

# **Overcoming the Cultural Divide**

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## **Abstract:**

This paper reports specifically on 2 successful components of the Charles Darwin University's "Remote Areas Driver Education Program" namely:

- (i) The community based driver instructor program
- (ii) Driving training and licensing in Alice Springs and Darwin Correctional Facilities.

These programs deal in particular with the high incidence of unlicensed drivers within Aboriginal Communities in the Northern Territory and the disproportionately high representation of indigenous people in fatal and serious car crashes.

The understanding of community and cultural dynamics is pivotal to the success of this program. By breaking down many of these barriers well over 3,000 community people have gained their drivers license.

## **Facts:**

- Indigenous people make up 30% of the NT population but account for over 50% of our fatal and serious road crashes.
- Indigenous people are three times more likely to be involved in fatal and serious road crashes.
- Unlicensed drivers are 17% more likely to be involved in fatal and serious road crashes.

## **Issues:**

- Unlicensed driving remains a major road safety, health and social problem for Indigenous communities in the Northern Territory. It is also a major contributing factor to their over representation not only in motor vehicle crashes but also incarceration rates.
- Driver training and licensing for remote and isolated communities has in the past been mostly inaccessible and costly leading to members driving unlicensed and without appropriate training.
- Mainstream driver training programs are culturally inappropriate and do not address literacy and environmental needs of indigenous people in the NT. Subsequently leading to high failure rates in licensing particularly in communities where English is used as a second language (70%).

## **Program Outcome:**

- Increase in the number of licensed drivers in rural, remote and isolated communities.
- Increased access to driver training and licensing
- Reduction in Indigenous involvement in road fatalities and trauma.
- Increase in road safety and road law awareness.
- Reduction in costs to community, insurance companies and emergency services.

- Reduction in incarceration rates particularly non-licensed indigenous people.
- Long-term quality training linked with employment outcomes and social justice.
- Access and equity for remote indigenous communities to licensing and training.

The paper will further discuss programs, issues, partnerships and resources developed to support the program.

## **Northern Territory Environment.**

The Northern Territory has a very unique environment. The population base of the NT is roughly

- 200,000 people spread over a very large area.
- Of these 30% are Aboriginal

Of these 30%

- 70% reside in remote communities
- Most speak English as a second or third language
- Many live in low socio-economic conditions with high unemployment, poor inadequate housing and poor health.

Most communities do not have education higher than year 12.

Long distances to travel for shopping or mainstream medical assistance add to the high risk of car crash involvement.

## **History of Remote Area Driver Training Unit**

The Remote Areas Driver Training program was first established in 1997 as a partnership between Northern Territory University (NTU) now Charles Darwin University and Territory Insurance Office (TIO), TIO being the primary funding body through its Motor Accident Compensation ACT. The programs main goal was to deliver and facilitate driver training in remote and isolated communities in the Northern Territory who have in the past had little access to training through isolation, cultural and financial restraints.

Initially the Northern Territory University was contracted to deliver heavy vehicle training in these communities. With more communities wanting to take on govt contracts to maintain roads etc in their area, training became essential. These contracts would see more money flow into the communities. Unfortunately it opened a minefield in training needs. Many people were found not to even possess the basic C Class (car) licence let alone be able to gain a higher level of licence.

Thus the task ahead was to first deliver C Class driver training and licensing.

## **Challenges to training**

- Remoteness of communities
- Remote versus Urban lifestyle
- Traditional lifestyles still intact
- English as second language
- Transient nature of the people

In this environment, social and cultural factors cannot be ignored when delivering training. It is also understandable that services developed for mainstream population are not always successful when they are applied to Aboriginal communities. Remoteness and distance of Aboriginal communities makes traditional mainstream training expensive, non viable and unsustainable.

Another factor contributing to the lack of importance of driver training and road safety issues in communities was their isolation from other communities and an unawareness of the high road toll effecting indigenous people.

## **Making driver training relevant and accessible**

There are many critical factors that need to be considered when developing programs for these communities.

- ✓ Local customs, beliefs and community dynamics.
- ✓ Traditional and contemporary management and decision-making systems, which govern the community
- ✓ Stage and pace development.
- ✓ Community ownership

We need to consider new innovative and relevant ways for dealing with Aboriginal Road Safety and Driver Training.

## **Remote Areas Driving Instructor Program:**

One of the initiatives of the program was to develop a community-based program to train local indigenous people to be trainers within their communities. The task of the unit was then to develop an appropriate program, which would provide nationally accredited training and modify it to suit the community way of doing things whilst being relevant, meaningful and address literacy needs of participants. The success of this initiative would also facilitate and ensure community ownership.

The outcome of the training would see the successful participants issued with a Restricted Driving Instructors Endorsement allowing them to deliver training within their community. In consultation with Transport & Works, Dept of Motor Registry, Department of Education and Police a course was developed so as to at least meet minimal requirements of Motor Vehicle Registry and other stakeholders

## **Delivery Of Instructor's Course.**

The training consists of 78 hours of instruction that covers both theory and practical application. The theory component covers mainly road law and understanding and theory behind safe and defensive driving. The practical aspect involves extensive in car training including defensive and economical driving practices, vehicle maintenance and correct and safe driving techniques. To overcome some of the literacy problems, school teachers and adult educators are often invited onto the course so they are then able to deliver the theory component, Road Law & Understanding to learner drivers leaving the

Aboriginal instructors to deliver the in car practical component. Training is delivered on site in the community.

Road safety issues particular to that community are taken into account and are approached with the view of facilitating the development of possible solutions during the program.

### **Resources developed:**

An issue, which immediately springs to mind when delivering any sort of indigenous training, is relevant resources. In the past all resources for driver education were geared up for mainstream student and were not indicative or relevant to the driving environment of indigenous people. Test for Learners licences where multi-choice and rather challenged their understanding of literacy rather than testing of road law.

The challenge thus was to then develop resources to accompany training programs that

- Dealt with varying levels of literacy and English as a second language
- Recognised the indigenous way of doing things, lifestyles and customs.
- Addressed both the learning and driving environment and
- Included relevance, ownership and road safety issues pertaining to indigenous people and their communities.

One of the most successful resources developed to date has been a national Indigenous Road Safety Video, "Corrugations to Highway" made by indigenous people for indigenous people taking into account the Aboriginal way of doing things. This project was the result of a collaborative partnership between CDU, WA Roadwise, WA Police and SA Police and continues to receive accolades by all national stakeholders as being truly successful and relevant.

Other resources developed by CDU are resource books of road rules, flip charts, and assessments/test used for licensing on road law, videos and programs/workshops.

## **Driver Training and Licensing in Northern Territory Correctional Facilities:**

Darwin and Alice Springs correctional centres comprise roughly of 80% indigenous inmates. Of these it was discovered that a greater proportion of the indigenous groups didn't have licences. Most never had a licence to begin with whilst the rest had lost their licence through disqualification from drink driving offences. These groups are indicative of what statistics in the wider NT indigenous communities however these groups have ended up in the correctional centres mainly as a result of motor vehicle offences.

A theoretical correlation was made between these unlicensed drivers of this group and recidivist rates. Whilst nothing was set in concrete it was considered that part of the issues that may have resulted in part to this groups incarceration was lack of access to driver training and licensing and low literacy levels of inmates which also in the past prevented their ability to gain a licence. To this end it was decided to conduct driver training and licensing within the prison for low security inmates in an effort to lower the recidivist rates.

Charles Darwin University (CDU) was initially consulted as a result of the success of our remote areas driver education programs to provide advise, support and resources for the program. Through the aboriginal reintegration officer (Judy Walsh) at Alice Spring prison, many partnerships were developed to ensure the success of the program and to guarantee all aspects, issues and stakeholders were covered. Partnerships were developed between stakeholders such as Tangentyre Council, Dept infrastructure and planning, NT road safety, motor vehicle registry, Dept of Justice and CDU.

These partnerships resulted in a positive, affirmative approach to getting things done and problem solving. There were many barriers to overcome such as confirmation of ID, security, sourcing of funding, sourcing of providers, legal issues, overcoming literacy issues and being able to physically deliver practical driver training to prisoners within the correctional facility environment.

Many barriers were encounter initially. Some were

- Resistance by prison staff and management to the new initiative.
- Funding of Training
- Acceptance of prison ID by Motor Vehicle registry as part of licensing requirements
- Testing and assessing of inmates for licensing
- Long licence suspension periods even though inmates had not ever held a licence.
- Practical training location outside prison
- Costs of drink driver education courses and costs of learners and provisional licences
- Eyesight test with in prison as medical care was contracted out and did not cover this area.
- Lack of prison staff to volunteer to accompany prisoners on driver training practice.

These are just a few issues that presented themselves.

The program now runs successfully in both prisons although there are still problems arising particularly when staff changes and momentum drops. Charles Darwin University now delivers the training under its Remote Area Program funded by Department of Education. We plan to train 100 inmates per year across both prisons to assist them to gain their drivers licence. CDU also delivers the drink driver education course which is compulsory in NT for people to regain their licence after a drink driving conviction. The misconception amongst

indigenous people is that if you don't have a licence you can't lose it. Thus we have many people in gaol with drink driver convictions that have never held a licence. This creates another problem. The cost of the course is also an issue that needs to be overcome, as it is a mandatory fee for service course as per legislative requirements.

Last year 47 prisoners were trained and licensed through the program and to date only one has returned into the system. However it is too soon to tell if this is a consistent result but first reports seem very promising.

### **Conclusion:**

In conclusion driver training and licensing for remote indigenous people presents itself with a whole gamut of issues not experienced by mainstream population. Low levels of literacy and English as second language create impediments to the process that need to be overcome.

For many remote communities in the past access to driver training and licensing has been nearly non-existent. The lack of driver training and licensing has far reaching implication as seen by the high incarceration rate of non-licensed indigenous people in the Northern Territory.

Mainstream training and licensing programs are minimally effective when dealing with indigenous community groups. For any programs to be successful for these groups they need to be targeted and relevant to allow participants to take ownership of them. Only by people having community ownership of driver training and licensing can we then have positive road safety outcomes resulting in the long-term reduction of the high rate of indigenous involvement in fatal and serious crashes in the Northern Territory.

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