

Promoting Safer Road User Behaviour in a Community Setting More “Bang for our Road Safety Buck”

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Abstract

Educating road users of all ages, experience levels and backgrounds in safer road behavior is crucial in changing attitudes to road safety and to other road users. We are all pedestrians at some point in our journey with many of us also being drivers, riders or motorcyclists. At a community level, there is huge capacity to engage with our local community to encourage improved understanding and compliance of the road rules as well as tolerance of other road users.

Background and Observations

Willoughby City Council has recently introduced several road safety education workshops aimed at improving road user knowledge, understanding and compliance when out and about.

Two of these workshops target drivers. “Drive Safer – Drive Longer” is for senior drivers while “You’re the Driver!” is for the general driving population from L platers to experienced drivers. The “You’re the Driver” workshop has also been popular with those from other countries who have been driving in Australia but need a refresher, and with learner driver supervisors who require some reassurance that they understand the road rules before teaching their learner driver.

In addition a pedestrian safety workshop, Street Savvy Seniors has been developed and presented in conjunction with NSW Police to target safety as a pedestrian, passenger and public transport user.

Benefits of a workshop setting

Willoughby Council runs public education campaigns across various road safety topics. Whilst there is a need for broad awareness campaigns through media channels there is still an appetite in our local community for face to face workshop style sessions. One benefit of these has been the ability to interact with participants and to answer questions or counter misconceptions. The “Little-Bit-Over” myth related to low level speeding is a good example. Being able to address misconceptions directly makes it more likely that information will be accepted and taken on board. A bonus has been information reportedly passed on to family and friends by participants.

Another benefit of workshop style session has been the opportunity for participants to raise questions. These can either be covered as part of the existing presentation or included ad-lib as the presentation progresses.

Costs and benefits of workshop based delivery over media based delivery

Whilst quantifying the actual behavior changes of a cohort of participants is not viable in the setting in which I operate, the reported learning from participants gives clear indications that behavior change is likely. The costs of holding and running a two session workshop, including advertising the event in the local newspaper, room hire and catering, totals in the order of \$900 and reaches up to 25 participants at a time. Each workshop cover a wide variety of road safety topics such as road rules, fatigue, effects of drugs and alcohol on driving, mobile phone use etc.

By comparison, measuring behavior change from a media based campaign is almost impossible. Current methodologies include surveys of how many people recognize the ad/poster, what their understanding of it was and whether they self-report any changes in behavior. In addition the costs associated of a media campaign are high. Graphic design plus the actual advertising costs can easily reach \$10000 or much more. The major benefit of media based campaigns is the potential to reach a large number of people however they can only target one issue.

Conclusion

Whilst developing and holding workshops is time-consuming, the benefit in understanding and behavior modification to those road users is well worth the time and commitment.

References

This discussion is based on anecdotal evidence and comments received as part of the feedback process following each workshop.