



Driving for Change - Stepping up and back to achieve mutual benefits

Initiative: Waitara Community Development Project, Waitara

Theme: Leading in and Leaderful Communities

Oftentimes, the response to those who flout the rules is to come down hard on them. In Waitara, working *with* young drivers who were breaking the law proved to be a winner. And not just for the young drivers either.

An awareness of young people driving while unlicensed (and often in unsafe vehicles that can be unwarranted and unregistered too) prompted the development of the Youth Driving for Change Roadshow in Waitara. Taking a lead, this initiative was created and run by the Waitara Community Development Project (WCDP) and the Waitara Community Constable with funding and assistance from RoadSafe Taranaki and the Ministry of Youth Development. Rather than coming down with a strong zero tolerance approach, the Roadshow worked *with* what the young people were already doing, with the intention of improving driver and community safety through practical demonstrations and accessible solutions.

The WCDP and local police obtained information showing Waitara High School Students had significant issues in relation to breaching of licenses. Almost half (48.8%) of these students admitted to breaching their license conditions, while 46.5% of students admitted to driving on the road unlicensed and 16.7% admitted to being in a crash while driving. A whopping 87% of fully licensed student drivers admitted to drinking often within 8 hours of operating a vehicle. At the same time, 88.4% indicated that they would attend a driver licensing course if it was free.

With such strong local data, the idea caught on with local education providers and spread to young people who weren't in education too. As the local secondary school principal says, "These guys are going to drive anyway, we just want to make sure they are doing it safely".

Although both local police and the WCDP were already committed to the project, they also needed the school to take a leadership role to ensure the messages delivered were relevant to the students. As it turned out, Waitara High School was also where the SADD (Students Against Drunk Driving) kids became involved and it was them who really took the lead, becoming excellent examples of Raelin's 4 C's:

- Their 'Collective leadership' meant that everyone in the group served as a leader; they each took turns designing and managing different aspects of the road show ensuring that their peers had maximum exposure to the information while they equally shared their skills.
- Each SADD student taking turns at managing the road show activities showed 'Concurrent leadership' where not only did all of our SADD members serve as leaders, but also they did it at the same time.
- As we had taken time to plan together we ensured a sense of 'Collaborative leadership' where everyone was in control of and could speak for the entire team. All our partners were able pitch in to accomplish the work of the team and make Waitara Youth Driving for Change such a success.
- Each of our team members committed to 'Compassionate leadership' whereby each individual on the team was heard, considered and respected. This meant everyone's talent shined through and contributed to the teams objectives.

This leadership style worked very well given the scope of the Driver Education Road show. With so many exhibits and 410 attendees, having one person in control of the entire project would never have worked well. Instead WCDP, the Community Constable and Waitara High School created a space and an opportunity where the SADD team could work in a leaderful way to hold the hugely successful full-day event for their peers.

Letting go of this process as organisers and 'holding the space' for SADD developed the SADD students' leadership capabilities and also developed the various professional service providers too. As Melissa Willis from WCDP says, "As police, educators and community development advisors we had to conscientiously step back from leadership and create a space for our young people to plan, develop, manage and shine through. Our role was to support and create opportunity which in the long run became more rewarding as we watched our youth achieve. It also helped us to build stronger, lasting and more meaningful relationships with our youth, they in turn became more interested in what we do and are participating in many other opportunities with us."

On the day, all students of Waitara High School and Waitara Alternative Education Courses as well as numbers of unemployed youth and members of the youth public took part in a wide range of activities and presentations. The Roadshow included a fully modified demonstration car, computer based driving, New Zealand Police driving demonstrations, seatbelt crash simulations and an example of a crashed car. Activities included negotiating an obstacle course while wearing 'impairment goggles' which simulate drunkenness and demonstrations of safe stopping distances at a variety of speeds. No wonder there was a lot of laughing, cheering and tyre screeching at school that day!

More seriously, the SADD group put on a mock graveyard and memorial coffin display while a local man who became a quadriplegic through a drink driving crash spoke to students about his experiences. His words were supported by an ALAC 'Had Enough?' DVD and photo displays. The perils of driving, and how to avoid them, were further reinforced by conversations with a subject matter expert and vehicle inspector as well as education on the responsibilities and costs of owning a car.

A huge attraction at the Roadshow was the opportunity to apply to participate in the Waitara Youth Driving for Change Education workshops. These workshops included eight hours of driver education from Street Talk Driving School, 2 hours practical driving tuition and the opportunity to complete their licenses at no cost to them. As well, the young drivers built relationships with the Community Development Advisor and Community Constable.

Showing that many young people wanted to get their licenses, almost 100 people applied. Students had to complete an application form and, from 410 attendees, there were 94 applicants. Selection was not easy. In the end, eight were selected for learner licences, eight for restricted licences and eight for full licences. The selections were made based on re-educating and improving the driving of students who were already offending, picking the students with limited support for driving lessons and students who listed good reasons for not getting their licences before now. Of the students surveyed over one quarter listed their reasons for not sitting their licences before now as being based on fear, and many also cited cost and previous failures. Since then, 23 of the 24 students accepted for the workshops have successfully gained their licences and, several months later, none have been caught committing any offences since their graduation!

These kids tell us they felt much more confident going for their licences in a team environment and that many of them would not have achieved their licences without this help. This sort of information is really important to gather. 'Practice-based evidence' shows what works in particular local places at particular times. It will never become a recipe, but it is a very firm foundation upon which to build something else. In this case, and not surprisingly, Waitara High School would love to run the Roadshow again.

"It's a really great initiative. If we get the funding, we'll definitely do it again. It's going to make Waitara a much safer community."

Hopefully, now that the idea has been shown to be worthwhile, gathering local partners and achieving funding may also be easier.

Key Learnings:

- Having well written and probing application forms ensures honest and direct information from applicants for the workshops. This also means targeting those who need help the most is simpler.
- Letting go of professional organisation and leadership and instead creating space for the SADD kids participate in the design and management of the project not only made it relevant to our audience but meant we had ready volunteers to run the activities on the day. It also gave our kids an opportunity to develop their leadership skills.
- Good ideas need coordination to come to fruition. This project, like many others would have remained as a good idea if the WCDP Advisor and Community Constable hadn't applied for funding and spent energy building partnerships. It took almost a year of information gathering and planning for the development of this project, yet the benefits of better educating young people on the road are of an even longer term.

Key Outcomes:

- 23 licensed drivers who would otherwise not have their licenses
- Building networks and relationships with schools and other education providers builds on the assets on the community and provides a base on which to work together on other things in the future.

- Providing space for others to grow in leaderful ways ensures these skills are shared. It also enables current leaders to learn to step back and to see the usefulness of playing a supporting role.

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References:

<http://www.leaderful.org/pdf/RaelinTD.pdf>

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