

Support for Rural and Regional Learner Drivers

Questions on Notice

Figures relating to the number of students who did not have their birth certificates (under the Griffith Project).

Western Riverina Community School is a special assistance school for those in years 9-12. At any one time, there can be 30-40 students attending, 40% of these students are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It was established in 2018 as an alternative to mainstream education, charging no fees to students or families.

The Road Safety Education initiative, designed by an educator at the school, came to the attention of NSW Health, NSW Police, NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, NSW Advocate for Children and Young People through the Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW) in 2020 as part of annual Transport for NSW funding (which AISNSW utilises to support Road Safety Education School-based projects for independent schools). The initiative was created with the goal of giving their students every opportunity to work towards successfully and safely gaining their drivers licence. Prior to the project, less than 10% of students had been successful in gaining their L's and no students had gained their P's.

Implemented in terms 3 and 4, three students sought the assistance of NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages in obtaining their identification documents, however, with a process in place (as a result of the 2020 project), up to 7 students were to seek assistance. To date, in 2022, 7 students have sought the assistance of NSW Births, Deaths and Marriages to obtain their identification documents.

The Western Riverina Community Safety initiative has demonstrated itself as a sustainable model of practice. In 2020, the program secured funding from AISNSW (through a long-standing cross-sectoral funding arrangement with Transport for NSW) and then Minister for Regional Youth, Mental Health and Women to make the initiative a fixture within the school PDHPE and Wellbeing curriculum. Due to the teaching model of the school as teaching in stages rather than individual years, the program will be run internally at the school every second year. It is envisaged that NSW Births Deaths and Marriages will continue to work with the school to assist students in obtaining their necessary documentation (after setting up a sustainable process in 2020/2021).

Figures relating to number of students who got their learners licence but not their provisional licence (under the Griffith Project).

Western Riverina Community School is a special assistance school for those in years 9-12. At any one time, there can be 30-40 students attending, 40% of these students are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It was established in 2018 as an alternative to mainstream education, charging no fees to students or families.

The Road Safety Education initiative, designed by an educator at the school, came to the attention of NSW Health, NSW Police, NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, NSW Advocate for Children and Young People through the Association of Independent Schools of NSW (AISNSW) in 2020 as part of annual Transport for NSW funding (which AISNSW uses to support Road Safety Education School-based projects in independent schools.) The initiative was created with the goal of giving their students every opportunity to work towards successfully and safely gaining their drivers licence. Prior to the project, less than 10% of students had been successful in gaining their L's and no students had gained their P's.

In the first cohort (2020) 8 students achieved their learners permit. To date in cohort 2 (2022) 7 students have their documentation in place and are preparing to take their learners permit. The first two students in the school's history have received their provisional permit.

The Western Riverina Community Safety initiative has demonstrated itself as a sustainable model of practice. In 2020, the program secured funding from AISNSW (through a long-standing cross-sectoral funding arrangement with Transport for NSW) and then Minister for Regional Youth, Mental Health and Women to make the initiative a fixture within the school PDHPE and Wellbeing curriculum. Due to the teaching model of the school as teaching in stages rather than individual years, the program will be run internally at the school every second year. It is envisaged as the program continues, students will continue to progress from their learners permit to their provisional permit.

Are there any other avenues for prospective learners to pass their driver knowledge test if their literacy is too poor to allow them to pass?

Lower levels of literacy is a profound barrier for some when progressing to their learners permit and then provisional permit. As discussed in the Committee Hearing, this is a challenge that is exacerbated within some community groups, including migrant and refugee communities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders and those in Juvenile Justice.

A balance must be struck to ensure that learners understanding and comprehension of the driver knowledge test is present to ensure safety while behind the wheel but also an appreciation of lower literacy levels. Increasing literacy is a key component of a number of Drivers Programs focused on specific cohorts.

For example, the Driver Licensing Access Program (DLAP) available through service providers to Aboriginal communities, refugee and resettlement communities and vulnerable young people has identified the barrier of lower reading, writing and maths skills when learning the road rules. DLAP service providers support participants by improving reading, writing and computer skills to prepare you for licence tests.

The Driver for Life Program conducted by the Salvation Army offers training and mentoring for those 16-25 accessing Centrelink seeking their drivers licence. The Program has identified numeracy and literacy challenges as a barrier that can be overcome by partnering participants with volunteers who support with pre-learner classes to help prepare for their L's.

On The Road Driver Education Course provided by ACE Community College is a placed based course supporting Aboriginal People to obtain their provisional licence. Commenced in 2003 in Lismore, the Course has now grown to 20 regional communities. The program is structured to prepare learners for the three stages of licence testing. First is an 8 week course to prepare for the Driver Knowledge Test, followed by the equivalent of 30 hours of driving lessons and then access to a car and instructor for the Driving Ability Road Test. The 8 week course component includes a Literacy Teacher that prepares participants with language, literacy and numeracy skills to pass the Driver Knowledge Test.

Is it a question of reducing from 120 hours or is it a question of providing alternatives to physically on the road driving in a car with a supervisor?

Each State in Australia has a minimum requirement for learners before they can apply for their learners and provisional licence, in NSW this has been set at 120 hours. Setting a minimum number of hours aims to ensure Learners have sufficient driving experience in differing conditions that reflect the reality of driving on the road. The requirement to meet these hours can be a barrier for young people for a number of reasons as discussed at the Committee Hearing.

A core function of the Advocate for Children and Young People is to ensure the safety of children and young people. If this requirement of 120 hours enhances the safety of young people on the road, it is not within the remit of the Advocate to make a comment on this.

Where we are able to provide comment is that, there are alternatives that we have seen have positive outcomes, such as simulation technology used within Juvenile Justice. Initiatives such as the program between TAFE NSW Tamworth and the Tamworth Supply Chain Cluster, which saw a driving simulator transferred from Western Sydney to Tamworth to train 30 heavy vehicle holders with free safety training should be explored further.

Do you have any data on the young people that do not have access to the programs or to driver training schools or family that can actually provide them with those hours that they need behind the wheel of a car to get a licence?

Quantifiable data in regards to this question is difficult to measure. Transport for NSW tracks the number of participants undertaking the Driver Licence Access Program, through a network of service providers. Service NSW tracks the number of driving permits issued.

Anecdotally, the Advocate has heard of the challenges of accessing programs to support learner drivers and other supports, such access to insured vehicles, supervised drivers and lower insurance premiums. Many of these instances are spoken about within the Advocate's submission.

This includes examples from within the Advocate's *What Children and Young People in Juvenile Justice Have to Say Report* and the *What Aboriginal Children and Young People Have to Say Report*, where participants spoke highly of the life skills programs in centres, including access to driver licensing courses and simulations.

The Advocate's *What Aboriginal Children and Young People Have to Say Report* also had participants discuss the positive social and skills aspect of support programs offered in schools, including the ACE driver education program, referred in an earlier question.

Within the Advocate's *Children and Young People Injury Prevention Report*, the NSW Government's Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS) is spoken of as an example of best practice in early intervention programs to avoid the risk of injury.

Furthermore, increasing the number of Aboriginal Young People getting a retaining a drivers permit was a goal within the *NSW Strategic Plan for Children and Young People 2016-2019*, which was tracked through participation with the DLAP (as referenced in an earlier question). This goal was achieved with an increase from 6,038 L, P1 and P2 permits in 2016/17 to 6,253 L, P1 and P2 learner permits in 2018/19, solely through that point of access.

Within the Advocate's *Rural and Regional Consultation Report*, individuals have spoken positively about services that help young people reach the required learning hours and attain a driver licence. Those living in regional NSW (75%) are more likely to say that in the future they would prefer to get a driver licence and drive their own car than those living in Sydney metropolitan areas (71%). The report does call for Driver licensing programs to be expanded in regional NSW to provide comprehensive end-to-end support for young people to obtain their driver licenses.

In the Advocate's *Consultation Report with Socially Excluded Children and Young People*, children and young people have recommended that there are provisions for socially excluded young people to obtain their drivers licence, including reducing the costs associated with learning how to drive, expanding learn-to-drive programs and providing insurance concessions for Specialist Homelessness Services cars that allow young people to use them for driving practice.

Within the Advocate's *Consultation Report with those experiencing homelessness, children and young people in Specialist Homeless Services* reported that the costs associated with learning how to drive and getting a driver licence, including paying the written and practical tests and for lessons, were prohibitively expensive. For those living in rural areas, a lack of licence severely limits their ability to access work and education, especially on weekends or after hours. Young people said that

the costs of getting a licence and maintaining a car are a major barrier to employment, including being able to get to job interviews and to work sites.

Young people in out of home care and experiencing homelessness also discussed that access to a sufficiently licensed driver in order to log the required 120 hours of supervised driving, including a minimum of 20 hours of night driving, is a significant barrier to getting their licence. Another reported barrier is access to an adequately insured car. Difficulties are magnified for young people in residential care and Specialist Homelessness Services.

During consultations with homeless young people, it was suggested that these services should be able to teach them how to drive as part of their case management plans. For example, if specialist homelessness services were granted insurance concessions and could insure their cars for learner drivers, young people in refuges would have greater opportunities to gain their licence. Limited access to volunteer driver reimbursements for fuel and other expenses can also be a barrier to enabling community-based organisations to provide volunteer supervision for young drivers. Young people have also reported that they may not have 100 points of identification or have difficulty in obtaining it, which can be a barrier to meeting the requirements to obtain a driver licence.

These examples are able to provide some anecdotal evidence to specific cohorts and experiences of why some young people cannot access programs, schools or families that could support their development as learner drivers. The Advocate would be happy to provide these reports to the Committee on notice.

Do we have any data on the number of kids that just are not in your programs and just fall through the cracks?

Please see response to above question.