

HIGHWAY 35 – A COMMUNITY ARTS APPROACH TO ROAD SAFETY BEHAVIOUR

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INTRODUCTION

In 2008 the Community Programs Section of the Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure (DTEI) provided funding for a community arts project in the South East of South Australia with an aim of raising community consciousness about road safety behaviour. The conditions of funding were that the project would be community driven; have some longevity in the community and that DTEI would be recognised as the funder. Funding was made available as one of several initiatives to assist the implementation of the South East Road Safety Strategy, the first regional road safety strategy in SA. The resulting project, named *Highway 35*, brought together local government, police, community members, Country Arts SA officers, Principals and teachers, with secondary school students (at Lucindale & Keith Areas Schools) and a professional film maker Antony Cirocco. A series of short documentary films about the effects of road trauma in their local areas and television commercials highlighting road safety issues for young people in the South East were the outcome. These were shown on the local WIN TV network in November 2009.

METHOD

The title *Highway 35* emerged from the broad subject of roads and the medium of 35mm film. It was derived from the communities' initial plan to produce a short, high quality road safety documentary for screening in regional cinemas, on regional television and other media outlets. Subsequent discussion modified the project to involve students in small teams, giving them all the opportunity to take several roles in the production process and a more personal slant on the outcomes. County Arts SA' involvement and representation (and let's not forget untiring enthusiasm!) through project officer Tyson Brown was important in the project's success.

A steering committee was formed in May 2008. At its first meeting key road safety issues for young people were identified; Lucindale had the highest rate of young person fatalities per capita in the state, and drink driving, invincibility, hoon driving and travelling as passengers with inexperienced drivers were major concerns at Keith.

The steering committee met several times during 2008, as the project took shape, grew, changed and eventually resulted in two 'boot camps' that students attended to research, conceptualise and produce documentary films and the TV commercials. The project gained recognition for a Community Studies Unit for SACE Stage 1. (1.)

The documentary themes include personal loss (of family and friends), the vital role of police and emergency services in rural South Australia, the individual life changing consequences of road trauma, and the cost of road trauma to communities, support services and individuals. The TV commercials cover the dangers of peer distractions, vehicle overloading (passengers), texting while driving, fatigue, the effects of speeding and alcohol on driving and crash fatality statistics of males aged 18 – 25.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The DVD *Highway 35 Tatiara Boot Camp* – May 18 – 29 2009 was launched in separate events at Lucindale (31st July 2009) and Keith (15th October 2009). Many of the people who had shared their stories for the making of the documentaries attended those 'red carpet' nights. The atmosphere is well described by a DTEI staff member who attended: *"It was interesting seeing the effect of the micro-documentaries and TV commercials on the audience – the talk stopped, then the whispering stopped, then the fidgeting stopped... and at the end there was silence. Someone whispered 'oh boy', a few others wiped their eyes... and it was some time before conversation started again."*

From a State Government Agency perspective, *Highway 35* has been remarkable – for its *process* and *influence*, as much as the more tangible outcomes.

In 2009 Lucindale and Keith Area Schools were jointly awarded the South Australian Area School Leader's Association Best Practice Award for the *Highway 35* project.

CONCLUSIONS

The combination of community, the arts and education has been a powerful way of reaching and touching thousands of people about road safety and the effects of road trauma.

"Learning about road safety is one thing, but actually creating something that can influence

change was something I was proud to be involved in... thankyou for giving us this opportunity to work with some great people, and hopefully, making some sort of difference.” (2.)

And as Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop once said; *“if you think you’re too small to make a difference, you’ve never been bitten by a mosquito.”*

REFERENCES

1. South Australian Certificate of Education
2. Nicholas Drabsch, Jess Cousins, Keith Area School

This extended abstract has NOT been peer reviewed.