

Submission

No 17

INQUIRY INTO SCHOOL ZONE SAFETY

Organisation: YouthSafe
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Mr Greg Aplin MP
Chair Staysafe Committee
Parliament of NSW
Macquarie St
Sydney NSW 2000

30 September 2011

Dear Mr Aplin,

Re: Staysafe Inquiry into School Zone Safety

Thank you for the opportunity to make a submission to the Parliamentary Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety (Staysafe) inquiry into 'School Zone Safety'.

Youthsafe is a not for profit organisation and the peak body in NSW for prevention of serious unintentional injury in young people. Youthsafe holds full accreditation having been assessed as complying with all required Quality

Improvement Council standards for community organisations in Australasia. Youthsafe's primary focus is young people aged 15 to 25 years, but we are also involved with the 12 to 15 year age group as this is the period during which risk taking behaviour in adolescence begins to develop. Youthsafe addresses injury prevention wherever young people are at risk of injury, including on the roads, in workplaces and in sport, recreation and other social settings.

Given that road trauma accounts for a major proportion of serious injuries and fatalities in young people, Youthsafe is interested in contributing to Staysafe's consideration of safety issues for students travelling to and from school, particularly those starting high school. Youthsafe's submission primarily relates to the following points in the terms of reference for the inquiry:

- c) Age as a factor in pedestrian crash risk and the major contributing factors for casualties by age cohort around school zones.
- f) The availability and effectiveness of current road safety education programs in NSW schools.
- g) Any other related matters.

Why young people are at risk on the roads:

There are many good reasons why young people generally are vulnerable road users. Youthsafe has previously highlighted several factors that increase the risk of injury to young people in general and on the roads in particular:

- The adolescent brain, which is still developing and maturing until the mid twenties, particularly the prefrontal cortex responsible for reasoning, self control and making better judgements.

- New levels of independence and responsibility that come with adolescence.
- Inexperience with new activities.
- A greater propensity amongst young people to experiment and to seek thrills.
- The strong influence of peers during adolescent years.
- Belief structures amongst young people that they are unable to control risk, particularly young people from lower socio-economic groups.
- Expectations in society generally that young people take risks and are not responsible for the outcomes of risk taking behaviour.
- Attitudes and patterns of behaviour related to safety which are influenced at an early age by parents/family and local community.

New high school students:

RTA data has indicated that students during early high school years were at increased risk as a pedestrian, with 13 years being the age at which pedestrian casualties most frequently occurred. Pedestrian casualties were higher amongst males than females.

Also, it is not just the immediate area around schools where adolescents are at risk of injury as a road user, it is across the whole journey, particularly after school.

While young children lack the perceptual and cognitive skills required to handle the road environment, for adolescents it is more about 'failure to deploy these skills that contributes to increased vulnerability of adolescent pedestrians'.¹

¹ Evans and Norman, 2003 'Predicting adolescent pedestrians' road-crossing intentions: an application and extension of the Theory of Planned Behaviour' Health Education Research Oxford University Press.

Additional factors contributing to risk of injury amongst young people of an age where they are starting high school can include the following:

- More independent travel than is likely to have taken place during primary school, and increasing demands for independent travel during high school years eg to sports activities as well as journeys to and from school.
- Longer travel distances to high school and more complex/busier road environments than those around primary schools.
- Greater likelihood that more than one mode of transport will need to be used by students travelling to high school, including walking to, from and between different modes of transport, such as bus or train – sometimes there are also issues associated with rushing to catch public transport.
- Greater likelihood that high school students will be more fatigued when travelling due to factors such as increased study demands, more commitments both at school and outside school, carrying heavier bags, laptops etc.
- High school students are likely to be experiencing more distractions while travelling with new friends or using mobile phones, MP3s or other technologies.
- Parental overestimation of adolescent road user capabilities due to lack of awareness of adolescent perception of risk and on decision making limitations and the impact of this for adolescents on the roads.

Various research studies have highlighted the above factors.

Effective Strategies:

It is understood that countries that employ more traffic calming measures, such as lower speed limits in built up areas, and place greater emphasis on

driver responsibility demonstrate lower injury rates² though this is not Youthsafe's area of expertise,

Youthsafe's injury prevention focus has been more on understanding adolescent development and communication/education strategies that are effective with young people.

In particular Youthsafe has taken a life skills-based approach. Life skills are a group of cognitive, personal and interpersonal abilities that help people make informed decisions, solve problems, think critically and creatively, communicate effectively, build healthy relationships, empathise with others and cope with/manage their lives in a healthy and productive manner. The World Health Organisation defines life skills as 'abilities for adaptive and positive behaviour that enable individuals to deal effectively with the demands and challenges of everyday life.' To develop life skills a combination of knowledge, attitudes and practical skills is required. It is now widely recognised that knowledge alone is not sufficient for individuals to choose, adopt and maintain healthy/safe behaviours, especially when there are temptations, pressures, pleasure or rewards associated with doing things that are 'unhealthy' or 'unsafe'. Motivation and capability is as important as knowledge.

Adolescence is a transitional period and adolescent motivations and capabilities are different to children and to adults.

Life skills-based education for young people relies on content that is *relevant* to and *effective* in their lifestyles and teaching/learning methods need to be *participatory* or *interactive* to achieve a combination of knowledge, attitude and skills development.

² Dr Jan Garrard, Senior Lecturer in Public Health, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University 'Submission to National Road Safety Strategy 2011-2020'.

There is now strong evidence from an increasing number of studies that skills-based health education, applied in an appropriate context, changes behaviour – including behaviour in sensitive and difficult areas where knowledge based health education has failed.

Characteristics of successful health education programs include the following:

- Focus on a few *specific behavioural goals*, which require knowledge, attitude and skill objectives.
- Inclusion of *basic, accurate information* that is relevant to behaviour change, such as the serious injury risks involved in certain behaviours and realistic strategies for avoiding and/or reducing those risks.
- Emphasis on *clear and appropriate values* that will strengthen individual values and group norms against high risk behaviours.
- Inclusion of *modelling and practice in communication and negotiation skills*.
- Use of *Social Learning theories* as the foundation for program development.
- Addressing *social influences* on high risk behaviour, including the important role of media and peers.
- Use of *participatory activities* (simulations, group activities and discussions, etc) to achieve the objective of personalising information, exploring attitudes and values and practising skills.
- Provision of extensive *training for teachers / facilitators* to enable them to master basic information about high-risk behaviour and opportunities to practice and become confident with life skills training methods.
- Support for *high-risk behaviour intervention programs* set up by education authorities, decision and policy-makers and the community at large.
- Completion of *evaluations* (eg of outcomes, design, implementation, sustainability, student, professional and community support) to ensure program improvement and best practice.

- Ensuring materials and activities are *age-appropriate*, targeting young people in different age groups and at different stages of development with suitable and relevant messages and *gender sensitivity*, to accommodate both males and females.³

Youthsafe resources and programs:

As well as looking to evidence to inform development of effective programs and resources, Youthsafe takes a multi-strategic, whole of community approach. Youthsafe, in large part, works with community based professionals, educators and others in a position to influence young people and resources are developed for this group as well as young people and their parents/carers. Our resources and programs are developed in consultation with target audiences, stakeholders and road safety experts, are pilot tested and refined before implementation and are regularly reviewed and updated as needed.

Youthsafe's activities are supported by the Centre for Road Safety, RTA and complement RTA programs.

One of Youthsafe's resources, developed with support from the RTA, is a fact sheet for parents of students starting high school called '*On the way to high school*'. A mailout and order form for this fact sheet goes out annually to all NSW schools. It is also included in other Youthsafe mailouts promoting the range of Youthsafe resources and presentations. The fact sheet is recommended as a 'take home note' for parents of Year 6 and Year 7 students and schools are encouraged to include the fact sheet in high school orientation sessions. Various community based professionals also use the fact sheet to

³ The partnership for Child Development website. <http://www.freshschools.org/education-0.htm>

support relevant projects they undertake in the community. The fact sheets are provided free of charge. Last year about 30,000 fact sheets were distributed in response to orders.

Youthsafe also provides presentations with a road safety focus to schools and community groups in Sydney and surrounding areas. Last year over 8,000 students participated in Youthsafe presentations.

To assist in reaching areas where it is not feasible for Youthsafe presenters to deliver face to face sessions, educator kits with audio visual materials, session plans and support resources have been developed, a comprehensive Youthsafe website is maintained and lectures are delivered each year to PDHPE student teachers at five universities.

In conclusion:

Youthsafe would like to reinforce with the Staysafe Committee:

- Characteristics of adolescence that are uniquely different to younger children and to adults, including the still maturing risk perception and decision making capabilities.
- Particular vulnerabilities of students in early high school years.
- Issues around the safety of students on the roads for their whole journey to and from school, as well as school zones.
- Educational strategies that are meaningful to adolescent lifestyles, including the value of a life skills-based approach.
- Positive and supportive approaches that recognise the need for young people to learn independence and responsibility.
- A multi-stategic approach to the safety of young people on the roads, including engagement of the wider community.

I trust Youthsafe's submission will be a useful contribution to the Staysafe Committee's inquiry and Youthsafe would be pleased to respond to any queries about our submission or to provide any further information. My contact details are as follows:

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We look forward to the outcome of the inquiry.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Anne Deans".

Youthsafe Chief Executive