

L2P: An innovative community based learner driver mentor program

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INTRODUCTION

The *L2P – learner driver mentor program* was introduced to support the new Graduated Licensing System in Victoria by helping young people aged under 21 years who have no access to a supervising driver or a vehicle, gain the compulsory minimum 120 hours of supervised driving experience as learner drivers. The Transport Accident Commission (TAC) provided \$9 million to support program development and implementation.

Objectives of the L2P program are to:

- reduce the crash and injury rate of young novice drivers by ensuring they obtain 120 hours of supervised practice
- increase equity of opportunity for young Victorians to obtain a driver's licence.

METHOD

VicRoads has contracted local governments to deliver the program across Victoria and local governments are then choosing to either deliver the program themselves or subcontract the delivery to a youth or community agency within the Municipality. VicRoads has used a community engagement model to build local capacity to deliver these programs.

The funding provided generally covers the cost for a local program coordinator, 7 driving instructor lessons per learner driver and the running cost, but not the purchase cost, of vehicles. The programs use screened and trained volunteers to deliver supervised driving practice to learners. VicRoads trains all of the volunteers to be effective supervising drivers.

L2P programs are provided with resources documenting the process for developing, implementing and running a L2P program. VicRoads project officers also work with local programs to support the development and implementation of L2P programs.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The program is still in the implementation phase, with 51 L2P programs funded across Victoria, covering 57 of the 78 Victorian Municipalities. As of 30 June 2010, 22 of these programs are operational, with learners and mentors undertaking driving experience. The remaining 29 contracted programs are in various stages of development and set-up.

It is anticipated that 1,500 young people, including those from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) and Indigenous backgrounds, will receive driving practice through the L2P program over the next 12 months. As of 30 June 2010, 460 mentor supervising drivers have successfully completed the training, making L2P the largest youth mentoring program in Victoria.

Local Governments and youth agencies implementing L2P programs see the potential benefits of the program as:

- assisting young people to gain a licence
- connecting and engaging young people with their community by developing a positive and sustained relationship with an adult mentor working towards something that will benefit them
- providing greater employment opportunities
- potentially reducing unlicensed driving
- improving health outcomes.

Learnings from the program implementation include:

- Being open, honest and collaborative was important in overcoming initial anxiety by individual and collective Councils regarding the potential risks associated with the program and concerns about cost shifting from State to Local Government.
- L2P program is primarily a youth program and youth agencies and youth departments within Councils see the wide range of potential benefits this program can offer. Despite being a road safety initiative, the road safety and engineering parts of Councils generally did not understand the potential of the program.
- Program providers have required a significant amount of support during the implementation of this program as it is a non-typical program, with many facets to consider and address.
- Partnerships between local government, local youth and community agencies, police, driving instructors and local business have been critical in the success of local programs.
- Victoria Police have a strong involvement in and support of the program, often housing the program vehicles, thereby ensuring access to vehicles outside of business hours, encouraging positive associations with Police for the learners.
- Organisations that have expertise in recruiting and managing volunteers have no difficulty in recruiting the necessary numbers required.

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Organisations without this experience can find this challenging.

- Smaller programs that receive less funding may struggle to meet project targets due to the part time employment of the local L2P coordinator and their lack of capacity to undertake all the necessary tasks required for an effective program.
- Volunteer supervising drivers feel more confident and comfortable in their role after completing the training program. Focusing on the graduation of driving experience from quiet streets to more complex driving situations is critical.

A short term evaluation of the program has begun. This will provide key descriptors and an outline of issues and methodologies for a longer term evaluation that is expected to be completed by June 2011.

CONCLUSIONS

The *L2P – learner driver mentor program* has been well supported in the community, resulting in a rapid expansion across Victoria. The program provides opportunities for young people who would otherwise find it very difficult to gain a licence and achieve the necessary driving practice to help keep them safe on the road.