

## **Implementing a Learner Driver Mentor Program in a Local Government Area - Y Drive**

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### **Abstract**

The Y Drive project is a community development project that assists young people reach the required 120 hours driving experience necessary to achieve their 'P' plate licence. The program is aimed at disadvantaged young people who are homeless, Aboriginal, or have no licensed parent or family/carers with a car.

Through volunteer mentor support young people are taught to drive correctly, improving road safety, confidence and breaking the cycle of disadvantage with less unlicensed drivers on the road. It also improves life chances by providing connection to work, study and community.

### **Background**

In 2017, Harrington and Callaghan (2017) wrote a needs analysis for the development of a Learner Driver Mentor Project in the Eurobodalla. Their paper concluded that Eurobodalla with its high levels of socio economic disadvantage (ESC Community profile, 2018) would benefit from such a program.

The Department of Premier and Cabinet provided funds to assist Eurobodalla Shire Council establish a pilot project in 2017/18. This project successfully achieved its objectives (ESC 2017) and as a result further funding was sourced from the Department of Justice Community Safety Fund to run an extended project for 18 months.

### **Method**

The pilot project ran for 12 months, on a minimal budget of \$20,000 which funded a day's wages. However, more hours were required so Council released the project officer from other work to allow time to manage the project. Youth Safe (2012) resources provided guidance for the development of the project and Council's established volunteer engagement pathways (ESC, 2019), community networks and the communications team created awareness of the project.

The call for volunteer mentors resulted in over 30 registrations and a car was donated by a local car retailer which was branded with business partners. The steering committee identified 40 young people as potential participants. These were vetted down to 12 participants who committed to 120 hours of supervised driving time.

Of these, five completed the program and successfully gained their 'P's in the 12 months and the remaining five were carried over to the next project. Additionally to the mentor instruction all learners undertook three professional driving lessons and participated in the Safer Driver (2017) program.

The second project received funding from Department of Justice which enabled employment of a project officer three days a week to support 30 young people, the purchase of resources and a second vehicle. The mentors from the pilot project willingly committed to mentoring the new recruits. Both vehicles were absorbed into Council's car pool which ensured maintenance, insurance and running costs were accurate. The project is still in progress with additional programs including 'Y check' (a car maintenance program run by Council mechanics at Council depot) and 'Y budget' (how to save for a car) being added to the project to further develop young people's skills.

## Results

**Table 1. Y-drive participant results and post project achievements**

	Pilot Project (12 month project)	Y drive (18 month project - 6 months in)
Project target numbers	12	30
Actual number of learners	10	29
Did not engage with program	2	2
Registered over 100 hours driving	4	15
Number to pass P plates	5	11
Number of mentors	10	21
Hours driven	479 hours	545 hours
Km's driven	21,697 kms	25,818 kms
Attended Y Check	N/A	16
Number of professional driving lessons and courses attended	30	66
Achievements post P's		
First person in family to get a licence	1	
Attending study	1	1
Got a job	5	4
Got their first vehicle	6	7
Green P's	1 participant	
Drives child to child care	1	

## Conclusion

Housing the project in a local government area has many benefits including flexibility of staffing arrangements; capacity to back fill when staff are away; established systems and procedures in place for volunteers; vehicle maintenance; well established communication pathways and thorough accounting and auditing procedures.

Other critical elements of a successful project include: establishing consistent routine weekly driving schedules; highlighting the commitment required to achieve goals through strong guidelines and communication channels; engaging the right people; flexible work hours to cover calls 24/7; allowing time for participants to attain 120 supervised driving hours; and setting a benchmark of a 70% success rate to allow for unforeseeable events that arise with young people from disadvantaged backgrounds.

## References

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