

Fire services role in an all of community response targeting young drivers

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Introduction

Young and novice drivers comprise only a small proportion of licensed drivers but are over represented in fatalities and injuries related to crashes on our roads. As the authorised road accident rescue agencies in Victoria, Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB) and Country Fire Authority (CFA) play a key role in emergency response. As a result fire services have a clear understanding of the very real cost of road crashes and a role to play in injury prevention.

Due to their road rescue responsibilities MFB/CFA received frequent requests to deliver road safety information from secondary schools and agencies involved in the delivery of services to young people. Whilst keen to make a positive contribution to the improvement of road safety amongst young and novice drivers and their passengers the delivery was ad hoc. Also of concern was that strategies used to convey information were not age appropriate, may have relied on shock tactics and did not reflect current good teaching practice.

Research

Before fire services could commit to a more structured involvement in contributing to the road safety of young drivers it was important that analysis and consideration be given to:

- Current road safety research and road crash data.
- Who were the key agencies in road safety in Victoria?
- What programs were on offer to young and novice drivers?
- What value or assistance could fire services add to these programs from the perspective of the program coordinator?
- What resources could fire services contribute in a sustainable way to existing programs?

As a result of the research undertaken the Fit to Drive (F2D) program was identified as the most appropriate program for the fire services to become an effective partner to make a positive contribution to the safety of young people on the road.

Method

F2D allows local communities to coordinate a range of resources and activities for young people developed by road safety agencies and stakeholders including Transport Accident Commission, VicRoads, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, RMIT University, local government, Victoria Police, RoadSafe, RACV, MFB and CFA. F2D is presented to teachers as a whole school curriculum approach, linking core traffic safety education programs reaching all students in Years 10, 11 and 12.

The aim of F2D is to:

- Support young people to make positive choices in relation to driving and road use;
- Raises awareness in young people of the risks and factors that contribute to road crashes in their age group;
- Affirm the ability of young people to change cultural attitudes and supports them to take ownership and responsibility;
- Reduce high-risk behaviour among young drivers and passengers using peer education strategies in order to help them avoid crashes and resist peer pressure influences;
- Raises local community awareness of road safety issues through local media coverage of the school activities [1].

A key element of the F2D is the Year 11 half day workshop. The workshops consist of facilitated peer group discussion lead by trained university students, short high impact presentations and practical activities by road safety agencies and local community stakeholders.

The fire service developed a case study of a car crash involving young people to compliment and enhance the messages of the workshop. The activity is designed to engage the students by using facilitated group discussions, challenging their values, empowering them to take ownership of the issues and take responsibility for the choices they make as a road user. A key factor is ensuring the discussion is relevant to the student's stage in life and experiences.

The students are introduced to the facts of the case study then broken up into small groups with the focus on;

- Choices made by all involved;
- The influence of peer pressure;
- Who is responsible;
- The impacts of the crash.

The small group work is followed by a facilitated large group discussion with all the students. This enables the students to share with each other what they believe are the key factors that lead to the crash. The student's take ownership of the issues, reflecting on their own values and develop solutions they would be comfortable using if they found themselves in similar circumstances or unsafe situations as a driver or passenger.

Results and discussion

An evaluation of the fire service case study was undertaken by the MFB in 2007. A survey methodology was used for the evaluation where students from ten schools who participated in the half day workshop completed a pre and post questionnaire. Results indicated some positive shift in student perceptions of the level of risk between pre and post program survey responses, associated with selected behaviours that related to some of the program's key messages and issues. One of the strengths of the case study seems to lie in the targeting of specific messages and issues around road safety for young people at this key stage, as they learn to drive and travel more independently as a passenger in cars driven by peers [2].

The F2D model has created strong ties and partnerships between the major road safety agencies, local government and locally based community stakeholders (Eg; schools, RoadSafe, local services clubs, local health networks, local businesses). This collaborative approach has opened networks with a number of benefits for the program and its partners including:

- The sharing of information and resources;
- The availability of expert advice;
- Coordination of road safety resources at the local level;
- Ability to raise funds and attract sponsorship for road safety programs;
- Accredited training for facilitators and presenters [1].

These attributes among others have established F2D as a stable and sustainable model attractive to road safety stakeholders and local communities across Victoria. The fire services have finite resource, this program allows us to maximise those resources to best effect delivering a quality road safety resource to young people.

It is important to highlight, for F2D to be successfully replicated there must be a strong commitment from local partnerships to support the program. To establish the program a substantial amount of work needs to be undertaken at a local level, including setting up of a local committee, promotion and implementation, managing schools and road safety resources, and a program budget [3].

Conclusions

F2D commenced in 2001 in 18 secondary schools in the municipalities of Frankston and Mornington Peninsula, in 2008 the program will be delivered across the state into approximately 185 secondary schools in 26 municipalities and demand is growing.

The program demonstrates how individual agencies like the fire services in unique partnerships can make a positive contribution to a model based on relationships between key stakeholders as an all of community response to keep young people safe on the roads.

Reference

1. F2D Statewide Steering Committee et al. Draft Business Model for Fit to Drive: 12-30 (2006)
2. Dynamic Outcomes Consultants et al. Metropolitan Fire Brigade Component of the Fit to drive Program Evaluation Report: 8, 30 (March 2008)
3. Nucleus Group et al. Fit to Drive – Future Business Model, Transport Accident Commission: 10-12 (June 2008)