

**Submission
No 31**

SUPPORT FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL LEARNER DRIVERS

Organisation: Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People

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Submission to the Inquiry on Support for Rural and Regional Learner Drivers

About the Advocate for Children and Young People

The Advocate for Children and Young People (ACYP) is an independent statutory appointment overseen by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Children and Young People. ACYP advocates for and promotes the safety, welfare, well-being and voice of all children and young people aged 0-24 years, with a focus on the needs of those who are vulnerable or disadvantaged.

Under the *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014*ⁱ, the functions of the Advocate include:

- making recommendations to Parliament, and government and non-government agencies on legislation, policies, practices and services that affect children and young people;
- promoting children and young people's participation in activities and decision-making about issues that affect their lives;
- conducting research into children's issues and monitoring children's well-being;
- holding inquiries into important issues relating to children and young people;
- providing information to help children and young people; and
- preparing, in consultation with the Minister responsible for youth, a three-year, whole-of-government Strategic Plan for Children and Young People.

Further information about ACYP's work can be found at: www.acyp.nsw.gov.au

Introduction

The Advocate for Children and Young People welcomes the opportunity to make a brief submission to the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety's Inquiry into support for rural and regional learner drivers.

Since 2015 ACYP has undertaken face-to-face consultations with over 12,000 children and young people and online quantitative research with 24,000 young people across NSW, across a broad range of topics. Their views have informed ACYP's brief submission to this Inquiry. Our submission does not seek to address the inquiry's Terms of Reference (ToR) in its entirety. Instead our submission is focused on outlining the issues that we have heard children and young people raise in relation to what is needed to enhance the NSW Government's existing efforts to support rural and regional learner drivers.

Obtaining a Driver's Licence is substantially more difficult for children and young people based in rural and regional areas. Access to a driver's licence supports young people's pathway to independence

ⁱ Part 3, Section 15 of *Advocate for Children and Young People Act 2014 No 29*
<https://www.legislation.nsw.gov.au/view/html/inforce/current/act-2014-029#sec.15>

and can provide a critical connection to education, employment, services, and recreational and social opportunities. This is particularly important for young people in regional and rural areas that are poorly served by public transport. The inability to obtain a licence, or the suspension or cancellation of a licence, can contribute to and perpetuate disadvantage for young people with limited access to public transport. It can also lead to unlicensed driving, which may result in fines, further suspensions, arrests and imprisonment.

ACYP is aware that a number of initiatives exist across NSW to support young people to access their driver's licence and support safer driving behaviours. This includes programs run through schoolsⁱⁱ, Juvenile Justice and Corrective Servicesⁱⁱⁱ, TAFE NSW^{iv}, Police Citizens Youth Clubs^v, community-based programs^{vi}, as well as private driving lessons. Some of these programs provide subsidies or other supports to address cost-related and other barriers for disadvantaged young people; however, throughout our consultations with children and young people we have consistently heard that a number of barriers remain.

Barriers to obtaining a driver's licence

Costs associated with obtaining a driver's licence

Across a range of our consultations, including the Advocate's recent visits to Cootamundra and Griffith, children and young people told us that the costs associated with learning how to drive and get a licence, including paying for lessons, paying for written and practical tests and then maintaining a car, were prohibitively expensive, reducing their ability to fully participate in their society and community.

ACYP recommends that the government consider the development of initiatives aimed at reducing the costs associated with learning to drive, particularly in rural and regional areas.

Requirement to complete 120 hours

In many of our consultations with children and young people, they have told us that a significant barrier to getting a driver's licence is the requirement to undertake a certain number of supervised driving hours.

ⁱⁱ Across all levels of schooling, there are an extensive number of programs which focus on road safety both within and outside the curriculum designed in partnership with Transport for NSW Centre for Road Safety. These programs are available across the different school sectors. Further information can be found at: <https://roadsafety.transport.nsw.gov.au/stayingsafe/schools/roadsafetyeducationprogram.html>

ⁱⁱⁱ Juvenile Justice NSW and Corrective Services NSW have recently partnered with Roads and Maritime Services to have the learners and provisional drivers test available within their centres.

^{iv} TAFE NSW offers an accredited course in Foundation Skills for Learner Drivers in partnership with Service NSW. Further information can be found at: <https://www.tafensw.edu.au/course/-/c/c/10748NAT-01/Foundation-Skills-for-Learner-Drivers>

^v PCYC NSW is the largest provider of the Safer Drivers Course, further information can be found at: <https://www.pcyedrivereducationprograms-sdc.org.au/>

^{vi} See for example: WEAVE Youth and Community Services 'Driving Change' Program <https://www.weave.org.au/programs/driving-change-program/>; Stepping Stone House 'Drive to Freedom' program <https://steppingstonehouse.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/SSH-Annual-Report-2018-low-res-1.pdf>

For instance, many young people in out-of-home-care (OOHC) have reported that driving lessons that are included in OOHC plans are working well, yet there is a discrepancy between the hours allocated in the plan, and the total amount required to obtain a licence. Young people reported difficulties in covering the hours not included in the plan.^{vii} For example, the payment of 10 driving lessons for young people OOHC is an important initiative to reduce barriers to accessing driving licensing for young people in care; however, these young people still need to obtain the remaining 110 hours required to meet the log book requirements. Some young people in care have also reported that whilst the provision for driving lessons is written into their leaving care plan they do not know how to access it.

Similar issues have been raised within consultations with children and young people who have or are experiencing homelessness. Within this context, for example, it was suggested that homelessness and other support services should be able to teach them how to drive as part of their case management and leaving plans.^{viii}

Access to a supervised driver

Young people in OOHC and experiencing homelessness have told us 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.^{ix}

“Getting your L’s – there’s no one there to help you.”^x

For example, children and young people have told us that caseworkers and residential care workers could not take them driving in the organisation’s car, but for a number of the young people present these were the only responsible adults they had in their lives.^{xi} 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.^{xii}

Access to an appropriately insured vehicle

Another barrier that children and young people have raised with us is access to an adequately insured car, whilst these can be barriers for many young people, the difficulties are often magnified for young people in residential care and Specialist Homelessness Services (SHS), as they also did not have the same access to vehicles as other young people had.^{xiii} Similar contexts exist for those living in lower

^{vii} ACYP Consultation Report, *What children and young people experiencing homelessness had to say*. Page 24 March 2017

^{viii} Ibid.

^{ix} ACYP Consultation Report, *Report on consultation with socially excluded children and young people*, Page 46. October 2018

^x ACYP Consultation Report, *Consultation with refugee and asylum seekers children and young people*, Page 17, 2019.

^{xi} ACYP Submission, *Parliamentary Inquiry into the child protection and social services system*. Page 11. December 2020

^{xii} ACYP Consultation Report, *Report on consultations with socially excluded children and young people*. Page 46 October 2018

^{xiii} ACYP Consultation Report, *What children and young people experiencing have to say*, Page 24. March 2017

socio economic areas or in the context of regional and rural areas, where the only available vehicle may be needed by a parent to travel long distances for work. In both these contexts the vehicle would be unavailable for lessons.

“Driving we have to do 120 hours of learners we get 50 hours of free driving lessons but how are we suppose to do the other 70 hours when we can’t use the work cars or the resi workers personal cars?”^{xiv}

If refugees and care providers were granted insurance concessions and could insure their cars for learner drivers, young people would have greater opportunities to gain their licence.^{xv}

Access to required 100 points of identification

Young people have also reported that they may not have 100 points of identification required by Roads and Maritime Services or have difficulty in obtaining it, which can be a barrier to meeting the requirements to obtain a drivers licence. Within our consultations with Aboriginal children and young people, they have previously identified particular challenges with accessing birth certificates and other records. Aboriginal people are significantly less likely to hold a current driver’s licence, in part due to this issue. We note that the Department of Customer Service through Service NSW is working to increase coverage of the digital licence and credential scheme which may alleviate some of these challenges, noting that some regional and rural areas may not have sustained digital infrastructure to facilitate this. This is in addition to broader reforms around birth certificates, including the “Our Kids Count”^{xvi} campaign run by the NSW Registry of Births, Deaths and Marriages, the introduction of online birth registration and fee waiver schemes, as well as a digital birth certificate currently under development by the NSW Government. ACYP recommends that Service NSW continue this positive work, including by further exploring partnerships with local schools and community organisations to increase the avenues and supports for young people to acquire the necessary documentation.

Access to Driving Courses

While many driver licensing programs are working well, some gaps remain in the driver licensing support system for young people. For example, for young people to be eligible for a free place on the Safer Drivers Course, they need to have already completed 50 logbook hours. However, as demonstrated above, for many children and young people from vulnerable backgrounds having access to the supervision and vehicles to undertake these initial 50 hours can be prohibitive. In addition to insurance concessions for SHS services or carer vehicles, another potential avenue which could be explored is having a specific vehicle insured as part of the fleet of vehicles attached to regional Government officers. The Government could also utilise its existing platform within the

^{xiv} Ibid.

^{xv} Ibid.

^{xvi} Speakman, M. (Attorney-General, NSW) 2018. *Huge rise in Aboriginal birth registrations*, media release, Department of Communities and Justice, 8 September, viewed 13 May 2021, <https://www.justice.nsw.gov.au/Documents/Media%20Releases/2018/rise-in-aboriginal-birth-registrations.pdf>

Timebanking system to have members of the community volunteer to supervise young people to achieve their required hours.

Embed Driving Education in Life Skills Courses

Across a number of ACYP's consultations, there has been a call to make education more relevant to a focus on life skills. For example, in our consultations on behalf of the NSW Education Standards Assessment Authority (NESA) on the future needs of education, just under two-thirds of children and young people (62.6%) reported that life skills, such as driver's education were among the most important skills that students should develop at school.^{xvii}

For those young people ACYP has spoken to in Youth Justice centres, young people reported feeling satisfied with some of the employment and life skills they had learnt through TAFE accredited vocational training, including tractor, motorbike and non-heavy vehicles driving licenses.^{xviii} ACYP recommends that the NSW Government explore opportunities to embed driver training and other life skills programs within the broader education system, with a particular focus on rural and regional areas.

Good practice examples

Throughout our engagement with government and non-government organisations, ACYP has identified a number of best practice programs that work to address some the barriers noted within this submission.

Western Riverina Community School Road Safety Project

This program Project currently involves the Association of Independent Schools NSW, NSW Police, Transport, Department of Customer Service and Service NSW, Health Infrastructure NSW and is focussed on vulnerable children and young people and is in Regional NSW.

Western Riverina Community (RC) School's main objective is to develop independence and work-readiness in students as having their licence is one of the ways in which they can significantly improve employment prospects and developing the social and emotional learning required to use roads and vehicles safely.^{xix}

Over 40% of students identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander, and amongst these students the success rate of students gaining their Learner Driver Permit is less than 10%, and none of this cohort have successfully gained their Provisional Driving Permit. This group also find it extremely difficult to navigate the literacy requirements of the Driver Knowledge Test, access technology to enable them to

^{xvii} ACYP Consultation Report, *The future of education*. Page 8. 2018.

^{xviii} ACYP Consultation Report, *What children and young people in juvenile justice have to say*. Page 34. 2019.

^{xix} Association of Independent Schools, *Road Safety Education*. <https://www.aisnsw.edu.au/teachers-and-staff/funded-programs-and-projects/road-safety-education>.

practise for the test and lack the skills and support to navigate the identity requirements necessary to successfully apply for a licence.

Using teacher release to staff an additional class, each student who is 16 and eligible to sit the Driver Knowledge Test has a timetabled lesson with the school's Wellbeing Officer for an hour each week to unpack questions and build their capacity to sit and pass the Driver Knowledge Test.

A school Youth Support Worker then works with students who have successfully passed the practice Driver Knowledge Test (DKT) to sit their DKT at the local RMS. This coincides with the Risky Driving unit students complete in PDHPE at school.

Many students do not have the financial resources, access to supervisors to assist them to gain enough supervised driving experience on their Learner Driving Permit, or role models who model safe driving skills.

Students who successfully obtain their L's will have one-on-one supervised driving session to practise the practical skills for driving safety, one afternoon a week across multiple terms.

Within this program, Service NSW and the Department of Customer Service is seeking to assist in:

- Registration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, obtaining birth certificates, legal aid to support payment for birth certificates.
- Consideration around Working Development Orders and if there are any outstanding fine issues from occasions such as fare evasion, that may also need to be rectified before obtaining a driving permit.

The NSW Police and PCYC are partnering in this program to assist in:

- Accessing driving hour supervision through Police Highway Patrol, PCYC and Police liaison with school.
- Ensuring local PCYC incorporates support for the project and school.
- Support with work development orders or outstanding fines/court if applicable.

The Australian Independent Schools Association recently released a video profiling the program which can be viewed here: <https://www.aisnsw.edu.au/teachers-and-staff/funded-programs-and-projects/road-safety-education>

Driving Change and Driver Licensing Access Program

In partnership with the George Institute and AstraZeneca Young Health Programme, the NSW Government developed the Driving Change licensing support program.

Driving Change is a community driven program which was focused on assisting young Aboriginal people to navigate through the licensing system and attain their driver licence.^{xx} The program focused

^{xx} George Institute, *Driving Change*. <https://www.georgeinstitute.org/projects/driving-change>

on assisting Aboriginal young people to navigate through the licensing process to build greater inclusion, independence, and wellbeing. The program was designed and implemented in 12 communities from 2012-2016, and worked in partnership with a range of community organisations including Tribal Warrior Redfern, Aboriginal Legal Service NSW/ACT, Shellharbour Aboriginal Community Youth Association (SACYA), Griffith Aboriginal Lands Council, Wiradjuri Condobolin Corporation, Dubbo Aboriginal Lands Council, Taree Indigenous Development and Employment (TIDE), Red Cross Wagga, AB Central Campbelltown, Mallee Family Care Dareton, Kempsey Neighbourhood Centre, Raymond Terrace PCYC and the Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Program.

The program resulted in a range of positive outcomes. For example, the driver license program run in partnership with Maranguka Justice Reinvestment Project resulted in 236 people obtaining their driving licenses and a 72% reduction in the number of young people (up to 25 years) proceeded against for driving without a licence from 2015 to 2017.^{xxi}

Following successful evaluation of the Driving Change program, Transport for NSW now supports communities directly through the Driver Licensing Access Program.^{xxii} A number of community organisations, such as WEAVE community services, also now run programs modelled on the Driving Change program.^{xxiii}

Recommendations

Although there are a number of supports available, there are also a number of significant gaps in supporting rural and regional learner drivers. To address these gaps, ACYP recommends:

- Expanding the support services available to help children and young people with a broad range of needs including improving access to driver licensing programs;
- Ensuring that driver licensing programs are adequately resourced to provide comprehensive end-to-end support for vulnerable or disadvantaged children and young people to obtain their driver licences, particularly those in rural and regional areas;
- Providing additional resources for young people to reduce barriers and navigate the licence process. This may include the development of initiatives aimed at reducing the costs associated with learning to drive, particularly in rural and regional areas;
- Improving access to the Safe Driver Course for disadvantaged young learner drivers, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and young people, by providing the course for free; and
- Department of Customer Services, through Service NSW, continue to partner with schools and community organisations within regional and rural NSW to provide assistance with ensuring young people have access to the 100 points of identification required to obtain a driver's permit.

^{xxi} Just Reinvest NSW (2018). 'New Evidence from Bourke'. Access online via:

<https://www.justreinvest.org.au/new-evidence-from-bourke/>

^{xxii} For further information, see:

<https://roads-waterways.transport.nsw.gov.au/roads/licence/driver/driver-licence-access-program/index.html>

^{xxiii} See for example: WEAVE Youth and Community Services Driving Change Program

<https://www.weave.org.au/programs/driving-change-program/>

Conclusion

ACYP thanks the Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety for considering these important issues and welcomes any follow up questions from its members. Should you have any further comments or questions, please do not hesitate to contact my office.