

CASE STUDY TWO

Rural program with a strong road safety focus

This program was developed with support from the local council, which saw the need through its road safety strategic planning. Discussions with local police revealed that a number of young people had been pulled over driving without a licence. It turned out that these young people didn't have family support to gain the necessary 'on-road' driving experience to get their licence.

Although the young people who the police identified were the key participants, anyone in the local community can apply if they need help to get their hours up to go for their P1 licence. Most participants are young people, but the program also works with older people, though only a small number have taken part. The program's only requirement is for learners to live within the council's boundaries and it is completely free of charge.

The program includes three half-day theory sessions that the learners must attend before they can get access to the program car and a mentor. Sessions include topics such as risk and the complexities of being a young driver, managing passengers, the financial responsibility of owning a vehicle and car maintenance. The police run a session on staying safe and how to keep your licence and not lose any points.

Learners hear about the program by word of mouth, referrals and advertising displayed on the program vehicle. The program requires them to have their learner licence before they can join. If they don't, they are referred to a local support service that can help them with this.

Mentors have mainly come from the excellent links council has with existing community groups, such as Rotary, Lions and local businesses. Retired teachers and driving instructors make up quite a few of the 18 current volunteers.

An agreement with the local driving school gives significant support to the learners, mentors and program coordinator. The driving school provides learners, at a discounted rate, with their first 10 lessons before they go out with the mentors. The driving school also assesses the learners and mentors, and helps train the mentors, including how to give instruction and plan drives.

To ensure the learner and mentor are on 'the right track', and to act as mini-milestones, the program offers an additional 10 driving lessons, on top of the initial set of lessons. These are spread throughout the learner's time with the program. This is a good way to provide incentive for learners to continue with the process and give feedback on progress for both learners and their mentors.

On top of this, the driving school allows time for volunteer mentors to ask questions or seek advice at any stage. Mentors can contact the driving school to ask the best way to approach supervising the learners in areas such as reverse parking, negotiating intersections or scanning for hazards. The director of the driving school feels that being part of the program is a way to contribute to the community in which they live and work.

The vehicle is part of council's existing fleet and is insured, registered and fully maintained. Bookings are arranged through an online system which then alerts the program coordinator to have the vehicle ready and available.

Council staff manage and coordinate the program, with some responsibilities given to the youth services team and others to road safety.

The major challenges are around managing the program. Although roles are clearly defined, staff find it's a struggle to manage the workload at times, on top of their existing duties. As the vehicle is part of council's fleet, it can be difficult sometimes to ensure it's available.