

‘Elmo Stays Safe’ – Road and Driveway Safety Education Campaign

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Abstract

Road and driveway run over incidents are a major cause of injury and death for children. Approximately 93 Australian children (aged 0-16) die as a result of an injury sustained on the road and a further 7,000 (0-14 years) are admitted to hospital with serious injuries every year. Driveway run over incidents account for an average of 7 deaths and 60 are serious injuries (0-14 years) every year.

The ‘Elmo Stays Safe’ campaign was developed by Kidsafe Victoria in collaboration with Sesame Workshop (the not for profit educational organisation behind Sesame Street), the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) and the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV).

The campaign was conducted in two phases; Phase 1 focused on ‘safe places to play’ as the key message. Phase 2 of the campaign, focusing on driveway and road safety, conveyed critical messages to children, their families and the public in order to:

- Raise public and parental awareness of the importance of children playing in safe areas.
- Promote safe driveway practices to the Victorian public, and;
- Raise children’s awareness of the dangers posed by vehicles in car parks, roads and driveways by utilising a popular international character to demonstrate this.

These messages were delivered utilising a range of resources including a radio CSA and an activity based app for children.

The ‘Elmo Stays Safe’ campaign contributes to the international effort to reduce child injury and death as part of the UN Global Decade of Action for Road Safety. The paper will discuss all phases of this campaign and the development process used to engages with families, children and the broader community.

Introduction

Road incidents are a major cause of child injury and death worldwide. Recent Australian statistics show that each year, approximately 93 children aged 0-16 years die as a result of an injury sustained on the road (Department of Infrastructure and Transport, 2011) and a further 7,000 (aged 0-14 years) are admitted to hospital with serious injuries (AIHW, 2012). Driveway run over incidents are also becoming an increasingly common cause of serious injury and death for children – with an average of seven deaths and 60 serious injuries each year (Department of Infrastructure and Transport, 2012).

In May 2011, the United Nations launched the Decade of Action for Road Safety with the goal of stabilising, and then reducing the forecasted level of global road traffic fatalities by 2020 (World Health Organisation, 2011). Sesame Street’s character Grover was named as a Global Road Safety Ambassador as part of the Decade of Action.

As part of Grover’s role, Sesame Workshop (the not for profit organisation responsible for providing Sesame’s educational outreach materials), expressed an interest in working with local

organisations in Australia to address a key road safety issue here. This presented an excellent opportunity to use the popular characters to promote road safety, rather than another key health issue as has been done in other regions internationally (e.g. dental hygiene, healthy eating). The Elmo Stays Safe campaign was therefore designed to complement the Decade of Action and address key road safety issues affecting children in Australia.

Elmo Stays Safe Campaign

The campaign, led by Kidsafe Victoria in partnership with Sesame Workshop, involved a number of supporting partners including the Transport Accident Commission (TAC), the Royal Automobile Club of Victoria (RACV) and Holden.

The objectives of the campaign were to:

- Raise public and parental awareness of the importance of children playing in safe areas.
- Promote safe driveway practices to the Victorian public, and;
- Raise children's awareness of the dangers posed by vehicles in car parks, roads and driveways by utilising a popular international character to demonstrate this.

The target audience for the campaign were parents, early childhood educators and children under 5 years of age (in the preschool stage).

Key messages of campaign

To ensure that key messages for the campaign were relevant and could be easily understood by Australian children, a thorough process was undertaken. This included a review of the messages by other organisations including the TAC and RACV, Kidsafe nationally, early childhood experts and focus testing with children and early childhood staff who would be the end users of the resources.

The key messages for the campaign focussed on:

- Safe pedestrian practices such as holding an adult's hand while crossing the road
- Playing in safe areas, and treating driveways and car parks like the road
- Safe car travel for children (using correct restraints, getting in and out of the vehicle via the safety door)
- Parents and caregivers modelling safe and appropriate behaviours, such as always wearing seatbelts themselves.

Phase 1 Campaign Resources

The key campaign messages were delivered utilising a wide range of resources including:

- A television Community Service Announcement, which features animated Sesame Street Characters and focuses on driveway safety.
- A large storybook (A2) which tells the story of Elmo's journey to the park with his Mum

- A set of 10 activity cards which accompanied the storybook, which involve children practicing to buckle up, learning to give parents or carers the ball to hold when walking near a road, car park or driveway and other activities.
- A message based and an activity based poster
- Online activity sheets including colouring in tasks and puzzles; and
- Message based stickers

Focus Testing Results

Two focus groups were conducted, one in metropolitan Melbourne and one in regional Victoria (Maryborough), involving early childhood educators (4), children (28) and their parents (3). It was found that the children were very engaged with the resources, for example they were observed moving in closer when the educator was reading the storybook to them, and calling out answers during the story. The children also showed a good understanding of the road safety messages in the resources.

The resources were well received by early childhood educators, and there were some suggested changes which were made to the resources to enhance readability and engagement. An initial take home activity book had been proposed but a number of activities were found to be too challenging and received a mixed response from parents and educators. This was taken into account and a few of the popular, well received activities were provided as free online downloads for those who were interested.

Campaign launch and distribution of resources

Phase 1 of the campaign was launched at Federation Square in Melbourne on the 27th March 2013. The launch was well attended by stakeholders and received excellent media coverage. An initial print run of 1,000 sets of resources was printed to coincide with the launch. The resource printing and distribution was supported by the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development (DEECD), and the resources were initially distributed through Family Day Care services in Victoria.

The kits were distributed through the DEECD to 183 Family Day Care services across the state, with each service receiving five kits to share with their educators (a total of 915 kits distributed). In addition, the resources have also been made available for free download from the Kidsafe Victoria website so that families can access them from home.

The remaining kits were provided to campaign partners, as well as offered to the library network in Victoria. An additional print run is planned for distribution to all early child care centres in Queensland, as well as further distribution in Victoria.

Evaluation of Phase 1

Feedback on Phase 1 of the campaign was sought from Family Day Care (FDC) educators. Some of the key findings were

- 90% of FDC educators stated that the resources were useful in engaging children in learning and discussions around road safety. The storybook was seen as the most effective resource, followed by the accompanying activity cards.

- 80% of FDC educators believed that the messages in the resources were appropriate/extremely appropriate for children in their services.
- 80% of FDC educators said that the Sesame Street characters were effective/very effective in engaging with children. Many said that they were effective because children were familiar with the Sesame Street characters.
- 90% of FDC educators said that they would recommend the resources to other educators for engaging children in discussions and learning about road safety. The reasons given for this included that the 'resources were easy to use and contained good messages,' because 'children knew the characters' and because 'the size of the storybook let everyone sit around and interact.'
- 44% of FDC educators said that they would use the resources monthly, while 33% said that they would use them weekly.

Overall, the evaluation results were positive and showed that the resources were effective in engaging children in discussions and learning about road safety issues. The results also show that using a popular character, such as Elmo, assists in engaging children. A small number of educators did not support the use of Sesame Street characters for use with young children based primarily on the use of characters as a method of engagement in learning; however the majority of feedback from educators and children demonstrated clearly how popular and useful the characters are in delivering road safety messages to children, which is consistent with other programs and activities delivered by Sesame Workshop and the TAC.

Phase 2 resources

Phase 2 of the 'Elmo Stays Safe' campaign was developed to extend on the initial resources developed in Phase 1, and to reach a larger target audience. The key messages continue to focus on driveway and road safety, with campaign materials conveying critical messages to parents and children under 5 years of age. This phase was also used to further refine Phase 1 materials, with experts in the Early Years Learning Framework and stakeholders from the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development developing a new set of learning opportunities for educators to undertake with the children.

The resources developed for Phase 2 of the campaign include:

- A 30 second radio Community Service Announcement targeted towards parents and carers
- An activity based tablet/smartphone app for children
- An E-book version of the storybook
- An A4 version of the storybook from Phase 1 of the campaign, and;
- Five additional educational learning opportunities to replace the activities from Phase 1

Phase 2 of the campaign will be launched in late August 2014, and it is expected that the TV CSA will receive significant national airtime and the app will have a considerable number of downloads. It is also anticipated that the Kidsafe Victoria campaign website page will receive a significant number of hits

Conclusion

‘Elmo Stays Safe’ has been an effective campaign to engage children on road safety, through the use of popular Sesame Street characters. The resources developed as part of the campaign will continue to be promoted. The campaign contributes to the international effort to reduce child injury and death as part of the UN Global Decade of Action for Road Safety.

References

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