

**Submission
No 29**

SUPPORT FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL LEARNER DRIVERS

Organisation: Port Macquarie Hastings Council

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Submission for the inquiry into support for rural and regional learner drivers.

There are a significant number of constraints experienced by those without a licence in regional and rural areas.

Challenges without a license

Living in regional and rural NSW without a licence presents many challenges and can be a significant disadvantage. Residents are not able to use alternatives to move about their town, due to:

- Lack of public transport options
- Low frequency of public transport service
- Limited route options – can't access many locations
- Negligible night options
- Some areas not serviced at all

This means that without a licence, many of our residents are disadvantaged and can even at times be at risk.

Without the ability to travel, or travel at specific times, individuals are limited in opportunity to:

- Study at local TAFE or university
- Attend training/apprenticeships
- Maintain a job
- Access medical support
- Join sporting and social activities etc.

Demographic in need:

For many of our young people, their family circumstances make it challenging or impossible to achieve the required 120 Learner driver hours. Situations vary, including:

- Students living in refuge situations
- Students living without a parent
- Families without fully licenced adults
- Students who are carers for their parent(s)
- Low income families unable to cope with costs of petrol/vehicle
- Families without a vehicle
- Families with other various challenging circumstances

What can funding do?

With various finite funding we have had several community-based organisations work to combat this issue. These programs have proven to be extremely beneficial to the individuals who access them. However demand outstrips the need and the programs often end due to funding limitations.

Example program:

An L2P learner driver program has been successfully running in this region in a small capacity. Initial funds came from local support from Lions and a donation of a car from a local car sales group. The program was able to continue with a further injection of funds from Transport for NSW. The program commenced in August 2016 (did not run in 2020 due to COVID). Evidence demonstrates there is a high demand for this support and service in the area.

The L2P program provides has a 16 -25 years program and a 25+ program.

Resources and funding have limited the program to 6 individuals at one time. Over the time the program has been running it has been fully subscribed with a continuous waiting list of eligible people. Funding is finite and will not be able to continue indefinitely.

- Approx. 60 young people have been through the program (although not all making it through to the end of the program)
- 25 young people in that time have gained their P1 Licence
- Currently there are 20 people on the list waiting to enter the program
- There are 4 mentors & 2 cars - further funds would help to expand the program to continue into the future
- Currently runs only in Port Macquarie - looking to expanding the program to Wauchope & Lake Cathie areas

The number of places in the program is limited by the number of cars available and is dependent on the number of volunteer driver mentors who come forward to take part in the program.

Funding for this type of program provides:

- Maintenance of vehicles
- Fuel costs
- Training for the mentors
- Professional driving lessons at crucial points for the learner drivers
- Safety driver training

Funding for this type of program is incredibly beneficial to the individuals and to the community as a whole. It provide youth in particular with:

- Access to education, training and employment
- Access to other activities and services – shopping, medical health, social activities
- Independence
- Options and purpose

Example case study:

Single mother with twin sons in Year 12 and a severely disabled younger child. Mother's time and care for the younger son has left the boys without an available parent to have the time, energy or funds to provide the opportunity for either of her twin sons to achieve the 120 learner driver hours.

The family live outside the town centre and with the mother as full time carer for her younger son, the boys were unable to take up part time work, attend regular sporting or other extra curricula activities etc. As they had reached the age to drive, they were frustrated that, due to not holding a licence, they were unable to be another support and resource for the family, to go shopping, help drive to medical appointments etc.

The L2P program allowed one of the twins to achieve his hours and go onto both support his mother and achieve his own goals.

Ideally, continuation and extension of such programs with funding support would lead to more individuals accessing such programs and extending the program to other locations to allow for more

reach within the community. Currently, this small program runs in Port Macquarie with an ideal to extend to Wauchope and Lake Cathie and possibly more remote areas in the future.

Extension for more remote access to the program would also be beneficial.

Funding to support similar programs, such as this [opportunity running at Sydney Motorsport Park](#), would also be beneficial to learners and P plate drivers in our regional and rurals areas. It can be quite overwhelming or confusing for novice drivers to be confronted with police sirens or RBT sites – often not knowing how to react or what to do as driver. In regional area with roads of various conditions and speeds, having support and practise of the correct driving behaviours would improve safety and instil greater confidence in our drivers.