

The social impacts of a road safety education program

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Abstract

As well as targeting knowledge, skills and attitudes of young peoples' road risks, road safety education programs can influence a wider circle of stakeholders and, if this occurs, support the broad range of community road safety measures.

Around 50,000 senior high school students attend the RYDA program each year in Australia and New Zealand. During the recent RYDA revision process, data was collected on indirect impacts on road safety attitudes suggesting wider social value of the program. Stakeholders surveyed included teachers (n=180), parents (n=60), facilitators (n=118) and community volunteers (n=55). Survey responses were voluntary. Teachers were approached at programs while Rotary volunteers/facilitators were asked via email. Parents were contacted via schools. Questions focused on RYDA stakeholders' sense of purpose, driving behaviour, and knowledge of road safety and any other outcomes that could contribute to the overall social value of the program.

Findings are that stakeholders, to varying degrees, report personal satisfaction from helping young people stay safer, increased knowledge and awareness of road safety issues, and sharing of road safety knowledge and skills. Teachers report increased awareness of road safety issues (75%), personal satisfaction from helping learner drivers to be safer on the road (59%) and increased road safety knowledge and skills to share with family and friends (44%). Volunteers (93%) and facilitators (86%) reported personal satisfaction from helping learner drivers to be safer on the road. Parents reported feeling their child was safer on the road (44%) and that they have indirectly increased awareness of road safety issues (37%).

Introduction

As well as targeting knowledge, skills and attitudes of young peoples' road risks, road safety education programs can influence a wider circle of stakeholders and, if this occurs, provide support for the broad range of community road safety measures.

Around 50,000 senior high school students attend the RYDA program each year in Australia and New Zealand. Designed for Year 11/12 students (depending on jurisdiction), it is an attitudinal program designed to raise awareness of both road and personal risks that contribute to crashes, and enable young drivers and passengers to develop strategies for taking action to reduce their risks in future.

The aim of the study was to trace and investigate further the different levels of social impact the program has. While reference will be made to direct impacts on students, I am equally interested in the indirect impacts on teachers (who attend the program with their students), parents (with no direct involvement, but we know through survey data that home conversations occur as a result of their child's attendance), facilitators (these are contracted

and trained to deliver particular RYDA sessions), and Rotary volunteers (acting as organisers in regional areas, day managing the program, and providing logistical support on the day).

The RYDA program consists of six 30 minute linked sessions focusing on different aspects of road and personal risk with an opening and closing address. Students use a Goals, Plans and Strategies workbook (GPS) for the day designed to record facts, thoughts and actions, and for follow-up at school and home.

The sessions are:

Rights & Responsibilities - Key risk areas for young drivers and passengers plus the role of the police. Features impactful videos on decision making.

After the Crash - A presentation by a speaker about the crash that changed their life. Students reflect on how a similar crash would affect their life

Genevieve's story - The story of two girls who made one bad decision, and its ripple effect. Students workshop how to plan ahead for high stakes decision-making.

Speed & Stopping - Practical demonstrations of the physics of speed, stopping and following gap, as well as car safety features and maintenance.

Hazards & Distractions - Strategising to manage distractions and improve hazard perception skills.

The Personality Test - Personality and mind-state role in road risk. Students identify five personality areas, self-assess against them and explore how they may affect their driver or passenger behaviour.

The student learning outcomes are:

- Understand road risks and reflect on long-term life consequences of a crash
- Identify crash factors and realise how they are preventable
- Appreciate how personal factors affect risk
- Develop personal strategies and plans, and consider self-monitoring of actions long term
- See driving as a social responsibility and recognise the protective role of road safety measures, especially the graduated licensing system

The developers used best-evidence road safety education principles supported by an academic Advisory Council in the recent program revision.

Method

During the RYDA revision, data was collected from program stakeholders on indirect impacts on road safety attitudes in relation to the wider social value of the program.

Stakeholders surveyed included teachers (n=180), parents (n=60), facilitators (n=118) and community volunteers (n=55). Survey responses were voluntary. Teachers were approached at programs while Rotary volunteers and facilitators were asked via email. Parents were

contacted via schools. Questions focused on RYDA stakeholders' sense of purpose, driving behaviour, and knowledge of road safety and any other outcomes that could contribute to the overall social value of the program.

Discussion

The study's key finding is that stakeholders, to varying degrees, report personal satisfaction from helping young people stay safer, increased knowledge and awareness of road safety issues, and sharing of road safety knowledge and skills.

Teachers report increased awareness of road safety issues (75%), personal satisfaction from helping learner drivers to be safer on the road (59%) and increased road safety knowledge and skills to share with family and friends (44%). Volunteers (93%) and facilitators (86%) reported personal satisfaction from helping learner drivers to be safer on the road. Parents reported feeling their child was safer on the road (44%) and that they have indirectly increased awareness of road safety issues (37%).

Conclusion

Any road safety education program has an impact depending on its size, whether its content represents best-practice principles, how it is organised, and follow-up message prolongation activities. The study is a starting point for further investigation of how a road safety education program can contribute value to the broad range of road safety measures in the community. The study's findings provide detail about how this works, and how the different stakeholders may take action as a result of the influence of their specific involvement. The research will be continued to assess more specifically the flow-on effects of these influences.