

**Submission
No 39**

SUPPORT FOR RURAL AND REGIONAL LEARNER DRIVERS

Organisation: Liverpool City Council

Date Received: 13 May 2021

Dear Committee Members,

Thank you for the invitation to Council concerning the inquiry into support for rural and regional learner drivers. Please note that Liverpool Council is on the outskirts of the Sydney Metropolitan Area however after discussions with A/Committee Manager, Council was encouraged to make a submission as our LGA experiences many barriers for marginalised groups. Council believes there needs to be increased opportunities to better support learner drivers in Liverpool as also identified by our local key stakeholders.

Liverpool Council's Road Safety Officers consulted with various key stakeholders in the Liverpool LGA consisting of Community Development Youth Services teams, Multicultural Community Liaison Officer, Migrant Resource Centre, Aboriginal Youth Service, South West Youth Services- Mission Australia and Carers NSW. The information captured has been summarised below, along with three case studies outlining the daily challenges learner drivers are experiencing in obtaining their driver licence.

Some key points for consideration:

- Affordability of paying for driving lessons, for many local people the costs are not at all affordable and people do not even consider a licence as an option.
- Access to a car and parent/guardian to support for the 120 hours of practice, even if there is a car in the house.
- Lack of access to alternate driving programs such as PCYC driver training.
- When young people have outstanding fines, stops them from getting licences, this impacts a lot of young people who have fines for minor things such as travelling on a train without a valid ticket.
- Parents unaware of the requirements of the log books/driver knowledge.
- Lack of understanding of road rules/ language barriers.
- There are some young people - males in particular who still drive without a licence and don't realise the consequences of an accident, insurance on their future lives.
- General lack of understanding of road rules, how to obtain a licence and learning how to drive safely and confidently.
- Driver training companies teaching how to pass the test only, not teaching valuable skills to maintain safety.
- Access to bilingual driving instructors.
- Lack of knowledge from parents.
- Access to information and lack of confidence because their parents do not drive.

CALD communities have a lot of services that assist with driving education within the Liverpool area, these include Navitas and TAFE. Many instructors within the area speak Arabic and the driver education booklet and test can be completed in their mother language. The issue develops with the following:

- Cost of lessons to make up driving hours, therefore they either drive unlicensed or stay on L plates for a longer period.
- Credibility of overseas driver's licences that actually allow privileges when obtaining NSW licences.
- Inability to read road signs.
- Inability to understand rules when an accident occurs.
- Understanding insurances required and the process after an accident.
- Language barrier following Police instructions.
- Issues understanding roundabout.

The examples of case studies below reinforce and reflect the difficulties and challenges learner drivers are experiencing in the Liverpool LGA.

Case study A

If a young person does not have access to a car and a fully licenced adult that can support them through the 120 hours necessary to attempt a driving test, they are then reliant on driving programs to offer that opportunity. However, many of the driving programs only offer a limited number of funded driving instructor lessons, which does not include the additional 'practice' which is needed to gain a provisional licence. I recently tried to refer a young person I was working with to the Access to Driving program in the Liverpool LGA, run by Uniting, however they are at capacity and are no longer taking referrals. Our service has already funded 10 lessons for this person but due to the lack of practice opportunities, those lessons will essentially be wasted unless we can find someone prepared to assist the young person to practice which is highly unlikely due to the obvious reasons such as concerns about their car and safety, but also the financial burden. If a car is used for driving practice or transporting people, then is often higher insurance charges and potential decrease in vehicle value due to extra mileage and wear and tear etc.

Case study B

I am a project officer with a Driving program supporting young carers get their licence so I will outline some of the challenges that young Carers have with getting their licence.

Young carers are people aged 25 years and under who help to care for a family member or friend who has a disability, mental illness, drug or alcohol dependency, chronic condition, terminal illness or who is frail. These young carers often come from socially and economic disadvantaged families are faced with the following challenges:

- cannot afford professional lessons
- often do not have access to a car
- maybe caring for that adult in their life so have no one to provide driving supervision
- families are time poor due to their caring responsibilities so often other siblings lose out as families are stretched to the limit
- if the parent does not drive, as in some CALD communities, they cannot supervise their children
- may not have that parental guidance to support them with learning to drive

By obtaining their driver licence:

- can open up so many employment and educational opportunities
- can prevent social isolation as they can keep in touch with their friends and peers
- can support them in their caring role – being able to bring whoever they care for to hospital appointments or get their medications

Case Study C

In my work I've had to transport clients to the RMS as they don't have family who can drive them and sometimes assist with the cost of the test and licence. I have also had to sit with numerous young people and help them practise the test.

Once they get their L's lots of young people struggle to find someone to drive with to get their hours done. Some of my families don't have a car. They may not be able to afford the extra petrol to drive more. The relationships with the drivers in their family isn't good so it doesn't assist with learning. The cost of lessons is prohibitive. I've referred to drive for life but they had a waiting list and were waiting for funding.

Also, I have not known a young person who has used a driver simulator or anything of the sort. The only use of technology would be doing the L's test online or on the app.

The above is both for clients living in urban as well as rural areas. I have had occasions where my more rural clients have driven bush bashers so they feel more comfortable behind a wheel, also some of them have had easier access to a family vehicle as they are a necessity while my urban families can rely on public transport.

Council looks forward to gaining further insight from the Staysafe Committee into improved and expanded opportunities to better equip our learner drivers, especially for our marginalised groups in the Liverpool LGA.