

Universal Pre-Driver Education A Targeted Approach for Young People and Their Parents/Carers in Western Australia

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Biography

Debra Zines is currently the Project Officer for the Road Aware Drivers project in Western Australia. Since commencing in January 2003 as one of three Road Aware Project Officers, Debra has been responsible for coordinating the development of a Pre-Driver Course and Parent –Supervisor Workshop. During her career Ms Zines has been involved in a range of positions in WA and NSW, with a focus on health, education and road safety, and most recently as Senior Research Officer at the Office of Road Safety. Ms Zines has a Degree in Human Movement and Exercise Physiology from the University of WA and a Post Graduate Diploma in Health Promotion from Curtin University.

Abstract

A literature review (Elliott, 2000) commissioned by the Road Safety Council of WA in 2000, provided direction to the Road Safety Council about strategic windows of opportunity for road safety initiatives for children and young people in Western Australia.

Following lengthy consultation, the Road Safety Council and Government endorsed a policy position and launched a state-wide road safety program titled Road Aware.

The Road Aware program commenced in January 2004 with three defined and overlapping project areas:

- Road Aware Parents (0-4 years and their parents/carers)
- Road Aware Kids (4-14 years and their parents/carers – with a focus on early primary years)
- Road Aware Drivers (15 – 20 years and their parents/carers/supervisors)

A unique aspect of the Road Aware program is that it has been strategically aligned to an existing project in WA – the School Drug Education Project (SDEP). In his review, Elliott highlighted the benefits for road safety initiatives requiring state-wide implementation, to be aligned with the SDEP.

The School Drug Education and Road Aware Program is co-managed and utilises an existing regional network established by the SDEP in 1998. There are obvious cost and implementation benefits to the State Government of WA in establishing this unique partnership.

One of three key initiatives of the Road Aware Drivers project is the development and evaluation of a pre-driver course and accompanying parent/supervisor workshop.

A significant amount of formative evaluation preceded and contributed to the development of the Pre-Driver Course, including:

- considering findings from the Elliott literature review and additional research;
- drawing on the expertise of stakeholders in generating specifications for course development;
- developing a preliminary methodology for a research agency to define an evaluation plan about the short and long-term outcomes of the course; and

- conducting a pilot with 20 government and non-government schools around the state.

The Pre-Driver Course is part of a comprehensive approach targeting young and new drivers in WA. The course and accompanying parent workshop, which primarily aim to promote supervised driving, strategically connect young people to the graduated licensing process in WA – the Graduated Driver Training and Licensing system.

1. WORKSHOP PAPER

This paper highlights the strategic approach taken toward youth road safety education in Western Australia. It provides a working example of how research findings have been formulated into strategic action through the development of a targeted pre-driver (pre-license) course and a parent-supervisor workshop for young Western Australians and their parents/adult supervisors.

The paper presents a model of best practice for the development of pre-driver (pre-license) initiatives, particularly in regard to the following National Road Safety priority areas:

- youth
- novice drivers
- those living in rural and remote areas and
- extensions to the graduated driver training and licensing system in WA

The Road Aware Driver initiatives provide examples of practical strategies that can be used by a range of road safety professionals in WA to address new and young driver issues in a local and/or state-wide context.

2. BACKGROUND

In 2000, the Road Safety Council of WA commissioned a comprehensive review of road safety practices for children and young people aged 0 to 20 years. The review was undertaken to examine existing road safety programs throughout Australia and overseas, with a view to identifying best practice and evidence-based programs and recommending priorities for Western Australia, taking into account existing structures and budget constraints. The report by Barry Elliott, Review of Good Practice: Children and Road Safety Education was completed in November 2000.

The Elliott report provided direction about pre-driver and youth driver initiatives based on research evidence. It included identifying specific issues about the development and implementation of comprehensive road safety strategies for young people 15 to 20 years of age and making recommendations about future directions.

Following Elliot's report and consultation with working parties, the Road Safety Council (WA) approved a policy document titled, Road Safety Policy for Infants, Children and Young People in Western Australia, describing all the initiatives to be implemented. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services endorsed the policy and launched the Road Aware program in August 2002, with the subsequent appointment of three project officers in December 2002.

Rationale

In 2000, 37 young people aged between 17 and 20 were fatally injured on WA roads. Twenty-eight were occupants of a motor vehicle, 2 were motorcyclists and 7 were pedestrians. In 1999, 42 young people were killed (37 motor vehicle occupants, 3 motorcyclists, 1 cyclist and 1 pedestrian) (Legge, M et al 2001).

Police crash data also shows that in 2000, 186 drivers, 112 passengers and 27 motorcyclists aged between 17 and 20 were taken to hospital compared with 219 drivers, 137 passengers and 29 motorcyclists in 1999 (Legge, M et al 2001) (Palamara, P.G and Stevenson, M. 2000)

Compared with all drivers, young drivers are over-represented in both fatal traffic crashes and crashes requiring hospitalisation. For the period 1987 to 1996, around one third of all drivers killed, and over one third of drivers reported hospitalised by police, were 17 to 24 years of age, yet this age group comprises only 17% of all licensed motor car drivers in Western Australia (Palamara, P.G and Stevenson, M. 2000). In particular, young males and young rural drivers are over-represented in fatal crashes involving young drivers in Western Australia. Per population, Indigenous young people have higher rates of death and hospitalisation from road crashes compared with non-Indigenous young people (Stevenson, M. and Palamara, P.G. 2001).

Driving inexperience, risk-taking behaviour and driving exposure are all major factors that contribute to the high crash risk of young drivers (Cercarelli, L.R. 1999) (Catchpole, J. et al 1994). Within the first six to twelve months of gaining their licence, young drivers in Western Australia are at their greatest risk of crashing (Mayhew, D.R. 1995). During 1990 to 1999, speed was a factor in 43% and alcohol was a factor in 21% of fatal crashes involving 17 to 24 year olds.

To address the issue of driving inexperience, the Western Australian government introduced a graduated licensing system in 2000. Graduated licensing systems are designed to allow learner drivers to obtain initial driving experience under lower risk conditions (Palamara, P.G 2001).

3. INITIATIVES

The major Road Aware Driver project initiatives intended to complement and enhance the Graduated Driver Training and Licensing system in WA, are:

- development, implementation and evaluation of a pre-driver course;
- development, implementation and evaluation of a parent-supervisor workshop;
- continued delivery of a learner driver assistance scheme for equity and access purposes; and
- establishment of a coordinated approach to road safety education activities targeting 15 to 20 year olds and their parents/carers, throughout the state.

4. PRINCIPLES

The Road Aware Drivers project is underpinned by a set of principles to guide and focus efforts and resources in planning road safety education for young people.

Policies and programs are developed:

- ensuring consistency with national and state road safety strategies;
- recognising and working at child developmental levels;
- recognising parents/carers as the primary road safety educators and role models for children and young people;
- based on best practice and consistent with research evidence;
- based on legislation;
- ensuring program sustainability;
- ensuring universality of access to road safety initiatives;
- ensuring consistent and coordinated service delivery;
- providing information and resources for all contexts;

- ensuring appropriate monitoring and evaluation of programs;
- providing universal and targeted programs with effective coordination and partnerships; and
- ensuring consistency with outcomes-focused education.

5. KEY MESSAGES

The overall aim of the pre-driver and youth driver initiatives is to maximise the potential to reduce the involvement of young people in crashes.

The key policy messages relating to pre-drivers and novice drivers (ie 15 to 20 year olds) are that:

- the Graduated Driver Training and Licensing (GDT&L) system presents the Road Safety Council with an opportunity to implement a number of new and effective strategies;
- the twelve principles outlined in the policy paper should be used to guide the development of effective initiatives;
- pre-driver education should be universal;
- effective and evidence-based countermeasures for reducing crashes among newly licensed drivers (in particular young males in rural areas), need to be identified;
- gaining extensive and supervised, practical driving experience whilst a learner driver, is critical;
- educating and promoting parents and carers as supervisors and role models is vital; and
- structures and processes need to be put in place to ensure coordination and implementation of the strategy.

6. FUNDING

The Insurance Commission of WA and the Road Safety Council of WA (via the Road Trauma Trust Fund) support and fund the pre-driver and novice driver initiatives as part of the overall Road Aware Program.

7. PRE-DRIVER COURSE

The course targets pre-drivers in schools and non-school settings (eg TAFE) and will be implemented and evaluated across the state commencing Term 4 2003. A team of writers has developed a teachers' manual, student magazine and student journal for the delivery of this course. Stimulus material (including a video, posters and road-network board) will also be part of the final package. The incentive for students completing the course will be the opportunity to sit for the learner's permit theory (road rules) test at the school, providing a fast-track quick process for obtaining a Learner's Permit (at 16 years of age).

The aims of the course are to:

- Increase awareness about, and promote positive attitudes toward, accumulating optimal hours of supervised driving practice
- Promote positive road-user attitudes and behaviours
- Provide information on road rules and safe driving practices
- Encourage young people to make informed and responsible driving related choices
- Prepare pre-drivers for the acquisition of a Learner's Permit.

The course is linked to the WA Curriculum Framework which is the standard outcomes-based model of education for all schools in Western Australia. A set of course outcomes has

been developed which link to the Health and Physical Education learning area outcomes from the Curriculum Framework. The course outcomes are defined below.

At the completion of the course students will:

- understand the importance of supervised driving practice and road-rule knowledge in the process of becoming a safer driver;
- understand the complexities of safe driving practices;
- analyse risk and plan strategies to avoid road crashes;
- establish personal goals and practice decision-making skills to become a safer driver;
- practice ways to negotiate safer road-user and driving behaviours with peers and others; and
- exhibit positive and responsible road-user attitudes.

Factors such as, over-confidence, (poor) hazard perception skills, inexperience and risk taking, influence road-user behaviours and outcomes for young people. These factors reduce young people's ability to understand and manage the diversity and complexity of the road environment.

In order to increase students' awareness of these risks associated with driving the Pre-driver Course has been developed to include topics such as:

- The Graduated Driver Training and Licensing (GDTL) system and how to obtain a drivers' licence
- Developing positive road-user attitudes and behaviours
- The importance of supervised driving experience
- Driving is a complex activity
- Risks associated with driving, such as speed, alcohol, seatbelts and fatigue
- How to reduce dangers associated with driving
- Factors influencing drivers and passengers and strategies for getting to and from destinations
- Sitting for the learner's permit theory test (road rules test)

All students who participate effectively in the course will receive a Certificate of Achievement. In addition to this, on passing the Learner's Permit theory test, students will be issued with a second certificate. This enables students to be eligible to obtain their Learners Permit after the student has turned 16 years of age.

It is acknowledged that education about driving should primarily remain the responsibility of parents or carers as they can have a significant influence on young people's driving related attitudes and behaviours. As such, the course includes a parent-supervisor education session (workshop) and a number of at home activities that parents and carers are encouraged to complete with their 'pre-learner' at home.

8. A COMPREHENSIVE AND TARGETED APPROACH

The key messages young people receive and process as a result of participating in the Pre-Driver Course, are reinforced by the course being part of a comprehensive and targeted approach. In response to Christie's comments relating to the general ineffectiveness of education programs being able to change attitudes and behaviour unless part of other ancillary behaviour change programs (Christie R, 2002), the Pre-Driver Course has been developed to ensure complimentary programs and structural links.

The Pre-Driver Course and Parent-Supervisor Workshop are provided as the pre-cursory programs for the Graduated Driver Training and Licensing System in WA. The WA Department for Planning and Infrastructure's Licensing Services have strongly supported this

connection, by ensuring that students can gain a certificate from the school (on passing the road rules test at the school) to validate for a Learner's Permit at any Licensing Centre in the state. Licensing Services will also support, where possible, the Parent-Supervisor Workshops conducted throughout the state.

The Parent-Supervisor Workshop provides a critical point at which the 'pre-learner' and their parent or supervisor can discuss and negotiate practise for the learner phases of the Graduated Driver Training and Licensing System. The extent to which this part of the overall program is promoted and implemented will in part determine the effectiveness of the workshop. The evaluation will include process, impact and outcome measures associated with the Parent-Supervisor Workshop.

9. PARENT-SUPERVISOR WORKSHOP

A 1½-hour parent-supervisor workshop has also been developed to complement the Pre-driver course. This workshop will be made available to school communities during 2003 as an additional session aligned to the Pre-driver Course. Parents/supervisors and 'pre-drivers' will be encouraged to attend the workshop together. The aim of the workshop is to increase awareness about, and promote positive attitudes toward, accumulating optimal hours of supervised driving practice for learner drivers.

10. EVALUATION

Formative evaluation

A significant amount of formative evaluation preceded and contributed to the development of the Pre-Driver Course and Parent-Supervisor Workshop, including:

- considering findings from the Elliott literature review and sourcing additional research;
- drawing on the expertise of stakeholders in generating specifications for course development;
- developing a preliminary methodology for a research agency to define an evaluation plan about the short and long-term outcomes of the course;
- conducting an audit of materials from around Australia; and
- conducting a pilot with 20 government and non-government schools around the state.

Pilot and Feedback

A pilot of both the draft Pre-Driver Course and draft Parent-Supervisor Workshop materials have been conducted between May – July 2003. The pilot involved over 600 students from approximately 20 government and non-government schools in metropolitan and rural locations. As part of the pilot process, focus group interviews were conducted with teachers and students to gather detailed feedback on the draft course. Feedback has also been sought from key stakeholder groups in order to gather feedback on both the education and road safety content of the materials. The feedback has been collated and subsequently incorporated into the course materials.

Evaluation

The Road Aware Drivers project is being evaluated at various levels, including performance indicators, monitoring reports for the funding agencies and the conduct of a long-term outcome evaluation.

The outcome evaluation is being conducted by the Injury Research Centre at the University of WA and will include impact, process and outcome measures (both short and long-term). The longitudinal aspect of the evaluation will include measuring outcomes over 3 - 4 years in order to track the crash record of the cohort.

In broad terms the expected outcomes of the two initiatives to be evaluated are:

- an increase in awareness about accumulating optimal hours of supervised driving practice in all conditions;
- a reduction in the crash and injury rate of novice drivers participating in a pre-driver course;
- an increase in the number of hours of supervised driving experience among learner drivers participating in a pre-driver course and a parent/adult workshop;
- a greater capacity to analyse crash, injury and hospital data by linking to other data sources available from key stakeholders; and
- implementation of sustainable pre-driver, parent and community programs in all regions and accessible to the proposed user groups across the state.

11. CONCLUSION

It is recognised that school programs support young people in making choices and developing self-management skills about their future driving and road-user behaviour. Road safety education is a shared concern for parents/carers, teachers and the community. A comprehensive approach to road safety education is recognised as a far more effective strategy.

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