

**Submission
No 36**

SUPPORT FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL LEARNER DRIVERS

Organisation: Youthsafe

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Submission to the Parliament of New South Wales
Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety

Re: Support for Rural and Regional Learner Drivers

From: Youthsafe, May 2021



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Preamble

Youthsafe is a charity which has operated since 1982. In pursuing its Mission “to partner to prevent unintentional injury of young people” it focusses on improving safety outcomes for young people (12 to 26 years of age) in relation to roads, workplaces, sport and socialising.

Youthsafe contributed to the development of the NSW Safer Drivers Course prior to its 2013 initiation. Since that time Youthsafe has been a state-level Training Provider for that course and has trained over 1,200 Coaches and Facilitators who, in turn, have provided the course to young learner drivers across New South Wales under the auspices of approved Course Providers.

Youthsafe became an authorised provider of the Transport for NSW (TfNSW) Driver Licensing Access Program (DLAP) in 2020 and has had a close service relationship with supporting Learner Driver Mentoring Programs (LDMPs) across NSW for over a decade.

While Youthsafe acknowledges that the challenge of acquiring a driver licence impacts learner drivers of all ages, its experience and expertise relate especially to drivers who are under 25 years of age: those who are required to reach licensure through the learner log book hours mandated by the Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS).

Our comments in this submission will largely focus on this youth cohort but many of the principles and strategies identified can be extrapolated to learners of any age.

Challenges faced by learner drivers in rural and regional areas to get the required training and experience to obtain a licence

The challenges faced by learner drivers in rural and regional areas of NSW essentially relate to lack of opportunity and access to the resources required to meet the requirements of the Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS).

This relates to lack of access to

- a registered, road-worthy vehicle
- adult supervising drivers for the supervised driving hours required by the Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS) as a prerequisite for the Driving Test
- professional driving instructors
- program supports like Keys2Drive and the Safer Drivers Course
- finances to pay for vehicle running costs, tests, licences, handbooks etc

Collectively these challenges constitute an insurmountable barrier for too many young drivers across the state, particularly those in rural and regional areas. A barrier that can all too often lead them to drive unlicensed, exacerbating their casualty crash risk and non-compliance to road rules.

Research has demonstrated the association between unlicensed driving and increased injury risk.¹

The outcomes of such behaviour include a higher safety threat to *all road users in the area* – drivers, passengers, cyclists etc - and a heightened possibility that the offending young driver will be

detected and penalised by law enforcement with life altering impacts by consequential judicial and penal processes.

Further, the lack of a driver licence (and a registered vehicle) can also impact on a young person's ability to access ongoing employment, training and further education as well as frustrating their ability to participate more widely in community, cultural and family events and activities, especially given the paucity of alternative transport options in rural and regional areas. This can compound social isolation and contribute to a worsening of any mental health issues which we know are disturbingly real in the lives of many young people.

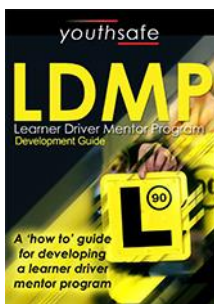
A final challenge relates to the financial cost of complying with all GLS requirements which can put obtaining a driver licence beyond the reach of too many. While this is not exclusively a problem for rural and regional NSW - socio economic disadvantage is of course a reality in urban locations - it can have a disproportionate impact on opportunity in rural and regional locations particularly in times of drought or economic downturn.

An option for rural and regional learners to access driver training opportunities

Learner Driver Mentoring Programs (LDMPs) are an effective way to provide licensing opportunities to learner drivers in rural and regional NSW.

LDMPs support learner drivers who lack access to a registered vehicle and an experienced licensed supervising driver. They provide learners from a range of disadvantaged backgrounds with access to a registered vehicle as well as the ongoing support of an experienced supervising licensed driver to help acquire the learner log book hours needed before a learner becomes eligible to do their driving test.

LDMPs are typically community-based programs which operate across NSW in both metropolitan and regional locations. The experienced licensed drivers who take on the mentoring role are predominantly local volunteers, augmented at times by professional driving instructors.



Youthsafe has been involved in the support and development of LDMPs for over a decade. To that end we have developed and published [development guides for LDMPs: in hard copy and digital form](#). Additionally, we have developed a full day face-to-face training workshop to volunteer mentors and program managers.

With the support of a TfNSW Road Safety Community Grant we are currently adapting our face-to-face training session for online delivery using a learning management system which will be a boon to those taking on this work in rural and regional locations.

We estimate that there are currently over 50 LDMPs across NSW but the exact number is difficult to verify as there is no state-level coordinating body for them and many operate in isolation. Indeed, the numbers vary from year to year as many LDMPs often fail as going concerns and new ones spring up as funding opportunities arise.

The challenges of LDMP sustainability and effectiveness are the central concerns of this submission.

While they have the potential to provide much needed licensing opportunities throughout rural and regional NSW that potential will not be realised without increased and consistent system support.

State-level coordination

The support needed could be delegated to a coordinating state-level body or program with the capability to, among other things, promote best practice in relation to

- i. adopting core program objectives: licensing *and* safety
- ii. assessing the community: its needs and capacities
- iii. supporting quality mentoring: recruitment, retention and training
- iv. facilitating collaboration and exchange between LDMPs

i. Adopting Core Program Objectives: Licensing *and* safety

The licensing process *and* a proactive commitment to fostering road safety outcomes should be regarded as best practice and be core objectives for all LDMPs.

This dual commitment is not currently apparent in all programs.

Program responses elicited from LDMPs by a Youthsafe survey in 2017 revealed supplementary objectives to the licensing process itself included increasing participants' life skills and self-esteem and providing increasing opportunity for them to access employment and education opportunities.

Nine out of 14 responses nominated "just get licensed" as the main aim of their program. Only one respondent identified road safety outcomes as of equal importance to obtaining a licence.

While building character and providing vocational opportunity are laudable goals they should not eclipse the importance of using the learner stage to build low risk driving behaviours.

Research stresses the fact that "competent handling of a vehicle is only a first step and can be greatly misleading in determining preparedness for the more higher-risk situations that require much more advanced cognitive skills and safety-focussed attitudinal-motivational orientations." ²

The transition from the learner licence to a provisional (P1) licence represents the transition from the safest time in a drivers life to the most hazardous'. Crash casualty rates increase by 800% in the first months of independent driving and all LDMPs should be committed to the development of low risk driving behaviours in their learners.

Given the disproportionately high rate of road use fatalities in regional areas – two-thirds of fatalities in NSW occur on country roads – road safety as a core objective is axiomatic in rural and regional areas.

LDMPs should provide on-road experience in different situations - road conditions, times of day, variable weather conditions - during supervised driving.

In addition, if feasible, they should access the services of professional driving instructors and programs like Keys2Drive and the Safer Drivers Course to supplement their work.

This best practice requirement – real world, variable, human-interfacing experience – should be taken into account when the value of driver simulators are proposed. Simulators may be a useful

way to augment a learner's technical skills but should not be seen as a replacement for on road hours with an experienced and attentive supervising driver.

ii. Assessing the community: its needs and capacities

The participation of committed local volunteers and the support of a wider network of community stakeholders are essential.

These programs cannot be helicopter dropped on a community but must grow from within.

A best practice approach would see all programs at the outset conduct a local assessment of need and capacity: see Appendix One *Conducting a LDMP Needs Assessment and Identifying Potential Partners*.

iii. Supporting quality mentoring: recruitment, retention and training

The identification, selection, training and continuing support of driver mentors is a challenge to many LDMPs. 12 out of 14 LDMPs reported in Youthsafe's 2017 LDMP survey that the lack of "quality mentors" is a barrier to program success.

LDMPs report that the recruitment and retention of volunteers is their biggest challenge and take up most of the program coordinator's time.

The *Driving Change* program which partnered with 11 Aboriginal communities to facilitate access to licensing in New South Wales demonstrated the critical importance of recruiting mentors from the wider community, appropriate matching of mentors and mentees and making mentors feel valued and connected.³

Youthsafe argues the need for quality training of mentors as the skills required by an effective mentor are not the same as those needed by an instructor or teacher.

LDMPs themselves stress the importance of quality mentor training. Two examples follow:

Youthsafe has run two mentor training programs in our area. The feedback from the mentors after attending the training is they feel well equipped to be mentor drivers. Some of the potential mentor drivers were apprehensive at first, however by the end of the full day training session with Youthsafe they were confident and eager to start. (Regional LDMP 2017)

"The feedback from volunteers who attended the Volunteer Driver Mentoring training was very positive. All who attended, stated that this training prepared them for their role as volunteer mentors. (Metropolitan LDMP 2020)

Training gives mentors confidence and contributes to their engagement and retention.

Face-to-face training is not always practicable or affordable for LDMPs in rural and regional NSW which is why it is important to provide online training support using pedagogically effective platforms.

Two LDMPs expressed this to Youthsafe last year in the following terms:

“...the biggest struggle we have in the program is finding mentors. Even if they want to join the program, trying to fit a full day’s face-to-face training into their schedule is often the barrier. Having the ability to do the course online would assist us in removing this barrier and being able to support more participants through the program.” (Regional LDMP 2020)

“Face-to-face group training has many benefits but it also presents many challenges. Choosing a training date that suits all participants can be almost impossible This may result in losing volunteers as it may be months before you can offer another training session. Having the flexibility of accessing this training through an alternate elearning program would certainly address this issue. It would also provide flexibility to train volunteers one by one rather than waiting months before group training could be arranged. This would be a much more efficient way to work with volunteers, particularly in the current COVID-19 situation where face to face training is prohibited.” (Metropolitan LDMP 2020)

See Appendix Two *Recruiting, Screening, Training and Retraining Mentors*.

iv. Facilitating collaboration and exchange between LDMPs

Many LDMPs operate in isolation, without the benefit of learnings from other programs.

In Youthsafe’s 2017 survey of LDMPs six respondents indicated they would welcome opportunities to communicate with other LDMPs as an exercise in exchange and learning.

14 respondents stated they would welcome accessing case studies from other programs while 13 indicated they would be willing to share and exchange information with programs.

A state-level body/program would enhance information sharing between LDMPs.

State-level investment and the Driver Access Licensing Program

Many of the recommendations in this submission require an enhanced level of investment from the NSW Government.

This is consistent with the stated aim of the NSW Road Safety Plan 2021 which commits the NSW Government to increasing

“... access to licensing, safe and legal driving and improve social outcomes by expanding support and mentoring programs for disadvantaged people.”⁴

The existing Driver Licensing Access Program (DLAP), commenced in January 2021 with a widened service brief to support novice drivers – pre-learners, learners, provisional drivers and those who seek to regain their licence – from the following demographics:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders
- low socio-economic and *geographically disadvantaged groups*
- those with lower levels of literacy including refugees and recent migrants

- vulnerable young people (such as those leaving state care)²

The recently expanded objectives of DLAP are to:

- improve road safety outcomes supporting driver licensing disadvantaged communities to meet the GLS requirements, leading to reduced crash and injury rates
- provide culturally appropriate support and resources that assist driver licensing disadvantaged communities (including Aboriginal communities) to obtain, retain and regain their driver licence across all stages of the licensing pathway
- contribute to improved access to education, employment, health and other community participation services for driver licensing disadvantaged communities through the attainment of driver licences
- increase equity of opportunity for driver licensing disadvantaged communities (including Aboriginal communities) to obtain a driver licence and to be a safer and legal road user.

DLAP is an existing program that could achieve much more in relation to providing access to driver training opportunities to regional and rural NSW: see <https://bit.ly/2SaFiSZ>

For this to occur, however, further investment would need to be made to the program.

The current level of funding for the program is in the order of \$4M pa over a five year funding term, with an additional \$300,000 being pledged in the current FY.

Other jurisdictions

The state funded TAC L2P program in Victoria is free for eligible young people aged 16-21 years who are seeking to get their driver licence.

TAC L2Ps matches each young learner with fully licensed volunteer mentor and provides access to a sponsored vehicle.

From 1 July 2019, the program was expanded to include new features such as:

- increased number of learner places
- improved support for both learners and mentors across programs
- refined eligibility criteria
- support and training services for mentors.

The TAC has committed \$33.4 million for the TAC L2P program over the next four years, until 30 June 2023 i.e, in excess of \$8M pa. This government investment is significantly higher than that provided in NSW.

Other programs in Australia that operate to give licensing opportunities to those living in regional and remote locations include the Northern Territory's *DriveSafe Remote program* and Western Australia's *Remote Services Program*.

Simulators and Telematics

Driving simulators, as previously stated, may be an effective tool to *augment* learning but they must not be seen as having equivalent value to actual in-car, on-road experience with a trained mentor.

If we are to build the capability of learners in relation to managing the ever-varying demands of real-world low risk driving behaviours and foster their appreciation of safety outcomes and the ethical underpinnings of responsible driving and road sharing, we should not rely on the learning value of simulated experience.

One technology that should be more closely examined - especially with regard to how it could assist a novice driver in the early months of independent driving - is telematics.

These devices are self-installed in a vehicle to monitor and record driving behaviours.

They have yet to be widely adopted and are often known by different names, such as 'insurance box', 'black box', or 'e-call system', but all are designed to monitor driver behaviour.

Insurance incentives, at different times, have been offered to novice drivers to instal these devices in their vehicles.

SIRA, in partnership with the NSW Centre for Road Safety, completed a research trial exploring the potential of telematics to improve the safety outcomes of young drivers.

The trial ran from July 2018 to March 2019 with more than 700 young drivers participating in the study. Drivers had a telematics device installed in their car, which collected data on the vehicle's acceleration, speed and braking in real time.

Among young drivers who received telematics-based feedback, there were reduced rates of rapid acceleration, speeding, harsh turning and harsh braking.

The trial concluded that if every young driver in New South Wales was to use this kind of technology there could be about 200 fewer crashes each year including two fatal crashes and 59 serious injury crashes.⁵

More attention needs to be given to this application of technology.

References

¹Blows et al. (2005) *Unlicensed drivers and car crash injury*

²Senserrick, T. & Howarth, N (2005) *Review of the literature regarding national and international young driver training, licensing and regulatory systems*

³Cullen et al. (2017) *Communities driving change: evaluation of an Aboriginal licensing programme in Australia*

⁴*Road Safety Plan 2021* p.19

⁵State Insurance Regulatory Authority *NSW Young Drivers Telematics Trial* September 2019

Appendix One

to Youthsafe's submission to the Parliament of New South Wales Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety's inquiry into Support for Rural and Regional Learner Drivers

Conducting a LDMP Needs Assessment and Identifying Potential Partners.

CONDUCTING A LDMP NEEDS ASSESSMENT

It is essential to conduct an audit to work out the type and scope of program you will offer, who your target

group is and whether young people (or other age groups) want help or need it.

Your audit can help to:

- identify whether young people will need and will commit to a LDMP approach
- work out approximately how many people (young and other ages) may access your LDMP
- look at why young people are asking for help with their on-road supervised driving experience e.g.- Is it for increased job opportunities? Are they newly arrived in Australia with no previous licensing experience or family close by? Is there no family vehicle available for practice? Do they have literacy issues that make it difficult to do the required tests?

Understanding these things will help you:

- decide your program's scope and also the kind of funding you apply for
- decide if you need to open the program to help people who don't yet have their learner licence; limit it to those who already have their learner licence, or even those with a few hours supervised driving experience
- determine whether literacy is a barrier. There are literacy programs to help young people pass the Driver Knowledge Test and get a learner licence e.g. Foundation Skills for Learner Drivers at TAFE
- know if the young people had any on-road driving experience, either with a supervising driver or driving instructor. This helps you understand how many supported hours young people may need with their volunteer mentor
- identify whether culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) or Aboriginal young people in your community need help to gain a licence. If so, you will need strategies in your program to address cultural needs
- quantify how many hours you can offer each learner and how many learners your program can help at any one time based on your available budget.

Finding out socioeconomic status is also useful to see if learners can afford to use a

professional driving school or are more likely to rely on family, friends or other services.

If you work with young people who are disadvantaged in terms of their employment opportunities, social support needs or equity of access to services, this can affect how you fund your program, choose program partners and work out appropriate objectives and evaluation. Ask your council's social planner or community engagement officer, or check your council's website for a link to Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data for your local area.

It is also useful to consult with existing groups and organisations that work in your area to improve the health and wellbeing of young people, including:

- neighbourhood centres
- youth accommodation services
- employment agencies
- foster care support services
- local council staff, including those working in youth and community services, and road safety
- community health
- high school staff and Parents and Citizens (P&C) or Parents and Friends (P&F) associations
- Centrelink
- agencies working with disadvantaged groups
- charities and community groups
- local TAFE.

Summarise your consultation's findings highlighting the need for a local LDMP, what form it will take and who it will best target. This summary can then be given to stakeholders, potential funders, program partners and others interested in or wishing to join the program. It is also useful for potential volunteer mentors so they can find out what a LDMP is and decide if they want to be involved.

IDENTIFYING POTENTIAL PARTNERS

Your partners may give you program advice, help promote your program, provide funding or in-kind support.

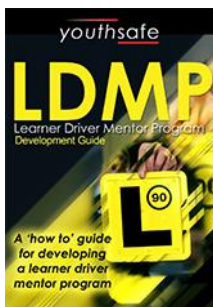
It is important to get to know your partners, apart from the learner drivers, and find out how your program affects them and what they want or expect. If you develop and maintain good relationships with people working across disciplines, agencies and sectors, workloads can be shared and efforts maximised.

You could have a formal meeting with invited guests or an open forum where you welcome anyone who is interested in knowing more. You should consider inviting anyone you see as potential partners, such as:

- [Youthsafe](#)
- local car dealers

- [Australian Driver Trainers Association](#) (ADTA) or state peak body
- regional Roads and Maritime Services road safety contacts
- Local Health District staff - health promotion/community health
- local council - road safety officers and youth services
- local police
- Centrelink
- employment agencies
- charities
- community services
- youth accommodation services
- schools
- local chambers of commerce
- [National Roads and Motorists' Association](#) (NRMA)
- [Transport for NSW](#)

[LDMP Development Guide](#)



Appendix Two

to Youthsafe's submission to the Parliament of New South Wales Joint Standing Committee on Road Safety's inquiry into Support for Rural and Regional Learner Drivers

Recruiting, Screening, Training and Retraining Mentors.

RECRUITING AND SCREENING MENTORS

Your LDMP will have a better chance of success if you can attract the right people as mentors. You are looking for people with a great sense of community spirit, an interest in the welfare of others (particularly young people) and spare time.

Likely candidates will come from different walks of life. Think about approaching retirees (especially driving instructors, police and teachers) and community service clubs like Rotary and Lions. Word of mouth is often an excellent way to find out who is out there. Consider placing an ad in the local paper, putting up posters in clubs or even a leaflet drop in your area.

Other options are to speak at community events about the program to share stories, upload information on social media people can share or post in local groups, or look for free community service announcements on local radio stations. A media release sent to local newspapers, radio or TV stations (particularly in rural areas) will often be picked up and can help to both promote your program and source volunteers.

Once you have a list of interested potential mentors you have to make sure that they are suited to the role. To screen mentors effectively you need to set up a formal application process. This process will help you work out whether the applicant's commitment matches your program's expectations e.g. Can they put in the required hours? Have they had experience supervising a learner driver before?.

A mentor application form is a must. If an applicant appears suitable you should follow up with an interview and then a final screen that includes obtaining:

- character and professional references
- a driving record printout (available from [Service NSW](#) – for privacy reasons volunteers must get this themselves and then claim the cost from your program)
- a Working with Children Check which is free for volunteers.

If you would like further assurance, you can also get a National Police Check from your local police station or by applying online.

What you are looking for is an applicant with the following qualities:

- capable and competent driver (you can ask a driving instructor to assess them)
- no criminal history that makes them unsuitable as a mentor

- acceptance of your program's objectives and rules
- commitment to help people gain their licence
- genuine empathy with your learner target group.

Desirable (but not essential) criteria include:

- experience working with young people
- experience supervising a learner driver.

TRAINING AND SUPPORTING MENTORS

Now that you have a sound approach to mentor selection you are responsible for providing a training and induction program for them so they understand your LDMP's objectives, roles, requirements and processes. Induction should involve an interview to help match mentors to learners (see section Matching Learners with Mentors).

It is important that you also have orientation so that mentors know about:

- program expectations, including objectives and policies
- role expectations, including the differences between a mentor and a professional driving instructor
- the NSW Graduated Licensing Scheme (GLS): how it works and what it requires from learner drivers
- the Learner Driver Log Book, including how to fill it in and use it as a resource to develop driving skills
- low-risk driving techniques in learners and how they can be supported
- the way the program will work in practice for each supervised driving session (including before, during and after sessions)
- background on the learner target group (just in general terms)
- strategies for what to do if something goes wrong, including a crash
- feedback and program input opportunities (formal/informal and group/individual)
- program coordinator's contact details and availability.

Youthsafe offers a training session specifically designed to support volunteer mentors of LDMPs delivered in your area. This training includes:

- the impact adolescent brain development has on young people and road related injury risk
- the GLS and its importance
- strategies for supervising a learner driver to help them through the GLS stages
- an overview of the role of volunteer mentors and the limits of that role
- effective communications for volunteer mentors especially with reference to diffusing stressful encounters.

Contact office@youthsafe.org for more information.



If the above options are not available to you, volunteer mentors can attend a Helping Learner Drivers Become Safer Drivers workshop that is run in local government areas across New South Wales. This is a free two-hour session. For more information see the Roads and Maritime website.

It is also a great idea to assess the driving skills of your mentors. The best way to do this is for a professional driving instructor to assess each mentor's capacity to drive safely and pass on correct information to learners. If your budget does not cover these costs, you could negotiate in-kind support from driving schools to help with this.

A checklist on pages 34 and 35 covers all the tasks you need to complete, to recruit and train your mentors.

RETAINING MENTORS

Losing mentors, especially experienced ones, will reduce your LDMP's capacity to support your learner drivers, as it takes time and resources to recruit, screen and train new mentors. Developing strategies to help your program retain mentors might save you a lot of work. Strategies already covered in this guide include:

- selecting mentors who are right for the job
- training mentors to prepare them for the role
- matching mentors and learners appropriately.

Other strategies to retain mentors require your program to:

- support and supervise mentors
- recognise the good work your mentors do.

Frequent contact with mentors is a role that needs to be assigned to the program coordinator or a LDMP team member. The program coordinator should have the ability, training and opportunity to pick up on signs that a mentor may be thinking about leaving. Ask questions about what the mentor and learner have been doing. Ask if they need any help or advice, or if there are things that make them feel unsure or uncomfortable.

The section on Legal and Insurance Implications mentions that volunteer mentors cannot be paid or financially rewarded for their work. However, other ways of recognising your mentors' good work can help with satisfaction and retention. Consider the following options:

- recognise mentor efforts publicly – highlight their work on your organisation's website, newsletters, social media or in local media
- recognise their efforts within the program at any progress meetings you hold
- remember to thank mentors personally and publicly
- ask for their feedback on the program and encourage them to take part in planning
- ask them to help you recruit more mentors as you need them – also invite them to share their personal experiences in induction programs you hold for new mentors and learners
- have a driving instructor or driving school that is willing to give tips and talk with mentors, even after initial training or support; this gives mentors encouragement and momentum to continue with the program
- use direct mail or program newsletters as a way to acknowledge mentors and share program progress; distribute them to learners, mentors, driving instructor/s, committee members, stakeholders, funders or sponsors.

Some resources and referrals for mentors can help them feel well supported and cared for by your LDMP. The NZ Youth Mentoring Network has some helpful [how-to tools](#).

[LDMP Development Guide](#)

