

# **ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION IN SCHOOLS – MAKING IT HAPPEN**

## **Bill Cirocco, Coordinator Education Programs, Transport SA**

### **ABSTRACT**

In 1995 when Transport SA decided to embark on the Safe Routes to School program it was realised that there was no road safety curriculum resource to implement the education component of the program. This meant that there had not been a focus on road safety in schools for many years. In fact, this became the starting point in implementing road safety in schools.

As a consequence Transport SA developed the road safety curriculum resource, Road Ready, a training program for Road Ready, support for teachers, parent information sheets and classroom support materials. Although Safe Routes to School has been a good program to implement the teaching of road safety in schools, there is considerable support and follow up work required by Transport SA to ensure it happens. There are many barriers and expectations from schools that also need to be addressed.

Schools not in the Safe Routes to School program who have discovered Road Ready have also requested support from Transport SA to implement road safety into their teaching programs.

Transport SA has also needed to take the lead role in road safety education in schools as the state's education department declared this was not its role.

### **INTRODUCTION**

Transport SA has taken the lead role in implementing road safety education in primary schools since 1995. This has been mainly done through the Safe Routes to School program in partnership with South Australian schools. An integral component of the Safe Routes to School program is Road Ready, the curriculum resource which assists teachers in implementing the road safety education component of the program.

Recognising that young children are in high-risk groups as road users, especially as pedestrians, Road Ready in particular targets primary school children by teaching road safety education as well as giving them practical demonstrations in real traffic situations.

Whilst the level of interest in schools teaching road safety as part of the Safe Routes to School has been high, it requires resources such as specialised staff with a teaching background, ongoing commitment from schools involved to ensure continuity of the program and a recognition by relevant government agencies that road safety education is a cross government responsibility.

### **ROAD READY**

In developing Road Ready Transport SA employed a teacher to write and develop the curriculum. Considerable consultation took place with specialised teaching staff from a wide range of primary schools, and road safety and traffic engineering staff from Transport SA. This led to an easy to use resource with enjoyable learning experiences. Road Ready is supported by a training program for teachers, parent information sheets, classroom support materials and ongoing support for teachers.

When developed, Road Ready reflected the curriculum framework in place in South Australia at that time, and with a recent change in the framework Road Ready is currently being adapted to the new framework. This will ensure teachers will continue to use it.

A continuing feature of Road Ready is the inclusion of classroom activities combined with real traffic experiences to reinforce safe road-use behaviours as well as activities which encourage parental participation in home discussion assisting to reinforce the message. A communication mechanism that builds on the principles of how children learn by observation, interaction and participation has also been incorporated.

Road Ready consists of nine booklets covering the areas of crossing procedure, passenger safety and pedestrian safety for each level of junior primary, middle primary and upper primary. It also contains:

- ❑ 30 discussion pictures with teaching points
- ❑ An audio tape that includes songs and listening activities, and
- ❑ Units covering a selection of topics, a variety of activities, detailed outcomes, related vocabulary, key ideas, broad listening experiences from the statements, assessment tasks, worksheets, evaluation checklist and a glossary of terms.

## **WAY TO GO**

When Transport SA embarked on the Safe Routes to School program, it was recognised that providing parents with information on road safety was an integral part of the program. This information needed to be relevant to the issues around schools and also needed to reinforce the road safety skills and behaviours being taught in the classroom. It was decided that the approach would be a sheet including parent information as well as an activity for the child to complete at home with parental help.

As a result the Way To Go parent information sheets were developed to provide road safety information to parents. Way to Go covers 22 different road safety topics with information for parents on the front and a child activity relevant to the child's primary level on the reverse side. To ensure parents take notice of this information, children are encouraged to complete the activity at home with the parents' help. The answers for all the child activities are contained in the front of the sheet. The distribution of Way to Go is through the primary school classroom and can be easily linked to the school's traffic safety education plan. Way to Go sheets are provided free of charge to schools and are distributed to families over time to maintain an ongoing long-term emphasis on road safety and to avoid overloading them with information.

Schools involved in the Safe Routes to School program are encouraged to incorporate the Way to Go resource into their ongoing traffic safety education plans, coordinating distribution of sheets with related topics in Road Ready. A matrix providing a cross-reference between Road Ready topics and individual Way to Go sheets has been developed to further assist teachers with distribution. The matrix suggests essential and recommended links between the two resources.

Way To Go fills a void in road safety education and assists parents to reinforce these messages at home. The information in Way To Go gives parents the knowledge they need to provide their children with a clear and consistent message on road and traffic safety and helps children to make safer choices.

## **CLASSROOM SUPPORT MATERIALS**

Transport SA has also needed to produce support materials for classroom teaching which are essential to enhance the childrens' learnings. These include the following:

- ❑ Six Posters
- ❑ Rulers
- ❑ Stickers
- ❑ Wrist bands
- ❑ Mobiles
- ❑ Bookmarks

There has been positive feedback on the support materials by teachers and they have also suggested that further materials would be beneficial. Further support materials being planned include:

- ❑ A road safety teaching video for the classroom
- ❑ A set of road signs
- ❑ Pedestrian crossing kit
- ❑ Fictional road safety books

## **IMPELEMNTATION PROCESS**

In the majority of cases in South Australia road safety education is implemented through the Safe Routes to School program. However, there are other schools not involved in the Safe Routes to School program that want to teach road safety. The implementation process for both sets of school is similar and are outlined below.

### **Schools in the Safe Routes to School program**

At the commencement of the Safe Routes to School program a staff meeting is conducted by a Transport SA Education Consultant to explain the commitment required by the teachers. The Education Consultant becomes the key contact for schools in implementing road safety education. Schools are asked to consider their level of commitment, available resources and teacher time allocation. Generally the teaching of road safety does not commence until later in the school year or the following year which allows for adequate planning and allocation of resources. Transport SA recognises that to implement road safety requires a fair level of commitment from the participating school and offers as much support and resource material as possible. However the successful implementation requires a partnership approach from its inception in order to achieve maximum benefit for participating children and the school community.

#### *Road Safety Vision Statements*

Prior to the school developing a traffic safety education plan, an important step in having the school staff focusing on road safety education is the development a vision statement by the school community. The road safety vision statements will embed road safety into the culture and business of the school community and provide guidance and direction for new staff to the school. Ideally the statement describes the objectives of Road Ready, discusses the implementation process, resources available and the outcomes for all involved.

#### *Traffic Safety Education Plan*

One of the first steps in implementing road safety education is the development of Traffic Safety Education Plan. The plan is based on topics from Road Ready with links to Way to Go, and addresses the traffic issues that have been identified through the data collection processes of the Safe Routes to School program. The plan for each school is specific to the needs of the school and reflects the structure of individual sites and may be reviewed on two or three yearly cycle. This plan is developed during the Teaching for Traffic training conducted by Transport SA. The training is a full day and attended by teachers from schools participating in the Safe Routes to School program. It is provided at no cost to the school and the schools are also reimbursed for their Teacher Relief Time payments i.e. the cost of replacing the teacher in the classroom for that day. Transport SA suggests that three teachers from each school be trained; one each from the Junior, Middle and Upper Primary areas. These teachers will then inform the remainder of the school staff on what is required to implement road safety education. They are provided with a Teaching for Traffic training manual to assist them.

#### *Traffic Safety Focus Teacher*

Transport SA requires the appointment of a traffic safety focus teacher from within the participating school and will be one of the teachers that has been trained. These teachers are the point of contact for Transport SA via the Education Consultant. It is ideal if the focus teacher is appointed for more than a one-year period as this assists in maintaining continuity of the program. Tasks undertaken by the focus teacher include distribution of information to school staff, advocating an emphasis on traffic safety in the school, identify school support needed and communicating this back to Transport SA, coordinating the Way to Go information, following the implementation of the traffic safety education plan, providing feedback on units of traffic safety, assisting in collection student work for display purposes, coordinating traffic safety events and highlighting the program to new staff. In acknowledging that the focus teacher will spend varying amounts of school preparation time per term performing these tasks Transport SA provides training and development opportunities including after school seminars, half-day seminars and guest speakers.

#### *What does successful implementation look like?*

A successfully implemented program is characterised by:

- Strong Principal support
- Having at least two enthusiastic teachers prepared to initiate and drive the program
- School/Council and Board support
- School is part of the Safe Routes to School program
- Having a clear implementation action plan developed and agreed by the school
- Identifying clear targeted audiences and year levels at outset
- Teachers seeking support and ideas from other schools and Transport SA
- Integrating it continuously into a range of learning areas
- Having it built into school policy
- Recognising people for their involvement on the program

### *Process*

The teacher's strategy usually involves a nine step process incorporating:

- ❑ Step 1 –Familiarise yourself with Road Ready
- ❑ Step 2 – Link into other participating schools
- ❑ Step 3 – Inform and engage others in your school
- ❑ Step 4 – Get school Council/Board support
- ❑ Step 5 – Inform and engage parents
- ❑ Step 6 – Develop a local strategy
- ❑ Step 7 – Identify local support resources
- ❑ Step 8 – Implement the Program
- ❑ Step 9 – Review and evaluate

### *Review*

The Education Consultant undertakes a program review. An appointment is made with the traffic safety focus teacher to visit the school and discuss the implementation process and to evaluate program outcomes. At this stage an on-going commitment is sought from the school to continue the program for the next two to three years. The Traffic Safety Plan is discussed and additional resources and on-going program is identified.

### **Other Schools**

Schools generally approach Transport SA requesting information about teaching road safety. The Transport SA Education Consultant will initially have a brief introductory meeting with the teacher. This discussion is generally followed by a visit by the Education Consultant to a staff meeting where a full explanation of Road Ready, Way to Go and support available is explained.

The process from here generally mirrors the process for schools in the Safe Routes to School program.

### **CONCLUSION**

Over the past seven years, there has seen a high take up of road safety education by schools in metropolitan and rural South Australia. However, the number of schools participating could be increased markedly if more resources were provided and a recognition that road safety education in schools is not solely the responsibility of Transport SA.

Safe Routes to School, Road Ready and Way to Go, focus on the road safety training of children and young people and is an investment towards the achievement of safer road users and a lower road toll in the future.

### **REFERENCES**

Harrison Market Research, Report prepared for Transport SA, May 2000, Way To Go Parent Information Sheets

Ciocco B, Clonan V Raising Parents' Awareness of Road Safety for Their Children. 'Way to Go' - Road Safety Information for Parents

Bailey R, Working Together: A Partnership Between Local Government and Schools,