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## PARSO Birth and Growth

A background to the development and work of the Professional Association of Road Safety Officers (PARSO) in New South Wales Inc.

by Janet Hogge, Road Safety Program Coordinator, Hawkesbury City Council

Until recently, PARSO members talked of the Association as being in its infancy. After more than six years of operation, we now feel we have moved on to another stage of development. This is reflected in the success of the recent PARSO Community Road Safety Summit. The Summit was the highlight in what has been, at times, an arduous journey.

The need for a professional body to represent Road Safety Officers (RSOs) was initially identified in September 1997. Discussion about how this might come about began and, in May 1998 a working group for the founding of a Professional Association of RSOs in NSW was established. Draft objectives, benefits and outcomes were produced to be canvassed with RSOs across the State.

It was clear that most RSOs wanted to form an organisation that was independent. It was agreed that incorporation was the most appropriate method to provide the Association with:

- a framework (constitution) in which to carry out its functions and role;

- a legal identity; and
- provide a simple and affordable means for achieving the above two.

The Professional Association of Road Safety Officers in NSW Inc. (PARSO) was incorporated under the Incorporation of Associations Act, 1984 in May 1999. A number of RSOs who were instrumental in establishing PARSO became members of the first Executive Committee. PARSO's objectives are:

- To provide an umbrella organization for all Road Safety Officers in NSW to do all such things as may be necessary to enhance and expand the NSW Local Government Road Safety Program (LGRSP) including, inter alia, the following:
- To facilitate opportunities for association and interchange of thought and experience among members of the Association.
- To develop a framework for effective education, training and publicity for Road Safety Officers.
- To arrange for an interchange of knowledge and experience of road safety matters between members of the Association.
- To provide opportunities to members for interchange of knowledge and experience of road safety matters between professional bodies both national and international.
- To ensure that specialised knowledge and experience of the Association is available to other organisations.

- To establish and maintain a reference library and collection of designs, drawings, promotional materials, resources, articles, and other information and to print, publish and circulate papers, books and other literary matter relevant and useful to members.
- To represent the views of Road Safety Officers to relevant organisations or bodies.

Since incorporation PARSO has endeavoured to find its place in the road safety landscape. Along the way the organisation has aimed to determine the needs of RSOs and to raise the profile of their work within the Local Government Road Safety Program.

There have been a number of milestones along the way for PARSO and one of the most important of these was the invitation from the Motor Accident Authority (MAA)

to join the Summit Advisory Group which organised the Young Driver Seminar in March 2000. Also significant, was the invitation from the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia (IPWEA) to have a PARSO representative sit on its Road Safety Panel, a specialist panel established in 1995.

To reach its goal of providing RSOs with support while raising the organisation's profile, PARSO has implemented a number of strategies including:

A Christmas card project to raise profile of RSOs in local government and deliver a road safety message to discourage drink driving.

Endorsing The Australian Pedestrian Charter. PARSO was the second organisation, after the West Australian Government to endorse this charter which promotes walking as a serious travel choice.

Organised visits to the Transport Management Centre for RSOs, Planners and Engineers.

Promotional brochure produced for distribution to delegates at the Vic Roads Conference in Melbourne.

Organised for NRMA to present its "Years Ahead" Seniors' Peer Education Program to RSOs.

Lobbied for additional Local Programs Officer at the RTA Sydney Regional Office to cope with the increasing number of metropolitan Councils joining the Local Road Safety Program.

Presentation at the 2004 Local Government Road Safety Conference State-wide RSO meeting.

One of the most significant steps taken by the organisation was the development of a survey to determine the varying conditions under which RSOs are working, and the overall commitment from Councils to the LGRSP. The results of the survey were presented at the LGRSP Conference held at Redfern in 2001. This conference also saw PARSO representation on the debating panel (this was repeated in 2002).

At the first Annual General Meeting (AGM) in October 2000, it was agreed that a new position should be established, that of media officer. A media policy was drafted and later adopted by the Management Committee.

Over the past two years PARSO has moved forward rapidly with the development of its "Outreach" project which provides financial support to RSOs who want to spend time with their peers in other parts of the State for the purpose of professional development. There has also been the development of the PARSO website which provides RSOs with information about upcoming meetings, interesting websites and meeting minutes.

Above all else, PARSO provides a voice for Road Safety Officers, particularly in responding to issues that impact on the delivery of road safety at a local level.

A comprehensive survey undertaken in 2004 by PARSO identified a wide range of issues for RSOs. The survey served to formalise what PARSO members had already been discussing and of which they were aware. Things such as no consistency regarding where an RSO is located within Council; to whom they report; whether they have access to vehicles or car allowance or mobile phones; or what level of support they receive.

The results of this survey have been taken into account by the RTA during its redevelopment of the Council/RTA funding agreements.

In 2004 members agreed to pursue the idea of a Community Road Safety Summit for all road safety practitioners including RSOs, Police, Rotary etc. The inaugural PARSO Community Road Safety Summit was held in February 2005. The Summit proved to be a huge success and delegates were able to vote for the winner of the inaugural PARSO Community Road Safety Award. The outcome of the Summit was the development of an Action Plan to move PARSO into its next stage of development.

Our primary function is to provide support by listening to RSOs and where possible, getting things onto the appropriate agendas. At the same time, we are able to maintain the integrity of individuals who may otherwise feel uncomfortable at 'having a say'.

Managing PARSO has been challenging for all concerned. The ideas come thick and fast, but the resources are at times thin on the ground. A commitment to PARSO, from committee members, involves sharing administrative tasks that would normally be managed by a dedicated salaried position.

For this reason acknowledgement must be made to all those RSOs who were instrumental in the establishment of PARSO and its ongoing development.