

SUPPORTING ROAD SAFETY EDUCATION IN WESTERN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

Authors: Anne Miller, Nicole Pettit, Deb Zines

Presenters: Rose Moroz, District Director, Swan District, Department of Education and Training, WA and council member of the Road Safety Council of WA, Anne Miller (Road Aware Kids Project Officer, School Drug Education and Road Aware) and Deb Zines (Road Aware Drivers Project Officer, School Drug Education and Road Aware)

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ABSTRACT

This paper describes the strategic approach taken towards child and youth road safety education in Western Australia. It outlines the role education systems and sectors, the Road Safety Council of Western Australia and School Drug Education and Road Aware play in supporting road safety education in schools. The paper provides a working example of how research findings and strategic planning have led to action through the development of a targeted road safety education program for young Western Australians.

The topics covered include the identification of key target ages at which children are engaged in a number of specific road safety issues, including restraints for infants, pedestrian safety for school children and driving safety for pre-drivers. In addition, these key times represented periods where parents are actively engaged in their child's road safety. It also focuses on the development of strategic alliances with key stakeholders for implementation. This strategic alignment will enable the success and sustainability of a focused road safety education initiative for the young people of Western Australia.

Examples of practical strategies that can be used by a range of road safety professionals to address issues in local and/or state-wide contexts, will be of interest to conference delegates.

BACKGROUND

In 2000, the Road Safety Council of Western Australia commissioned a review of national and international road safety practices and initiatives (Elliott, B. 2000). The review made recommendations for the development of a comprehensive road safety education program for children and young Western Australians.

The education representative on the Road Safety Council steered an extensive consultation process with stakeholder groups and prepared a policy

document titled *Road Safety Policy for Infants, Children and Young People in Western Australia*. The Minister for Police and Emergency Services endorsed the policy in 2002 and the Road Aware Program (Road Aware) was subsequently launched in September 2002.

TARGETING AGE GROUPS AND PARENTS

Elliott's review highlighted the importance of identifying key target age groups, focusing on the role of parents in road safety education and developing strategic alliances for effective implementation.

Three overlapping project areas were created within Road Aware, targeting specific age groups and their parents. These include:

- Road Aware Parents – parents/carers of children aged 0 to 4 years
- Road Aware Kids – for children aged three to 14 years and their parents/carers
- Road Aware Drivers – for young people aged 15 to 20 years and their parents/carers.

Elliott (2000) identified these age groups as being significant times at which children are engaged in a number of specific road safety issues, including restraints for infants, pedestrian safety for school children and driving safety for pre-drivers. In addition, these key times represented periods where parents are actively engaged in their child's road safety.

The core business of each Road Aware project is to:

- develop, produce and implement road safety resources
- encourage teachers and parents/carers to become involved in road safety education for children and young people
- provide professional learning and support for teachers, community health and child care agencies
- coordinate road safety education efforts throughout the state.

Since 2003, several new Road Aware resources have been developed and produced, and are currently being implemented and evaluated, including:

- *Keys for Life* pre-driver education program
- *Steps to Safer Driving* parent workshop
- *Challenges and Choices* - an early childhood education resource for resilience, drug and road safety education.

STRATEGIC ALIGNMENT

Accessibility and distance are significant issues in Western Australia, particularly for school communities. As a result of Elliott's review, the School Drug Education Project (SDEP), launched in 1997, was identified as being successful in accessing teachers and delivering professional development

across vast distances and to remote areas. The SDEP network of Regional Organising Committees spread throughout all regions of Western Australia was seen to be a highly effective model of comprehensive planning and implementation for a health education intervention within the Western Australian context.

In 2003, a strategic alliance between Road Aware and the SDEP was formed. The alliance resulted in the two projects becoming one organisation, School Drug Education and Road Aware (SDERA), sharing management, administrative, business planning and evaluation processes.

SDERA is managed by representatives of two funding agencies and the three education systems and sectors in WA:

- Association of Independent Schools, WA
- Catholic Education Office, WA
- Department of Education and Training, WA
- Drug and Alcohol Office on behalf of the WA Department of Health
- Office of Road Safety on behalf of the Insurance Commission of Western Australia (with support from the Road Safety Council).

This strategic alignment is a unique and deliberate approach taken by the State Government towards coordinating child and youth drug and road safety education efforts in Western Australia. It embodies the role that all key stakeholders play, in supporting drug and road safety education in schools and will foster the success and sustainability of focused school education initiatives for children and young people in Western Australia.

Of particular significance to Road Aware in this strategic alliance, is the availability and utilisation of existing SDERA practices and procedures for capacity building.

ESTABLISHED REGIONAL NETWORKS

Within each region of the state, SDERA has an established network of professional development facilitators functioning as a Regional Organising Committee or ROC (originally created by the School Drug Education Project in 1998).

This network of facilitators are trained to deliver professional development and support for their education based colleagues as well as other agency representatives, provide assistance in policy development and help to foster community involvement in school based programs.

There are eleven ROCs, four of which are led by a part-time SDERA Regional Project Officer. Together they ensure the coordination of ongoing road safety and drug education teacher training and regular networking opportunities for teachers and other relevant school staff. Network meetings involve:

- a needs assessment process which leads to the development of training tailored to the specific needs of children and young people in the local area
- sharing of ideas and progress using an action research (problem solving) approach
- identification and development of school and community links (discussion of ideas, opportunities and progress), which may include the attendance of regular community and agency guests.

By the beginning of 2006, each region will have a dedicated, part-time Regional Project Officer responsible for both drug and road safety education.

SYSTEM-WIDE CURRICULUM

All resources developed by SDERA are based on the principles and practices outlined in system-wide curriculum documents, developed by the Curriculum Council of WA (i.e. *Curriculum Framework for Kindergarten to Year 12 Education in Western Australia*, 1998 and the associated *Curriculum Guides*, 2005). These documents are relevant to schools, systems and organisations and identify:

- student-centred, interactive, collaborative and locally relevant learning as the key to engaging students in the learning process
- the key content to include, based on the Interpersonal and Self-management Skills; Attitudes and Values; and Knowledge and Understandings Learning Outcomes for Health and Physical Education.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

All SDERA programs are developed and implemented using some common theories and frameworks as a guide, such as the Health Promoting Schools Framework (World Health Organisation, 1986). This framework identifies three key factors that need to be addressed and in place for effective implementation of school health education programs:

- curriculum, resources and training
- policy, principles and practices
- parent and community involvement.

COORDINATION AND CAPACITY BUILDING

In Western Australia, the Road Safety Council (RSC) is the peak body responsible for the coordination of road safety and the implementation of the state strategy, *Arriving Safely: Road safety strategy for Western Australia 2003-2007*. *Arriving Safely* is based on the vision of the State Government and the Road Safety Council of WA to eliminate road crashes as a major cause of death and serious injury.

The Council membership consists of senior executive representation from Government agencies, non-Government agencies and road users, and through its efforts, reinforces the importance of coordination, cooperation and capacity building.

Agencies operating in joint ventures and partnerships are central to the state strategy. Road Aware is one of the supporting initiatives of this state strategy that exemplifies agencies working together in partnership through coordinated efforts.

When viewed in relation to crash statistics, the regional implementation of Road Aware becomes even more important due to the over-representation of rural children and young people in road deaths.

Inherent to the success of Road Aware's state-wide reach, is the successful implementation of road safety education to all Western Australian schools.

The vast geographical distances and high number of isolated and remote schools necessitates effective regional networks. In order to address this SDERA continues to develop links to a number of existing networks within education, health and road safety fields and utilises the established SDERA Regional Organising Committees.

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

As a learning organisation, SDERA constructs opportunities for teachers, school staff and agencies that reflect best practice in professional learning. The outcomes for these groups are that they:

- are confident in their abilities and capacities, including the skills and knowledge needed to plan, implement and assess health education
- engage in teaching practices that reflect best practice in drug and road safety education
- feel motivated, knowing they are valued and supported.

SDERA professional learning opportunities are planned both centrally and with Regional Organising Committees. The benefit of this joint planning is that it is strategic, accommodating local needs and other educational commitments.

Workshops are available on a recurrent basis throughout each calendar year. Incentives such as fully funded teacher relief, travel and accommodation and free resources ensures SDERA workshops are consistently accessed and requested.

ROAD SAFETY IN SCHOOLS COORDINATION GROUP

There are numerous agencies working to deliver and promote road safety education in Western Australian schools. Realising this, the Road Safety in

Schools Coordination Group (RSISCG) was established by Road Aware with the aim of encouraging agencies working in school road safety to be coordinated to maximise efficiency, avoid duplication of efforts and promote consistent road safety messages to children and young people, their parents/carers and teachers.

The RSISCG promotes and utilises the Health Promoting Schools Framework (HPS) to guide road safety activities in school communities, whether curriculum based or community based. The HPS Framework will assist community organisations and agencies to provide effective support for school road safety education.

NETWORKS OUTSIDE SCHOOLS

As the project targets children and young people aged 0 - 20 years, which extends both before and beyond the school age group, the utilisation of additional networks is a key part of the implementation process. In particular Road Aware has made links to the Road Safety Council's Regional Road Safety Coordination Groups.

The Regional Road Safety Coordination Groups involve key road safety stakeholders in each of the regional areas of Western Australia. Supported by the Office of Road Safety (on behalf of the Road Safety Council), the aim of the groups is to provide a coordinating mechanism involving senior managers to provide strategic planning and decision making for addressing locally specific road safety issues while complementing and enhancing the work of the Local Government road safety groups (RoadWise).

CONCLUSION

The development and delivery of Road Aware initiatives relies on the utilisation of regional networks, best practice professional learning and evidence-based contemporary curriculum resources.

In addition, the collaborative and partnership approach fosters successful implementation and sustainability in schools in Western Australia.

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