

Journey Beyond Road Trauma online community

by Michelle Kelly



The Journey Beyond Road Trauma (JBRT) online community (<http://journeybeyondroadtrauma.org>) has had an astounding response since the official launch at Easter 2010, with people sharing stories about recent losses and about loved ones lost 20 years ago. Emergency services personnel, people living with serious injuries and counsellors have also joined.

Thousands of people are affected by road trauma every year through death, serious injury and their work in the emergency services, legal professions and disability sector. The ripple effect of each and every crash is incalculable.

People affected by road trauma – either by a serious injury or a fatality – often feel voiceless and need to be heard. Also, quite often people affected by road trauma become passionate campaigners and want one good thing to come out of it to make sense of the senseless.

Co-producers Sandra Cook and Kerry Sunderland spent two years researching and developing the community and how it could meet those needs. They conducted in-depth research into the road safety sector to understand how the project could be effective in road safety education.

With more than 1700 members on the main site and the Facebook spinoff, and around 19,000 visits and 162,000 page views, it is an active and passionate movement which is finding its voice and strength.

Making an impact

Youth Justice conference convenor Lorna Edwards from Newcastle in NSW used the online community in a powerful way for a young man charged with dangerous driving. Ms Edwards chose a story from the JBRT site about a man who accidentally killed a young child through dangerous driving when he was 18 years old. This story was read out by a police officer at the initial conference.

An outcome plan, which was the sentencing option, stipulated that the young man charged with dangerous driving had to visit the JBRT site and select three stories to print out and send off to the Department of Juvenile Justice. Ms Edwards says it was a 'great' conference and has recommended using this process in the future for driving-related cases.

Neurosurgical nurse at the Royal Hobart Hospital Tasmania, Linda Nichols, presented a paper at the Australasian Neuroscience Nursing Conference in Christchurch titled 'Moral and ethical decision making'. The paper focused on the factors that influence decisions made by parents following motor vehicle and motorbike accidents involving young persons.

Ms Nichols promoted JBRT as an avenue for parents who have lost children or who are supporting the seriously injured, to tell their stories so as to have a voice and make a change. The community is regularly contacted by welfare workers, schools and university students who want to include JBRT in their education programs.

Speaking out

The producers put out a call asking for community members who were willing to tell their stories across different media. Within days they had an extensive database of committed people ready to speak publicly about their experiences.

This cross-platform story sharing strategy has seen the community represented across various media outlets including the 7.30 Report, the Conversation Hour and Channel 7 Sunrise. The Sunrise segments ran over a period of five weeks and featured JBRT community members speaking on different topics such as fatigue, serious injury, repeat offenders and young people dying on the roads.

JBRT has partnered with road trauma support groups, disability service providers and community-based lobby groups nationwide.

With more funding, the campaign section in the website will include sophisticated group functionality for campaigning, event organising tools, online petitions and downloadable templates for petitions and letters. The campaign section will also include educational advice from road safety experts who will interact with community members via live chats on road safety, news feeds, statistics and links.

JBRT is following the MADD (Mothers Against Drunk Driving) model. From its humble beginnings 25 years ago, MADD has evolved into one of the most widely supported and respected non-profit organisations in America. What began as a handful of angry mothers with a mission to stop drink driving has evolved into an educated and effective group of road safety campaigners. These mothers, by collaborating with each other and utilising the guidance of road safety experts, have now helped save thousands of lives.

In early 2011 a teachers' guide will be available on the site so that schools around Australia can more effectively and easily use the community and the stories of the members to educate future drivers about the effects of careless driving. A press kit, FAQs and images are also available on the site. For more information, contact producer Sandra Cook, phone 0413 146 013, or Michelle Kelly, phone 0431 011 050.