involves a multi stakeholder approach to road safety that is local and long term. This paper will explain how the research and development of the Fit to Drive (F2D) program is implemented in Senior Secondary schools, TAFE and community settings in Victoria.

Supported by major stakeholders in road safety education in Victoria* the paper explores how the program builds on and extends the collaborative ability and potential of “F2D community networks” (local school groups, local government, universities) and uses trained university students as road safety education facilitators and ambassadors.

The half day F2D program for 16 year olds, currently involves over 50 Local Government Areas, 220 Government, Independent and Catholic schools, 26,000 young people and has trained more than 500 university undergraduates to be road safety facilitators. As part of the first action plan of Victoria’s Road Safety Strategy 2013-2022, it will be made available to all schools.

The undergraduate peer led approach, combined with targeted community partnerships is presented as a local community road safety response and community capacity building model that is a potential paradigm for other communities, within the context of the “Decade of Action for Road Safety”. The paper explains how the Fit to Drive (F2D) community model of delivery that is evidence based is both measured and sustainable.

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1. Introduction

Fit to Drive (F2D) is a half day in-school experience for Year 11 students to support them to make good decisions when faced with risky driving situations, both as passengers and drivers. F2D is not about further driving skills, but about building in young people the confidence and self-belief needed to change behaviour through facilitated group discussion.

F2D is a local community program, focussing on young people within a local government area, which aims to build their competence to become safer road users. In the F2D model young people are at the centre, and are offered the opportunity to make their own contribution to road safety. The philosophy of the F2D program therefore incorporates the belief that young people have the capacity to change and influence attitudes in relation to risky driving, and supports them to take ownership and responsibility for themselves and their peers’ safety.

Young people are encouraged to develop a respect and a pride in safe road use, using the active learning methods that draw upon their own experiences. The road to empowerment is fostered

through the small group facilitation undertaken by tertiary undergraduates. The program itself is a half day (four hours) in-school experience with group sizes of 20.

The tertiary students have been selected, trained and professionally developed in their time with the F2D program. Generally they are second and third year undergraduates from a range of disciplines and they remain with the F2D program usually for two or three years. They are paid for the Year 11 workshops that they facilitate

The Year 11 workshop includes a range of different approaches and presentations about the issues for young drivers and passengers including a Police presentation and a real life case study developed and delivered by the MFB, CFA and other emergency services. At the culmination of the F2D workshop the young people develop a Personal Plan involving strategies and things they would say in dangerous situations in order to stay safe on the roads. The student groups also develop recommendations for promoting road safety awareness in their school and broader community. The plan is shared with, and support requested from, school and local community leaders.

The F2D model is a multi-stakeholder approach that uses constructive partnerships with key road safety education stakeholders to provide a coordinated, best practice approach to delivering safer outcomes for young people as road users. A key feature of the F2D model is its utilisation of 'community networks'. These are local secondary college groups, local government, community groups and universities. The F2D Foundation trains university students as workshop facilitators - in effect road safety motivators and potentially ambassadors or champions. The training can be complementary to the undergraduate course they are undertaking and frequently there are direct links with students in Education, Youth Work, Psychology and Social Work.

Constructive partnerships can lead to positive outcomes. Fit to Drive provides an example where partnerships of public and private organisations can come together with the intention of accelerating the progress of road safety. With the support of the major organisations in road safety education in Victoria, the program builds on and extends the collaborative ability and potential of the F2D 'community of local networks' to initiate and support government road safety actions.

After twelve years of operation, the half day F2D program annually involves 52 Local Government Areas, 220 Government, Independent and Catholic schools, 26,000 young people and has trained more than 500 university undergraduates to be road safety facilitators. The first action plan of the Victorian Road Safety Strategy 2013 to 2022 has identified the Fit to Drive (F2D) program and committing to make it available to all schools in Victoria, a process that is already involving further program development and an extensive evaluation project.

It is the contention of this paper that the F2D model presents an innovative, evidence based approach that contributes to the establishment of a measured, sustainable and potentially effective response to young people's overrepresentation in road crashes (Spencer 2011). Within the context of the "Decade of Action for Road Safety" (UN 2011) the F2D program approach may well provide a useful model for other communities to take up and adapt according to local conditions.

Extensive data shows that young novice drivers are at significantly greater risk of crashing relative to drivers of other ages. The Transport Accident Commission (TAC, 2012) reported that in Victoria young people (18-25 year olds) represented 28% of driving-related fatalities. Further, at the pre-licence stage, risky attitudes towards the road can be evident (Chapman et al.) suggesting that this is an ideal time at which to promote positive road safety attitudes. Certainly young people are likely to be passengers of young novice drivers and may be in a position to influence the behaviour of young drivers.

2. *The Fit to Drive (F2D) model and how it developed*

The F2D model developed out of a local program originally initiated, trialled and resourced by schools and the communities of the Mornington Peninsula and Frankston, Victoria, (Australia) in 2002 to reduce road traffic injuries in young people. It was subsequently adopted by communities and schools in other metropolitan and rural regions of the state.

In 2008 the Fit to Drive (F2D) Foundation Incorporated was established as a not-for-profit organisation supported by Victorian road safety stakeholders. The Foundation developed a charter to coordinate, administer and develop the program throughout the State. The business model used includes support from schools, universities, road safety agencies and local government. Local business and service organisations often contribute. In 2012/13 the F2D Year 11 Curriculum was redeveloped working in collaboration with VicRoads.

In 2014 a new business plan was developed and the restructure of the F2D Foundation occurred, in order to embrace and underpin the growth and extension of the existing program and to respond to the delivery of programs in other road safety education settings.

The Fit to Drive (F2D) program has since its inception rigorously sought to incorporate best practice road safety education principles (Fit to Drive Foundation, 2011). The importance of designing road safety programs based on clear theoretical foundations has been well established (SDERA, 2009; Buckley, Reveruzzi & Watson, 2012). Best practice programs are considered to be evidence based, age appropriate, sequential and embedded in the school curriculum (SDERA 2010). Best practice programs involve students, staff, parents and the community, focus on self-efficacy and behaviour change rather than driving skills or fear tactics and incorporate an understanding of the steps being taken to reduce the risk for young drivers such as graduated licensing schemes and enforcement measures (Engström et al., 2003; Department of Transport & Main Roads, 2009).

It has been suggested that ‘tested behaviour change’ theories provide the best basis for the design of road safety education programs. Programs based on these theories, it has been argued, have a ‘greater likelihood’ to be successful (Buckley, Reveruzzi & Watson, 2012, p.32). There is evidence from other health promotion programs and other disciplines that peer facilitation by near age or slightly older peers can be effective, and that positive and consistent role modelling can lead to behaviour change (Hyder et al., 2010).

It has been further noted that ‘behaviour change programs have the potential to draw on effective strategies from many areas such as public health, education, psychology and health promotion’ (Buckley, Reveruzzi & Watson, 2012, p. 18). Cheryl Perry (1999, p. 115) highlights the importance of using creative approaches to develop community and school-based health behaviour programs for young people that are “fun, humorous, engaging, attractive, and interesting, in addition to being effective”.

Analysis of the F2D program based on research undertaken over the past eight years as part of a PhD research project (Montero, 2013) suggests that the facilitated small group discussion workshops have addressed key elements of delivery as identified in behaviour change models that emphasise such factors as: self-efficacy, the development of personal strategies, practising (resistance/assertiveness) skills, evaluating perceptions and expectations of friends and parents and evaluating potential outcomes of safer behaviour and risky behaviour.

In addition, the program has developed creative strategies to engage and hold the interest of the students across the half-day program. The F2D program features both large-group sessions and small group facilitated discussion, with each approach playing a specific role in the program design.

In the large groups young people are presented with information and evidence related to road safety, and powerful personal stories are also interwoven into program, through film and dialogue and from real-life circumstances. By this means a climate is created where young people are made “work ready” for the deeper effort required in the small group workshops. For young people, then, the day unfolds into a series of closely linked experiences, a journey with the closing line of each activity leading on to the next.

Within the structure of the four hour program students explore risk-management strategies such as: driving for a reason, limiting late night driving, and considering distractions such as music and peer passengers. Other risk management measures covered include no mobile phone use while driving, not driving when impaired (alcohol and other drugs) or fatigued, driving safe cars and driving at safe speeds. Key messages highlight the strategies young people can use to reduce their own and their peers’ risk taking behaviour on the road. This involves recognising that their own behaviour can increase or decrease the risk of the crash for themselves and their friends, practicing planning ahead, formulating problem solving strategies and rehearsing what to say in unsafe situations. The main message encourages planning, remaining calm and in control and helping friends to stay safe.

Fit to Drive places a strong emphasis on developing productive ‘youth-adult partnerships to reduce road trauma. Where Fit to Drive communities have been established for some time, follow up Youth Forums and Projects, supported and sponsored by local government, have emerged that look more deeply at the road safety issues surrounding survival on the roads.

From the initial stages in the development of F2D a key feature of the Year 11 F2D workshop has been that it is one part of road safety education in Victoria. Fit to Drive builds on students’ earlier learning in the core school road safety curriculum. The main road safety curriculum resource in Victorian secondary schools is “Traffic Safety Essentials for Young Road Users” (Hughes & Di Pietro, 2007). This curriculum resource is made available for all schools by the Victorian road safety key partner organisations including TAC, VicRoads, Victoria Police, RACV and DEECD. Through this connection with other road safety programs, including the VicRoads Year 10 “Keys Please” program, young people are reminded of their prior learning.

The Fit to Drive (F2D) workshop has thus provided access for young people to the latest information from the partnership of road safety stakeholders (international, national, state and local) who are committed to strategies to help young people survive on the roads, and who have developed successful policy and strategy measures that have worked to reduce the toll in the community over many years.

3. Road safety and community as demonstrated in F2D

The Fit to Drive program aims to create a safer driving community for young people and to do this effectively has adopted a whole of community approach. It has been recognized that schools are uniquely positioned within the community to play a key role in community action on road safety (Howat et al., 2001), and that effective school health education programs must be able to utilise community resources (Perry, 1999). Both in origins and philosophy the Fit to Drive program is a community-based program with not only strong links to, but - in terms of its successful introduction to a new school - dependent on, the local community. ‘Community’ in this sense refers to the geographical locality of the respective schools. Generally the school will identify itself within a community bounded by a metropolitan local government area, or a town or regional centre.

The Fit to Drive Foundation has appointed part time Community Liaison Officers (CLO’s) who work within communities to develop Fit to Drive partnerships and who are on the lookout for Community Champions who are passionate about, or can be persuaded to make a difference to the

safety and future of young people. CLO's look for people of influence who can quickly tap into the community of resources needed to get a F2D Workshop running. The key supporters of F2D have often been local community leaders (School Principals, Mayors, Councillors, and Magistrates, small and medium size business leaders), sometimes they have been touched directly by road trauma, and many times they are locals who already have an involvement in community road safety and a commitment to the safety of young people. The CLO role is therefore to network, to establish and maintain strategic partnerships with schools, stakeholders and community groups and to recruit schools. Their role is to promote a strategic approach that includes best practice road safety education and resources.

Another dimension of 'community' finds its expression in the way that F2D has developed its own distinct identity and sense of community. The F2D organisation brings together people with different backgrounds, organisational links and roles. However, the development of a collective vision with respect to road trauma prevention, a shared history with the organisation and the cooperative character of the relationships, has meant that F2D has in many respects taken on the character of community - a 'community of interest' (Spinosa et. al., 1997). The energy, enthusiasm and commitment of young people to planning, and taking responsibility, for their own safety that is demonstrated at the workshops is the only catalyst necessary for further community support. The trained university facilitators have their own youth leadership connections in universities, in social networks and sporting and church organisations, and often through local government connections. There has been very little marketing of F2D; the participants share and pass on their own experiences to others.

Working towards the development of an effective road safety culture in a community has its challenges and there are a number of barriers to success, influenced by a range of social, economic and cultural factors. Very often in local communities 'everyone is an expert' in road safety. The 'Common sense' view dominates even though it does not always accurately reflect reality. Many in the community are not aware of the scientific evidence that exists. Key concerns for people in the community are "How do you get young people to hear the message?" Attitudes about young drivers and passengers that are predominantly based on "They think they are bullet proof and are always overconfident" abound. However most communities do respond positively to the notion of peer education and see it as effective pedagogy. People in positions of influence frequently can see the logic of involving young people in the process of change is a better way of achieving change. They see this as more likely to succeed as opposed to 'telling' young people how they should behave and what they should do.

The long term success of the F2D model in Victoria suggests that in the community there is strong potential to commit to a road safety culture within a more holistic 'ethic of care and responsibility' (May et. al. 2008, p. 403) as a corrective to what May describes as the culture of individualism, consumerism and speed. A school road safety education program that is grounded in community may indeed play a vital role in achieving the requisite safety 'culture change' that is required in order to achieve further reductions in road trauma (Johnston 2010, Victorian Road Safety Action Plan).

4. F2D Implementation strategy and Organisational model

An organisational model and structure have been developed to support the partnerships and the community base of the F2D program. The strategic and broad based community partnership that facilitates learning, sharing and networking, as depicted in the F2D partnership model (see Figure 1 below "Strategic and Broad Based Community partnership Model") has been shown to be sustainable, and transferable to other communities. A key to its sustainability has been the culture of systematic quality assurance planning, training and retraining that is required for the facilitators and

presenters of the F2D program. A robust website at f2d.com.au has been developed and contains information about the program and allows schools and a community to book F2D Year 11 workshops and for university students to apply to become facilitators has been developed this year. The F2D Governance model has been redeveloped in 2014 alongside thorough processes, documentation, reporting measures and annual Business Plans (See Figure 2 below “Support and Implementation”).

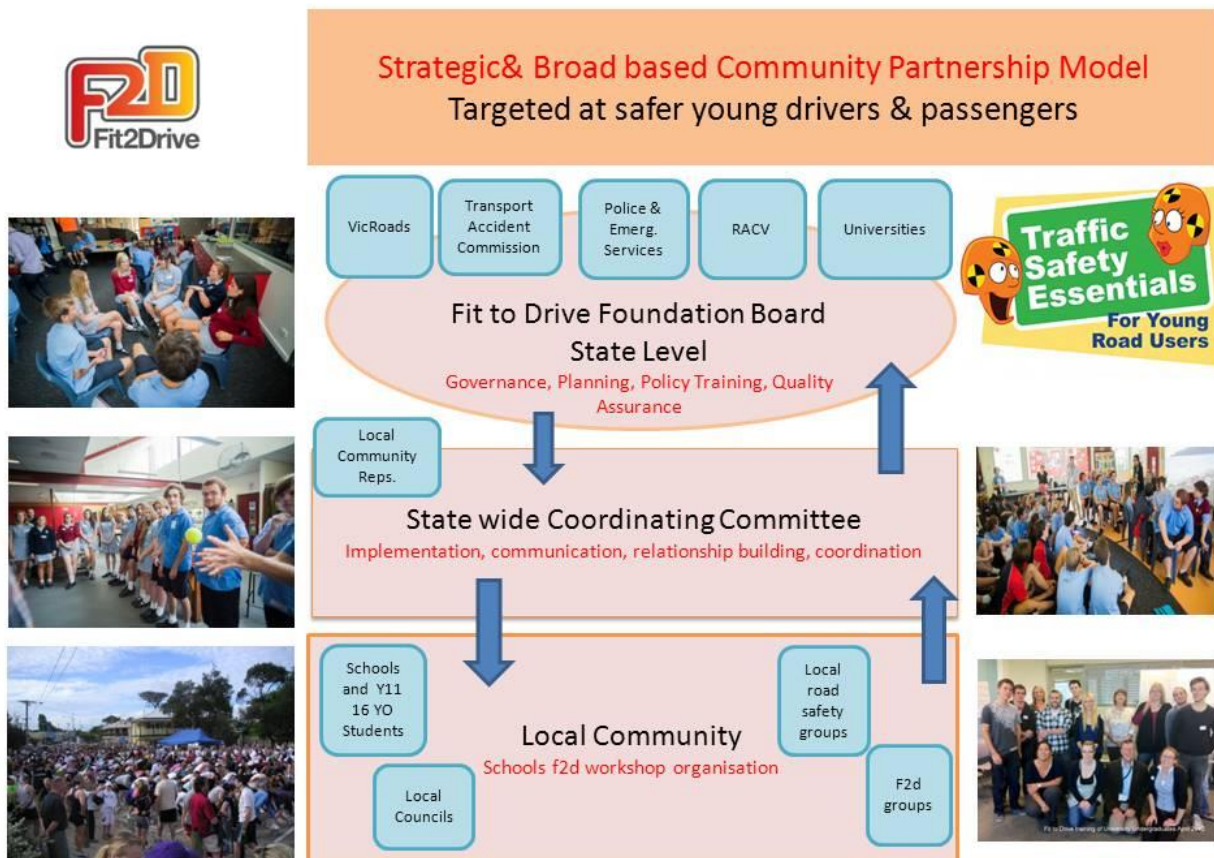


Figure 1: Strategic and broad based community partnership model.

Fit to Drive - delivery/support

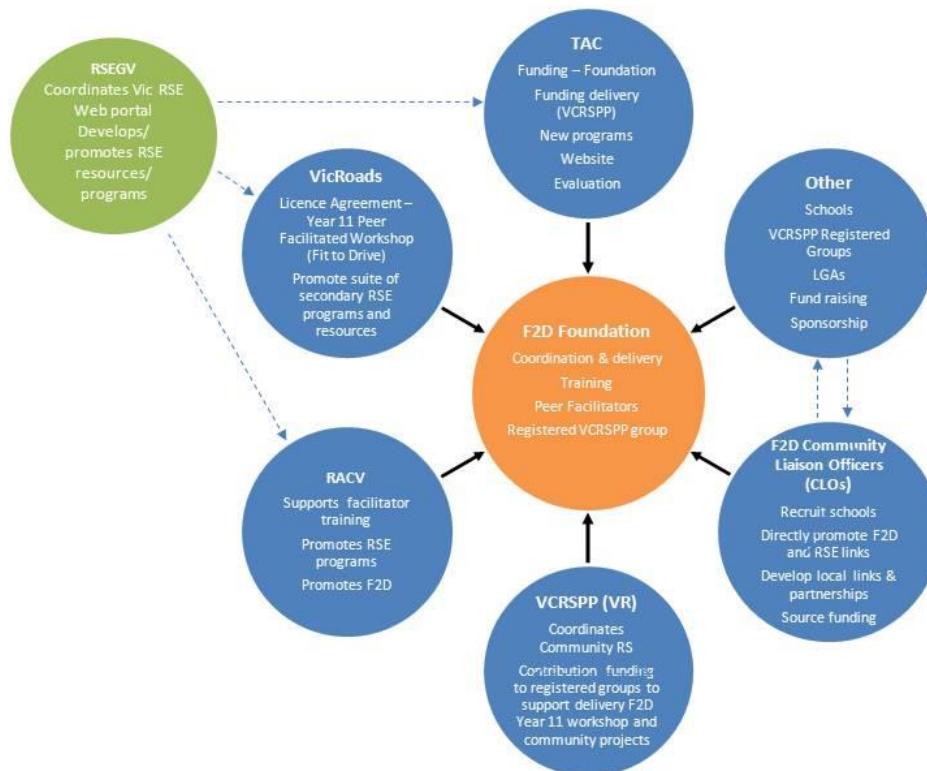


Figure 2: - Delivery/Support

5. What have we learned in building a community-based school road safety program and what is the measure of success?

A critical factor in the success of F2D as a community based organisation focusing on road safety particularly for young passengers and drivers has been the partnership model that has developed. An intrinsic feature of this partnership is the mutual sharing of resources, skills and specialised expertise to create the climate in which communities can undertake successful road safety programs. Since the F2D Foundation was formed in 2008 it has responded to the partners through a reporting process to maintain effective communication channels and to support those organisations in reporting to their funders and parent organisations. Frequently this reporting mechanism has been strengthened by using the extensive networks of individuals who have been involved in the statewide coordination model, described and depicted in this paper. Although there has been little marketing of the program there have been presentations and reports about the program nationally and internationally. It is acknowledged that the chances of long term success are small without community and government support. The essential elements of F2D's success appears to have been:

5.(i). A Collective Purpose and Direction

There has been an overriding sense of purpose and passion for the work that is needed to be done. Everyone involved with F2D has been committed to reducing the death and injury of young drivers. In essence "Be safe be fit to drive". When it comes to road safety young people are vulnerable and overrepresented in road crashes. Everyone involved in F2D sees the need to deliver the program to as many schools as possible. Purpose and direction also means believing in and appealing to the

strength of young people to be safer young drivers and passengers. It means too following the direction of world wide evidence in research and good practice.

5.(ii). Continuous Community Networking

As a local community model F2D is constantly on the lookout for contacts. Effective F2D programs are essentially locally driven with coordination and advice being provided by the Fit to Drive Foundation. The F2D model heavily relies on influential road safety champions who can engage others. The success of the model counts upon there being a reservoir of people who want younger people to be safer and are prepared to be actively involved

5.(iii). Community action and development

This involves being there for the long haul, and is characterized by actions that are progressive, comprehensive and sustainable. The F2D program began over 12 years ago. The F2D program and Foundation has changed in line with new road safety evidence, new forms of communication, new training methods and changed again in the light of the VicRoads research into peer facilitated road safety programs and the continued review of the organisational structure to ensure it can respond to the Victorian road safety partners' key objectives and focus.

In terms of the measures of success the F2D story has been about:

- a. searching for the best road safety practice by partnering with and following the advice of government road safety stakeholders.
- b. using the voice and recognising the energy of young people, the students, university undergraduate facilitators and the community to promote the program.
- c. leading and learning as an organisation. For the F2D Foundation this has meant becoming a not for profit Incorporated Association, registration with the Victorian Community Road Safety Partnership Program** developing formal and informal links with other government and non-government road safety education organisations and financial autonomy.
- d. demonstrating the qualities necessary for effective community engagement. For example the people involved in F2D and who are trained as facilitators and presenters, or are involved in the promotion of F2D, understand the underlying educational principles of F2D believe in the program and are well qualified and committed. Those educational principles for example: affirm that F2D is based on road safety education evidence and research, is a whole of school program and not part of a subject area, depends upon peer education and facilitated discussion, is about empowering young people and recognises the role of local law enforcement in road safety. Characteristically the team of people involved in F2D demonstrate leadership or look for leaders who can sustain and build and strengthen the F2D program. They willingly volunteer or do more than is required of them and there are high levels of trust and optimism. They tend to share their responsibilities and expertise. To develop a successful F2D road safety education program it is essential that local knowledge is respected, the local community is heard and young people's ideas valued and acted upon. Road safety champions required by F2D demonstrate those qualities necessary for effective community engagement. They provide us with a photo fit.
- e. evaluating the success of the F2D program in schools and community settings. The F2D Foundation evaluates the F2D workshop by monitoring the number of students involved in each school, and also by seeking feedback directly from students via an online survey. The F2D Year 11 workshop is also being externally evaluated over the next two years to determine its effectiveness in improving road safety for young people and in helping to build a road safety culture in schools.

In conclusion, using the foundation of best practice traffic safety education resources in schools, the F2D program employs an innovative and strategic blend of educational activities within the half day workshop program to achieve maximum learning impact. The small group workshops, facilitated by university undergraduates, use a structured approach that integrates case studies, individual stories, facts and evidence. With the support of the major organisations in road safety education in Victoria, the program builds on and extends the collaborative ability and potential of the F2D ‘community of local networks’ to initiate and support government road safety actions

**The Victorian Community Road Safety Partnership Program model involves the Victorian Community Road Safety Alliance and Local and Statewide Community Road Safety Groups. The Alliance and the Local and Statewide Community Road Safety Groups work together to improve the safety of Victorian road users.

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