

# Dr. Prasannah Prabhakaran

*ACRS Young Leader forever, remembered*



It is with great sadness that we acknowledge the premature death of Dr Prasannah Prabhakaran, an esteemed colleague, road safety expert, and a cherished member of the Australasian College of Road Safety (ACRS). Prasannah's contributions to road safety were exceptional, and his loss will be deeply felt across our entire community.

In 2024, Prasannah was honoured as the ACRS Young Leader, an award that recognised his remarkable expertise, professionalism, and unwavering dedication to reducing road fatalities and serious injuries. He was a beacon of hope for the future of road safety, with a passion for evidence-based solutions and collaborative leadership that inspired all who had the privilege to work with him.

Prasannah's commitment to road safety extended beyond his own research and projects. As an active and highly respected committee chair within the ACRS NSW Chapter, he played a crucial role in shaping policies, mentoring others, and fostering strong partnerships to drive progress. His thoughtful guidance and insightful contributions enriched the College's work and strengthened the road safety community.

Beyond his professional achievements, Prasannah will be remembered for his kindness, humility, and ability to bring people together. His warmth and positive energy made him not just a colleague but a friend to many. Prasannah embodied the very qualities that define true leadership, vision, empathy, and the courage to advocate for change.

While his time with us was too short, Prasannah's legacy will live on through the impact he made in road safety and the lives he touched along the way. He will forever remain in our hearts as an ACRS Young Leader, forever young, forever inspiring.

Our thoughts are with his wife Felice, his family, friends, colleagues, and all who mourn this profound loss. We are grateful to have walked alongside him and will continue to honour his memory by striving towards the safer roads that he worked tirelessly to achieve.

Rest in peace, Prasannah. Your legacy endures.

**By Emeritus Professor Mike Regan, University of NSW Sydney, ACRS Fellow**

I first met Prasannah in 2011 when I joined the School of Aviation at UNSW as a professor. Prasannah, completing his PhD on young driver risk management, and I shared mutual research interests, leading to many deep and fruitful discussions.

In January 2018, Prasannah became a Research Fellow at the Research Centre for Integrated Transport Innovation (rCITI) at UNSW. I joined rCITI later that year and was delighted to have a colleague with a background in psychology and human factors. We worked closely for two years and became good friends.

Prasannah was a “big” deep, lateral thinker with many innovative ideas for road safety research. He had more ideas for projects than he would ever be able to create. Together, we formed the human factors group, securing funding for projects like perceptual countermeasures in tunnels, driver training for advanced systems, and virtual reality validation for road research.

He was also a gifted teacher. We developed and delivered a semester-long course (CVEN 4405 – Human Factors for Civil and Transport Engineers) and a professional course for Sydney Trains. His lectures were meticulously prepared, practical, and entertaining, earning high praise from students. He also co-supervised Civil Engineering Honours projects and was highly respected by all he taught and mentored.

Beyond research, Prasannah had a strong commitment to community service. He served on UNSW’s Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: Disability Working Group, a human research ethics committee, and became an active member and Chair of the

NSW Chapter of the Australasian College of Road Safety.

Prasannah was well-liked and respected by all at UNSW. His departure to a strategic role with the NSW Centre for Road Safety was a loss for us but allowed him to implement his visionary ideas on a broader scale.

We have lost, prematurely, a colleague upon whose shoulders the next generations of road safety professionals would have stood. My thoughts are with Prasannah’s wife, Felice, and his family at this most difficult time.



**Pictured above left to right:**  
Prasannah & Felice Prabhakaran, and Mei & Mike Regan.  
*Photo supplied by Mike Regan*

**By Joanne Bennett**

Prasannah loved telling the story of how we met. It was playing in a mixed netball team with mutual friends. We were doing our PhD’s at the time but never spoke about what we were studying. We became Facebook friends and after I posted a photo where I was giving a presentation about driving simulators, I got a message from Prasannah saying “what do you do? I think we should talk”. That was the beginning of our countless conversations about research and how we could make the world a safer place. This work together continued until the end as I only submitted one of our papers for publication two days before his passing.

Prasannah was so passionate about road safety, and he had more brilliant project ideas than we ever had time to complete - we had a spreadsheet just to try to keep track. He was a big picture thinker who simultaneously would fixate on the details - he would spend hours formatting a table to make sure it was perfect! He was my greatest sounding board, and for every idea and every question I would speak to him.

He was more than a colleague; he was one of my true friends. Prasannah wanted to live a life where he made a meaningful

impact on the world, and whilst his time with us was shorter than hoped, the impact he made on our lives, my life, has been immeasurable.

**Pictured below:** Prasannah & Joanne Bennett  
*Photo supplied by Joanne Bennett*







Prasannah Prabhakaran, 2024 ARSC, Hobart, TAS  
Photo supplied by Michael Timms

### ***From Michael Timms, ACRS NSW Chapter Chair***

NSW ACRS Chapter Chair Michael Timms said Prasannah was everything the next generation of road safety leaders should be.

"Prasannah's intellect, humility and sense of humour drew you to him. He made people want to make our roads a better and safer place," Michael said.

Past ACRS NSW Chapter Chair Duncan McRae described Prasannah as "a brilliant, shining light of road safety."

Prasannah was the driving force behind the NSW Chapter's Regional Road Safety Forums. The 2023 forums were the year's most significant events for the broader NSW regional road safety community.

"Our upcoming forums in Orange and Wagga Wagga are testimony to Prasannah's legacy", Mr Timms said.



### ***By Professor (Em.) Ann Williamson***

I have had the pleasure of knowing Prasannah since he was a PhD student at UNSW Aviation. While I wasn't one of his Supervisors, I read his thesis and Prasannah and I had many conversations about his work which I always thoroughly enjoyed.

He was always so excited and interested in what he was doing. He never lost that and while I followed his career from a bit of distance after he became a fully-fledged researcher, I was so pleased that others in the road safety field could see his spark. I was delighted when he got a job with the Centre for Road Safety as Road Safety Policy Lead. It was good news for road safety.

Prasannah's enthusiasm for road safety meant that he joined the College of Road Safety. True to form though, he became fully involved and gave up lots of his time for road safety when he became co-Lead of our NSW Chapter with Mick Timms.

Prasannah also participated in many other College activities, helping to make the difference we need. His contributions were recognised recently when he won the Young Leaders Oration Award at the last Australasian Road Safety Conference. Prasannah gave a knock-out oration which was much commented on and will I'm sure be remembered for years to come.

We need people like Prasannah, even if it was for such a short time. I am so grateful for his contributions and will sincerely miss him. Thanks, Prasannah!

### ***By David McTiernan***

Prasannah was someone who could connect with a great many people in a great many ways, but we would all agree, that when he engaged with you, you would be the centre of his attention and he would listen intently to what you had to say, questioning you to get to the core of why something was this way or why it was not different.

In talking with Prasannah about road safety, you would immediately feel his energy, his passion, and see his drive for making things better, for making people safer on our roads. As demonstrated through his Young Leaders Oration presentation in Hobart last year, Prasannah was a deep and passionate thinker, always looking for new ideas and testing them against what others might think; he openly invited people to contribute to doing things a better way, to build on a diversity of views and perspectives, and in this way draw people into a conversation.

But above all, everyone who knew Prasannah would agree that he was a generous, considerate, giving friend and colleague and he will be sadly and deeply missed.



**By Brett Molesworth, (Prasannah's PhD supervisor), UNSW Aviation**

I first met Prasannah in 2009 when he expressed interest in completing a PhD at UNSW Aviation. From his first email, it was clear he was confident and enthusiastic. During our first in-person discussion about the project he expressed interest in, it became evident that he was a lateral thinker.

Prasannah completed his PhD in 2012, and in the process published two journal papers in an industry leading journal. Prasannah's enthusiasm to make a real and meaningful difference was infectious. The School of Aviation was fortunate to experience this enthusiasm a second time, when in 2024 he delivered a post-graduate course.

Prasannah created a legacy in both academia and the road industry. My thoughts and the School's are with Felice and his family.



Prasannah & Felice Prabhakaran



L to R: Senator Anthony Chisholm MP, Prasannah, Liz Waller, Prof. (Em.) Ann Williamson, Dr Ingrid Johnston at the 2024 ARSC Award Gala



L to R: David McTiernan, Prasannah, Anna Chevalier, Michael Timms, Liz DeRome, Duncan McRae



Prasannah at 2019 ARSC, Adelaide SA



Prasannah presenting at the Wollongong Regional Road Safety Forum Nov. 2023



Prasannah delivers the 2024 ARSC Young Leaders Oration



ACRS 2023 Executive Council members at the Parliamentary Friends of Road Safety event, Parliament House, Canberra 2023