

The Fatality Free Friday road safety campaign - A strategy for mobilising the community ownership to improve road safety

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Abstract

Fatality Free Friday is designed to focus public attention on road safety to encourage all road users to actively think and drive safely.

The core goal of the campaign is to ensure that there are no road crash fatalities around Australia during the target day. It is a call to action that serves as a platform for a targeted and ongoing approach to road safety nationally.

Road safety is a complex issue but we believe that if drivers consciously think about road safety and safe driving for just one Friday in the year, that day's toll - statistically about 5.3 deaths - could be reduced to zero. Just one 'Fatality Free Friday'.

Ultimately, it is our aim to use this approach to improve road safety awareness not only on one specific day but to enhance road user behaviour every day of the year.

Australians are urged to 'take the pledge' of Fatality Free Friday – it's a promise to 'drive to stay alive'. *The aim is to see a zero road toll for 24 hours.*

This type of approach has been successfully used in other fields. Examples of these programs include environmental and community campaigns. There is strong evidence to suggest that these campaigns have been highly successful in not only raising community awareness on a specific issue but are also successful in actively facilitating public action to assist in addressing the issue.

Whilst there has been some research into community based campaigns, little research is available on the full scope of this kind campaign in terms of road safety.

Since commencing in 2007 Fatality Free Friday has rapidly expanded into a national campaign that has successfully engaged community action on road safety. The campaign provided a focal point to help engage community activity whilst also providing a central and consistent theme for individual road safety activities.

Keywords

Community, road safety, awareness campaign

Introduction

What is Fatality Free Friday?

Fatality Free Friday is based on a Community Mobilization Strategy to increase public awareness and action on the issue of road safety. The inaugural Fatality Free Friday was held on the 27th of April 2007 and coincided with the first United Nations Global Road Safety Week. The initiative was established in Queensland and was expanded into a national event.

Fatality Free Friday provides a unique opportunity to raise community awareness on road trauma.

The overall strategy for the campaign is built around the concept of actively seeking to engage public awareness on Road Safety and to encourage a level of community ownership on the issue. This approach uses a number of media avenues to assist in initially building awareness and encouraging active participation.

It aims to build a cumulative level of awareness on the issue with the aim of positively altering road user behaviour. Fatality Free Friday differs from conventional road safety campaigns by emphasising these key areas:

- An individual can make a difference
- Personal responsibility and accountability
- Positive reinforcement via community action
- Community Ownership

This type of approach has been successfully used in other fields. Examples of these programs include environmental campaigns such as Earth Hour and Clean Up Australia Day as well as Public Health Campaigns such as Red Nose Day and the Think Pink Program. Whilst there has been some research into community based campaigns, little research is available on the full scope of this kind campaign in terms of road safety.

However, there is strong evidence to suggest that other campaigns have not only been highly successful in raising community awareness on a specific issue but are also effective in actively facilitating public action to assist in addressing the issue.

Methods

The Fatality Free Friday program is designed as a public information campaign that engages greater community mobilization on road safety. It employs a diverse range of activities to promote its goals and objectives whilst increasing public action on road trauma.

From its inception in 2007, Fatality Free Friday utilised a communication campaign as its primary marketing strategy.

The Centre for Health Promotion at the University of Toronto (1991) stated that communication campaigns are goal oriented attempts to inform, persuade or motivate behaviour change to a well defined and large audience. The activities involve media, interpersonal support and community events. The above definition contains four basic elements.

1. Campaigns are goal-oriented.
2. Aimed at a large audience
3. Occur during a given time period.
4. Involve an organized set of communication activities.

The Fatality Free Friday campaign uses these strategies to engage community ownership on the road safety issue. Australians are urged to 'take the pledge' of Fatality Free Friday – it's a promise to 'drive to stay alive'. *The aim is to see a zero road toll for 24 hours.*

The structure of a public information campaign

In a 2003 report on community mobilization and public awareness campaigns, the Oregon State University Family Policy Program provided the following overview on the key elements of a successful public campaign:

A public information campaign is a strategic, comprehensive, and inclusive initiative undertaken to raise awareness, enhance knowledge, and increase commitment to specific, positive action.

- *A **strategic** campaign is intentional - guided by clear desired outcomes.*
- *A **comprehensive** campaign aligns many activities in order to achieve a desired outcome.*
- *An **inclusive** campaign addresses multiple audiences – parents, neighbours, and employers – across diverse sectors and populations in a community.*

Effective public information campaigns combine three strategic activities to achieve community outcomes.

*First, widespread **media increases community awareness***

*Second, **educational events and resources enhance knowledge** among targeted community members.*

*Third, **referral and linking services provide action opportunities** to people who are committed to act on the issue.*

Strategic media activities

A campaign of this nature does require significant media exposure in order to increase public awareness. From a media perspective Fatality Free Friday was very well supported by Channel 7, Channel 9, Channel 10, NBN, Radio 4BC and News Limited. There was significant National Television, Radio and Print coverage leading up to the day itself.

In the final week Radio Station 4BC aired reminders at the end of each news bulletin on the hour and on the day itself involved Queensland Police in a proactive exercise of rewarding good driving behaviour. In addition the event received strong radio air time around the country both as a news story and as a community service.

Both the Queensland and Northern Territory Police also used the campaign to further highlight road safety and actively promote the Fatality Free Friday mission via their media departments.

Founder Russell White appeared on Channel Seven's Sunrise program .Channel Nine's "The Car Show" featured a specific Road Safety segment and a number of celebrity endorsements supporting the day were aired on the nightly news programs of several television networks and other media outlets.

Some examples of high profile support included The Queensland Minister for Transport the Hon John Mickel MP, Shadow Minister for Public Transport and Traffic Management Mr Tim Nicholls, Scott Prince and Craig Wing from leading NRL clubs and the entire field of V8 Supercar drivers.

A structured media and public relations campaign from Business Communication Management was the corner stone of the project and this generated significant media coverage.

Television coverage was strong with Channel 9 Gold Coast; Win TV and NBN all showing stories. Press coverage was via the Courier Mail, The Age, The Herald Sun, Townsville Bulletin and the Gold Coast Bulletin.

Educational events and resources

Fatality Free Friday used a number of social marketing strategies to help facilitate community awareness and action. The primary information portal for the campaign is the Fatality Free Friday web site. Implemented for the 2007 Campaign and expanded in 2008, the web site was the hub of the program. It provided universal access to the pledges as well as the opportunity to add extra comment in addition to media information. As a result Fatality Free Friday instantly topped Google's loose-string search within a week and was linked to by private web sites and blogs, news sites and Government and community web sites.

The 2008 campaign also featured a more holistic approach to the event branding. All Fatality Free Friday promotional items featured a consistent branding message. A number of additional promotional resources were also produced for the 2008 campaign and were used to promote the program to the community and corporate sectors. These resources included posters that were distributed to a number of corporate and community outlets, Fatality Free Friday bumper stickers and key rings. Each of these featured Fatality Free Friday branding.

These resources help to establish a consistent message and brand awareness for the event.

Apart from the media activities that promoted the overall goal for the event, Fatality Free Friday also provided an opportunity for various educational activities.

Referral linking and community action opportunities

The third foundation for the event was to look at opportunities to source support from government, the corporate sector, community groups and the public in general. Obtaining this support would help to compliment the media activities and facilitate a sense of community ownership. This was an essential ingredient to the overall impact of the event and its long term sustainability. Clearly a national community action campaign requires a significant level of resourcing and the broader support of other community based organisations to help promote the campaign around the country.

Fatality Free Friday is based on a targeted strategic plan. Communities which structure their road safety activities round a strategic plan are therefore more likely to be successful in reducing road trauma than communities which do not have such a plan to direct their efforts.(Cairney 2001)

In both the 2007 and 2008 campaigns specific support was first sought from the Queensland state government. The Office of Road Safety in Western Australia and the Northern Territory Government were also among the first state authorities to support the program. This principle support assisted in obtaining additional cross promotion and awareness activities with other

state departments such as police, transport departments and other emergency services. Local councils from around the country were also key partners in the campaign. Each council used the Fatality Free Friday campaign as a vehicle to help promote local road safety programs. It is our view that these relationships with local government are vital to the overall structure of the event and will need to be expanded on as the program develops in the coming years.

The corporate sector was also a significant partner group. For the 2008 campaign corporate organisations were encouraged to become actively involved in the program via the FFF Alliance program. This initiative provided a number of membership levels which provided a range of benefits and access to Fatality Free Friday resources.

Finally, the event also served as a central campaign that smaller community based programs could align themselves with in order to increase local awareness. These programs included road safety programs from various local councils and schools. In addition community activist groups like Working Against Culpable Driving used Fatality Free Friday as promotional tool to increase road safety awareness in their local area.

Results

Fatality Free Friday proved again to be highly effective in laying the groundwork for creating effective volunteer networks, crafting more inclusive communities at the local and state levels, building positive community environments, and linking formal systems to community concerns and action as a pre-cursor to enhancing community Road Safety. The campaign would also provide a number of opportunities for additional research and evaluation on the effectiveness of this style of community road safety at the national, state and local levels. Henderson (1991) suggested that road safety mass media campaigns can achieve, and have achieved, the following:

- Increased awareness of a problem or a behaviour;
- Raise in the level of information about a topic or issue;
- Help in the formation of beliefs, especially where beliefs are not held formally;
- The establishment of a topic as more salient;
- Sensitisation of the audience to other forms of communication.

The results from the two previous Fatality Free Friday campaigns have demonstrated that the event provides a strong framework for the ongoing delivery of a road safety philosophy that enhances community ownership on the issue. Cairney (2002) highlighted that ownership depends on the community believing not only that the solutions are within its power, but that it has a responsibility to implement these solutions.

Fatality Free Friday served as a vehicle to enhance the community ownership and action in reducing road trauma.

The event proved to be highly effective in establishing partnerships with local government authorities, corporate organisations and associated community networks to achieve a greater focus on road safety outcomes at a local community level. The event also provides a structured theme for road safety campaigns beyond the main target day itself.

Overall with 6 out of 8 states recording a zero road toll we feel that we are progressing towards our goal, it did achieve a great deal of awareness and the efforts were encouraging for

the future, however the result also vividly demonstrates that there is a lot of work that still needs to be done to encourage people to be more aware of the hazards on the road and to take responsibility for their actions behind the wheel.

This result was significant and is a good foundation for future awareness programs.

Especially given the fact that this was only the second event, the momentum of the Fatality Free Friday program continues to grow. The event achieved its primary aims in terms of increased public awareness and the event was successful in engaging more people to look at what individuals could do to improve road safety in the community.

These results have provided a very good platform to build on in 2009 and beyond. It also highlights that this is a long term project. The fact that the majority of states reported a 0 road toll for the day was a great result. This is certainly very encouraging and is a strong foundation for the ongoing success of Fatality Free Friday.

Future objectives and challenges

Reducing the number of road deaths will ultimately remain the core philosophy of the program. However, the overall effectiveness of the campaign in increasing community action and awareness would be worthy of future research and evaluation.

In an Austroads Report on Community Road Safety Cairney (2002) and Cairney, Douglas & Frier (2006) stated that while the objective of community road safety is always the reduction of road trauma, are also a number of subsidiary objectives as well. These include:

- Creating an informed community
- Creating informed activism
- Mobilising local resources to road safety ends
- Promoting effective action
- Integrating activities
- Raising awareness
- Influencing key stakeholders

Both previous Fatality Free Friday campaigns have been successful in achieving these objectives and are certainly worthy of ongoing evaluation.

Cairney highlights however that specific evaluation of Community Road Safety programs in terms of crash reductions is very difficult due to a number of methodological challenges.

A potential way to overcome these issues would be to use a multi-level evaluation model. This would look at process evaluation for all activities and outcome evaluations in terms of knowledge and behavioural change.

Future evaluations could focus on the awareness of the campaign, its message in the community, the overall market reach, how well the event is structured and the level of community buy-in and additional strategic partnerships.

Conclusions

Fatality Free Friday provides a unique opportunity to provide a central road safety target that compliments other road safety countermeasures. It provides a proactive means of engaging the community and individuals to take ownership on the road safety issue. Many road safety strategies are based on deterrence and whilst this is certainly part of an overall approach to altering road user behaviour, it shouldn't be seen to be the only part.

Fatality Free Friday has demonstrated that there are significant opportunities to mobilise community ownership to improve road safety by creating a new road safety culture. It also helps to indentify that each road user can play a role in reducing road trauma.

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