

Development of a road safety program for young offenders

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Abstract

One group of young people particularly at risk of performing unsafe road behaviours is those who have entered or are at risk of entering the justice system. Many of these young people have either committed an offence involving motor vehicles or were involved in high-risk situations involving motor vehicle use.

The Transport Accident Commission (TAC) has developed two programs for young people who have appeared before the courts and been given diversion orders or supervision orders. The aims of the programs are to provide the participants with important information, education and behavior change strategies to be safer road users.

Background

Although school-based educational programs have been created and implemented in an effort to curb young driver and passenger risk, the cohort of young offenders, including motor vehicle offenders, many of whom are disengaged with school, has been largely overlooked. Well-intentioned community groups and organisations interested in young driver safety have developed and implemented programs, particularly for 'at risk' young people. However there is very little evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of most of these programs, and some approaches and programs have been found to either have no effect or have even increased the level of risk among some participants (Harris et al., 2013).

To identify possible opportunities for practical, evidence-based road safety interventions for this group, a series of expert workshops were hosted by the Transport Accident Commission in Melbourne, Victoria during 2014-2015. The workshops included experts from Youth Justice (DHHS) and CARRS-Q as well as forensic psychologists. Through this process it was decided that two interventions would be developed in order to suit the differing needs of the young people involved. One program for offenders aged 15-18 who have been placed on supervision orders; and another program for offenders aged 15-18 who have been given diversion orders by the court to complete a road safety program.

Program Development

Both TAC programs were developed based on the principals of cognitive and behavioural change. Small groups are encouraged to discuss 'case studies' and scenarios allowing for exploration of situations similar to their own experiences, with comparable decisions and consequences. This approach helps foster an environment that is supportive, but also challenges existing belief systems and motivates participants to adopt safer behaviours. Participants are also able to access information about road safety and the graduated licencing system that they may previously not have been able to access. Through guided discussions the participants learn to identify possible barriers and protective factors in their own lives as well as developing behavioural strategies and a personalised plan to help them make safer decisions. Flexible program design has allowed for one-to-one delivery of the program if a group setting is unsuitable for any participant.

Next Steps

It is expected that initial piloting and refinement of the programs will continue during most of 2016. Details of the program content and outcomes of the pilot phase will be presented. A detailed evaluation framework is also being developed to assess the impact of the programs on the future offending and road safety behaviours of the participants. This framework will also be presented.

References

Harris, A., Waller, E. & Wishart, S. (2013) Good practice road safety education and community road safety, paper presented at the Australasian College of Road Safety Conference, Adelaide, 2013.