CREATING SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS TO PROMOTE ROAD SAFETY IN SCHOOLS. CASE STUDY: FIT TO DRIVE (F2D)

Graham Spencer
GSC Partners, Melbourne, Australia
PO Box 116, Ashburton, Victoria Australia 3147
E-mail: gsc@bigpond.net.au

Kerry Montero
RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia
GPO Box 2476V Melbourne Victoria Australia 3001
Email: kerry.montero@rmit.edu.au

ABSTRACT
This paper describes an innovative, transferable and sustainable community partnership approach to the prevention and reduction of road crashes amongst young drivers. The Fit to Drive (F2D) model is a community intervention strategy, led by university undergraduates to empower young people to be safer road users.

The continued over-representation of young drivers in casualty crashes in Victoria, Australia, has resulted in the development of Government legislation and road safety education interventions that focus specifically on young drivers and road users.

This paper explores the collaborative ability and potential of the F2D “community” (local school groups, local government, and community road safety groups) to support multi stakeholder (e.g. Police, Road Rescue Emergency Services) and Victorian Government road safety initiatives.

The Fit to Drive (F2D) program is aimed at personal safety, behavior change and risk minimisation rather than driving skills. Initial findings and experience indicate that the undergraduate peer led approach combined with targeted community partnerships is an effective local community road safety response and community capacity building model (Verity 2007).

This paper explores the development of the F2D community networks and the steps taken to involve local school groups, local government and universities in the development of a coordinated, partnership approach to road safety education. The paper describes the theoretical basis for the program and the key features of the half day year 11 F2D workshop, including the central role of the selected and trained university students as road safety role models and educators.

The Fit to Drive (F2D) model offers a potentially valuable example for other communities to adopt and develop according to local conditions and within the context of the United Nations’ “Decade of Road Safety Action”.

1
1 INTRODUCTION

Despite significant road toll reductions over the past two decades, young drivers continue to have more casualty crashes than any other group of drivers (Peden et al. 2008, Toroyan & Peden, 2007). While making up 14% of all licensed drivers, people aged 18-25 account for 28% of driver deaths in Victoria, Australia (Healy, Catchpole & Harrison 2012). Crash risk in the first year of driving is three times greater than in subsequent years and road crashes remain one of the biggest killers of young people (predominantly males) 16-25 in Victoria (Eldridge 2008, AIHW 2011). This reflects a global trend, with road crashes identified as becoming the third major contributor to the burden of disease globally by 2020 (World Health Organisation 2009). In addition road trauma creates a significant economic burden. For example, the overall economic cost of road trauma is currently estimated to be more than $3 billion a year to the Victorian community (Victorian Road Safety Action Plan 2013-16).

The high crash risk for young people has resulted in the development of Victorian government legislation (including a Graduated Licencing System and passenger restrictions) alongside sequential road safety education interventions that focus specifically on young drivers and road users.  

Fit to Drive (f2d) is a half-day (four hour) road safety education program where Year 11 students (16 year olds) participate in small group discussion workshops peer led and facilitated by trained university students (Spencer, Montero & Rowland 2006). The philosophy of the program incorporates the understanding that young people have the capacity to change attitudes in relation to risky driving, and supports them to take ownership and responsibility for their own and their peers’ safety.

The f2d model described here is an organisational structure which uses a multi-stakeholder approach that is local and long term. The f2d model uses ‘community networks’ (local high school or secondary college groups, local government, universities) and trained university students as road safety ambassadors or champions (Nucleus Group 2007). With the support and approval of the major organisations in road safety education in Victoria, the program

---

1 Victoria’s road safety strategy 2008 – 2017 is designed to deliver further major improvements to the road transport system, and to improve safety for all Victorian road users. 

The Graduated Licensing System in Victoria is a system that provides 
a structured transition to driving as the new driver's experience and maturity increase.

- Key features of the graduated licensing system include:
  - compulsory 120 hours of logged supervised driving experience
  - a minimum 12 month learner permit period
  - a more challenging on-road driving test
  - a two stage probationary licence system (P1 and P2)
  - peer passenger and mobile phone restrictions for P1 drivers
  - probationary drivers are prohibited from driving certain vehicles
  - a range of educational support measures reference VicRoads 2012 (VicRoads 2012)

2 Transport Accident Commission (TAC), Victoria Police, VicRoads, Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), Metropolitan Fire Brigade (MFB), Country Fire Authority (CFA), State Emergency Services (SES), Royal Auto Club of Victoria (RACV).
builds on and extends the collaborative ability and potential of the f2d ‘community of local networks’ to initiate and support government road safety actions. After nine years of operation, the half day f2d program annually involves 43 Local Government Areas, 180 Government, Independent and Catholic schools, 24,000 young people and has trained more than 500 university undergraduates to be road safety facilitators (Fit To Drive (f2d) Foundation 2011).

A current study is being undertaken to analyse the processes necessary to the establishment of a successful partnership approach to school-based road safety education (Montero, 2013). An intrinsic feature of this partnership is the mutual sharing of resources, skills and specialised expertise to create the climate in which communities can undertake successful road safety programs (build capacity). Initial findings and evaluation indicate that the undergraduate peer led approach combined with targeted community partnerships offers a local community road safety response and community capacity building model that is aligned with best practice models of road safety education (SDERA 2010, Senserrick et al. 2009).

The Victorian Road Safety Action Plan 2013 to 2016 has recommended the extension of the Fit to Drive program to all schools in Victoria, a process that will involve further program development and evaluation.

The f2d model therefore presents an innovative evidence based approach that contributes to the establishment of a measured, sustainable and potentially effective response to young people’s overrepresentation in road crashes (Spencer 2011). Within the context of the “Decade of Road Safety Action” (UN 2011) the f2d program approach may provide a useful model for other communities to take up and adapt according to local conditions.

2 THE FIT TO DRIVE (F2D) MODEL AND HOW IT DEVELOPED

The f2d model developed out of a local program originally initiated, trialed and resourced by schools and the communities of the Mornington Peninsula and Frankston, Victoria, (Australia) in 2002 to reduce road traffic injuries in young people. It was subsequently adopted by communities and schools in other metropolitan and rural regions of the state.

In 2008 the Fit to Drive (f2d) Foundation Incorporated was established as a not for profit organisation supported by Victorian Government road safety stakeholders with a charter to administer and develop the program throughout the State. The business model used includes support from schools, universities and local government. The Fit to Drive (f2d) Foundation has rigorously sought to incorporate best practice road safety education principles.

The importance of designing road safety programs based on clear theoretical foundations has been well established (SCDERA, 2010; Buckley, Reveruzzi & Watson, 2012). Best practice programs are considered to be evidence based, age appropriate, sequential and embedded in the school curriculum (SCDERA 2010). Best practice programs involve students, staff, parents and the community, focus on attitudinal change rather than driving skills or fear tactics and incorporate an understanding of the steps being taken to reduce the risk for young drivers such as graduated licensing schemes and enforcement measures (Engstrom et al., 2003; Department of Transport & Main Roads, 2009).

It has been suggested that ‘tested behaviour change’ theories provide the best basis for the design of road safety education programs. Programs based on these theories, it has been argued, have a ‘greater likelihood’ to be successful (Buckley, Reveruzzi & Watson, 2012, p.32). There is evidence from other health promotion programs and other disciplines that peer
facilitation by near age or slightly older peers can be effective, and that positive and consistent role modelling can lead to behaviour change (Hyder et al., 2010).

It has been further noted that 'behaviour change programs have the potential to draw on effective strategies from many areas such as public health, education, psychology and health promotion’ (Buckley, Reveruzzi & Watson, 2012, p. 18). Cheryl Perry (1999, p. 115) highlights the importance of using creative approaches to develop community and school-based health behaviour programs for young people that are “fun, humorous, engaging, attractive, and interesting, in addition to being effective”.

Analysis of the f2d program based on research undertaken over the past eight years as part of a PhD research project (Montero, 2013) suggests that the facilitated small group discussion workshops have addressed key elements of delivery as identified in behaviour change models that emphasise such factors as: self-efficacy, the development of personal strategies, practising (resistance/assertiveness) skills, evaluating perceptions and expectations of friends and parents and evaluating potential outcomes of safer behaviour and risky behaviour.

In addition, the program has developed creative strategies to engage and hold the interest of the students across the half-day program. The f2d program features both large-group sessions and small group facilitated discussion, with each approach playing a specific role in the program design. In the large groups young people are presented with information and evidence related to road safety, and powerful personal stories are also interwoven into program, through film and dialogue and from real-life circumstances. By this means a climate is created where young people are made “work ready” for the deeper effort required in the small group workshops. For young people, then, the day unfolds into a series of closely linked experiences, a journey with the closing line of each activity leading on to the next.

The program helps young people to develop a respect and pride in safe road use, using the active learning methods that draw upon their own experiences. The road to empowerment is fostered through the small group facilitation undertaken by tertiary undergraduates. The program itself is a half day (four hours) in school experience with group sizes of 20.

The program’s specific, intended learning outcomes are to analyse and challenge attitudes to risk taking behaviour among young drivers and passengers using peer led education strategies and facilitated by trained university undergraduates. The main message encourages planning, remaining calm and in control and helping friends to stay safe.

Within the structure of the four hour program students explore risk-management strategies such as: driving for a reason, limiting late night driving, and considering distractions such as music and peer passengers. Other risk management measures covered include no mobile phone use while driving, not driving when impaired (alcohol and other drugs) or fatigued, driving safe cars and driving at safe speeds.

Key messages highlight the strategies young people can use to reduce their own and their peers’ risk taking behaviour on the road. This involves recognising that their own behaviour can increase or decrease the risk of the crash for themselves and their friends, practicing planning ahead, formulating problem solving strategies and rehearsing what to say in unsafe situations. Fit to Drive places a strong emphasis on developing productive youth-adult partnerships to reduce road trauma. Where Fit to Drive communities have been established for some time, follow up youth forums supported and sponsored by local government have emerged that look more deeply at the road safety issues surrounding survival on the roads.

The Fit to Drive (f2d) Foundation has recently completed a project to map young people’s attitudes to speed and evaluate change in opinion towards speed among young people who
have undertaken the Fit to Drive (f2d) program (Alexander 2012). This information is being used to inform the revised f2d curriculum. Allied to that study has been a subsequent program to trial youth and community action projects to “Reduce Speed”, working with Victoria Police, MFB and other Road Rescue organisations. Once again this has demonstrated the capacity to build youth adult partnerships. An example of this is the recent youth project sponsored by the f2d Foundation to develop a marketing Campaign aimed at “Making Speed a Health Hazard” (Alexander 2012).

A key feature of the Year 11 f2d workshop is that it is one part of road safety education in Victoria. Fit to Drive builds on students’ earlier learning in the primary school road safety curriculum. The main road safety curriculum resource in Victorian secondary schools is “Traffic Safety Essentials for Young Road Users” (Hughes & Di Pietro, 2007). This curriculum resource is made available for all schools by the Victorian road safety key partner organisations including TAC, VicRoads, Victoria Police, RACV, DEECD, and is distributed through the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development senior program officers. Through this connection with other road safety programs, including the VicRoads year 10 “Keys Please” program, young people are reminded of their prior learning.

The Fit to Drive (f2d) workshop thus provides access for young people to the latest information from the partnership of road safety stakeholders (international, national, state and local) who are committed to strategies to help young people survive on the roads, and who have developed successful policy and strategy measures that have worked to reduce the toll in the community over many years.

The authority of the presenters - former school principals, MFB officers, Police Youth Resource Officers - who complement the small group facilitation by university undergraduates, helps to give the program a stamp of moral authority as they act as the source of information and authenticity. Working as a team they are involved in setting the scene, linking the activities and acting as the source of road safety facts. These responsibilities are all aspects of their role and help to validate the individual and shared learning that is taking place for the young people in the small groups led by university students (Montero, 2013).

Using the foundation of best practice traffic safety education resources in schools, the f2d program employs therefore an innovative and strategic blend of educational activities within the half day workshop program to achieve maximum learning impact. The small group workshops, facilitated by university undergraduates, are acknowledged within the community as effective and use a structured approach that integrates case studies, individual stories, facts and evidence.

3 BUILDING THE F2D COMMUNITY BASED MODEL

3.1 Key educational and community involvement principles: the basis for road safety action

f2d is characterised by key principles that guide its philosophy and practice. The first category of principles relates to the educational philosophy and practice, with the second category pertaining to the relationship with community and road safety partners. These principles are outlined in the program statement of “Basic and Guiding Principles of the Program” and are presented in figure 1 (below) (Spencer, 2011). These principles present a distillation of f2d’s philosophy and approach, the means by which it establishes its own “distinct identity and community” (Montero, 2013) and engages with young people.
The principles are described under headings (the 10 “R’s”) and represent the two main points of focus of the f2d model: education and community.

‘Education’ comprises research (best practice in road safety), reciprocity (a whole school approach), risk management (using a peer education approach), role models (trained tertiary students as road safety ambassadors), resilience (emphasizing the protective factors generated by the empowering impact of evidence based road safety messages) and repetition places f2d as part of a set of sequential road safety education programs).

‘Community’ incorporates relationships that are built and strengthened by the community coordination of road safety stakeholders and resources (through a statewide committee), responsibility (ownership of and involvement in road safety issues by young people), raising awareness in the local community about road safety issues, and respect for road laws.

These principles are perhaps best described as core values or a shared vision. They suggest the scope, the goals objectives and describe the fundamentals of the program. They link the sometimes divergent road safety views of the people who make up the f2d community. The trained university students, who are the road safety role models or ambassadors, facilitate the year 11 (16 -17) age group discussion with these basic principles as their guide and aim.

3.2 Developing a road safety community partnership and multi stakeholder strategy that is local and long term

The Fit to Drive program aims to create a safer driving community for young people and to do this effectively has adopted a whole of community approach. It has been recognized that schools are uniquely positioned within the community to play a key role in community action.
on road safety (Howat et al., 2001), and that effective school health education programs must be able to utilise community resources (Perry, 1999). For the program to be successful there must be a high level of support and commitment from all of the stakeholders involved. Identifying the leading personnel with the relevant leadership qualities, and teams required to do this, is a major task. Establishing appropriate, realistic and achievable objectives and strategies, and realistic budgets, are all important considerations in this first step of setting up a Fit to Drive (f2d) program and community.

Community driven road safety programs have both strengths and limitations that need to be take into account. It is understood that community driven initiatives like f2d can, through networking and partnerships, and applying best practice principles in road safety education, successfully provide useful information for vulnerable road users such as young drivers and passengers, and contribute to behaviour change. Community based non-government programs also play an important part in advocacy. It is not realistic to expect that these achievements directly leads to a reduction in death and injury, however they do significantly contribute to a culture of safe road use. The Victorian Community Road Safety Partnership Program, a State Government program that enlists the support of local communities to work to support Government State road safety targets and objectives values community groups for the role they play in road safety promotion.

The f2d program’s intention is to be inclusive of all local groups who have a stake in road safety (for example the local council, the local Road Safety Partnership membership group, the local police, secondary schools and vocational education colleges in the area). The program actively invites participation by the local community and seeks to be empowering to the many groups who are involved or who are interested in road safety, such as the state emergency services, local service clubs and local health networks. Local and Statewide Groups meet regularly, many of them once per month, and demonstrate sound partnership principles such as: a shared vision of a safer future for young people, a belief in capacity building for individuals and groups, and a commitment to collaborating to achieve a common road safety goal.
Although Fit to Drive (f2d) is community based and organised in local government areas, the program development, training and coordination is administered through the Fit to Drive Foundation Incorporated, a Victorian Community Road Safety Partnership (VCRSP) registered body. Representatives of the various f2d communities, along with the program coordinators, meet monthly. Local communities wishing to introduce a f2d program into their area are required to develop partnerships with the major stakeholders in the community such as Vic Roads, TAC, RACV, Victoria Police, MFB or CFA. The local program must be sustainable before it commences and the involvement of as many people as possible is the necessary basis for growth and volunteer commitment. The patron of the Fit to Drive (f2d) Foundation is the Assistant Police Commissioner – Road Policing Robert Hill. The Chair of the organisation is Leigh Hardinge OAM a former local government Mayor, an honorary Justice of the Peace and former head of the State Emergency Services Volunteer Association.

The importance of community support for the program is evident in the recruitment and training of the peer educator ‘road safety ambassadors’. A highly organised, documented and effective two day training program of university undergraduates, supported by mentoring and monitoring, is required to ensure a high quality of peer facilitators. Annually, around 100 tertiary students are selected and trained from Victorian universities as road safety ambassadors, many of whom join an annual data base of around 80 students for the duration of their commitment and employment. The facilitator training program for the university undergraduates, supported by the RACV, is undertaken in different communities, has stakeholder and university support and is consistent throughout the state.

RMIT University has, over the years of f2d’s development, incorporated the f2d training into an elective in their Bachelor of Social Science (Youth Work) Degree. Other tertiary institutions such as Victoria University, Latrobe University, University of Ballarat and Deakin...
University are significant partners, support the program and have endorsed the training. MFB and CFA members and Victoria Police Youth Resource Officers undergo their training alongside the university undergraduates.

In essence community members are actively involved through networks in the setting up of the program, in supporting the curriculum and in the training of undergraduates. Community capacity is built by channeling individual efforts into a concerted local effort to draw attention to, and tackle young driver issues in the area or region. Fit to Drive (f2d) involves community leadership, time, resources and above all individual and community commitment.

3.3 Community road trauma and road safety education objectives

Road trauma impacts tragically on the quality of human life. Communities affected by road trauma have an opportunity to achieve a greater sense of purpose and effectiveness by partnering with other government and non-government road safety agencies committed to reducing the road toll. The partnership when created can be aligned with longer term community road safety objectives.

The f2d community organisation therefore can potentially act as a conduit for appropriate information, resources and support when trauma occurs. The establishment of a f2d program may help to correct mistaken ideas about the reasons for young driver overrepresentation in crashes and convey timely safe messages to change behaviour. Considerable professional skills of expert knowledge, negotiation, network expertise and political understanding are often required to work with grief and to channel demands for immediate action into achievable gains in safer road use. Bringing together these professional skills is time consuming and usually relies upon an enormous amount of voluntary support.

3.4 Fit to Drive (f2d) peer facilitated small group workshops – an innovative approach in road safety education delivery

Ultimately, it is through the small group discussion workshops facilitated by trained university graduates that the young people first become engaged in the ‘youth-adult partnership’ to reduce road trauma, where they learn to understand that they are not alone in tackling the significant social issue of young driver death and injury. At the conclusion of the program the young people are encouraged to share what they have experienced and learned with their parents (who are an important part of the partnership), and with others.

The small group workshops are a key to the effectiveness of f2d in engaging young people in the program. The second and third year students are drawn from a variety of courses such as youth work, social work, psychology and education. In evaluation feedback young people consistently cite their learning experiences in the small groups, and specifically their connection with the facilitators, as a highlight. As positive role models for young people of 16 or 17 the university undergraduates are appropriate and effective, not only from the perspective of their positive connection with the year 11 students, but also with respect to their driving attitudes and behaviours. It has been noted, in a study of the driving influences and practices of young Victorian drivers, that university educated young people were “less likely to have had their license cancelled or suspended, were less likely to have friends who were drink-drivers, more often used forward planning when making pains to avoid drink driving and were less likely to drink drive after making these plans” (Vassallo et al., 2007).

Facilitated group discussion has been shown to be a powerful tool in health education both for engaging, shaping opinions and sharing information and resources. Collaborative
approaches in education have long been known to assist young people to become more confident in developing strategies to tackle the issues they confront. In the f2d small group workshops the facilitators work to elicit young people’s views and responses to problems and situations related to road use, getting them to explore their attitudes and assumptions, to reflect on and respond to new information. The facilitated workshop encourages the students to explore alternative, or new, ways of seeing and interpreting responsibilities, their capacity to effect change, to exercise control over their circumstances, to impact on their environment and to shift perspectives.

Best practice principles in peer education programs emphasise the importance of effective training for peer educators/facilitators (Buckley, Reveruzzi & Watson, 2012). Fit to Drive facilitators undergo a rigorous two day training program in which they gain knowledge in road safety and young driver research, learn small group facilitation skills and practice facilitating the f2d group activities. They continue to receive on-going support and development throughout their employment as facilitators. The ‘participatory learning’ approach of the workshops is complemented by strategies to reinforce the learning and positive messages, such as finishing each workshop activity with a scripted conclusion that summarises the learning. For example, “the more exposed you are to risk on the road, the more likely you are to have a crash” (Ariens 2010).

4  IMPLICATIONS FOR OTHER COUNTRIES - LEARNING, SHARING AND NETWORKING IS A FORMULA FOR SUCCESS

The strategic and broad based community partnership as depicted in the f2d partnership model (see fig. 3, below) has been shown to be sustainable, and potentially transferable to other countries and communities. While management and coordination of road safety resources will vary between different countries, a model that facilitates learning, sharing and networking may be employed as a template for improvement in the capacity to address the overrepresentation of young people in road crashes, particularly in the “Decade of Road Safety Action”.
An example of the transferability of the f2d program is evident in the roads safety education program, ‘Smartroads’ (Montero, Spencer & Ariens 2012). This program was developed in collaboration with a major manufacturing company to improve road safety awareness in an industrial community in the vicinity of Jakarta, Indonesia, where the high and increasing rate of road trauma has become a major public health problem (Soehodho 2007, Suardika 2006). Adapting the f2d model of a successful community, university undergraduate role model and school-based program, and using a peer education approach, twenty young employees of a major steel production company were trained to implement road safety education programs amongst their peers, using local network leaders and contacts in schools and in the local community. The newly trained ‘Smartroads Ambassadors’, with follow-up support and development, became road safety educators with a commitment and responsibility to deliver education to their work and local communities (Montero, Spencer & Ariens 2012). They were able to reach communities, working with local knowledge and networks. The model involves active engagement and cooperation with key road safety authorities (police, local government, national government, health organisations) and other potential road safety partners.

By adapting the f2d model to the local context, Smartroads demonstrated the transferability of the model, indicating that there is significant potential for it to be used, not only in schools, but in other industrial, rural and educational settings in countries where road crash fatalities are impacting severely on communities. It may effectively complement and build on public...
health promotion initiatives and stimulate renewed attention to the development of innovative approaches to road safety promotion.

5 CONCLUSION

In terms of the growth and the development of the Fit to Drive (f2d) model, the levels of local and statewide government and non-government stakeholder support and the significant numbers of schools and young people that have been involved, the Fit to Drive (f2d) program has achieved significant success. It has become established as an acknowledged education initiative aimed at safer road user behaviour by young people.

The principles, the undergraduate peer led approach and the years of development and encouraging outcomes indicate that Fit to Drive (f2d) is a credible and potentially effective local community road safety response and a sustainable community capacity building model that may be of value and transferable in the “Decade of Road Safety Action”.

REFERENCES

Department of Transport and Main Roads, (2009). Driver Education for Senior School Students (Years 10 -12) and young novice drivers. Literature Review and key elements of a best practice program, Queensland Government.
Fit to Drive (f2d) Foundation (2011). Fit to Drive (f2d) Foundation Third Annual Report November 2011.

Montero, K. (2012). Evaluation of the Fit to Drive (f2d) Program for the NorthWest4 Community Road Safety Group. NorthWest4 Community Road Safety Group Melbourne


SDERA (2009). Principles for Road Safety Education. Edith Cowan University, Western Australia.


Spencer, G. (2011). Empowering youth in schools to be safer road users; peer-led by undergraduates. Unpublished paper delivered at the Australian Council of Road Safety conference September 2011, Melbourne


Vassallo, S., Smart, D.,anson, A., Harrison, W., Harris, A., Cockfield, S. & McIntyre, A. (2007). In the Drivers Seat II: Beyond the Early Driving Years. A report from the Australian Temperance Project The Second report from the collaborative partnership between the Australian Institute of Family Studies, TAC and RACV.
