

**CMYI Submission on:
Young Driver Safety
& Graduated Licensing**

Setting the agenda on multicultural youth issues

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1. INTRODUCTION

Submission to Vic Roads

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) welcomes the opportunity to provide a response to the Discussion Paper, Young Driver Safety and Graduated Licensing, endorsed by the Hon. Peter Batchelor, Minister for Transport.

The current situation, where *more young people in Victoria and Australia die from road crashes than any other cause* exposes a need to both explore the causes of negative outcomes, such as fatalities and serious injury and to discover positive strategies for supporting safer practices on our roads. The Discussion Paper is a concerted effort to address the issue of young driver safety broadly in this State. However, the lack of examination and understanding of issues that impact on the driving practices of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds is a situation that requires some remedy. We believe that CMYI's submission represents a beginning.

1.2 The Organisation

The Centre for Multicultural Youth Issues (CMYI) has a long history of responding to the needs of young people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) backgrounds within Victoria. CMYI has a strong focus on the issues and needs of young people from refugee or newly arrived communities who face particular social and economic disadvantages as a result of their refugee experiences and subsequent resettlement in Australia.

As a statewide organisation, CMYI has a crucial role in providing current and informed advice to the government and the non-government sectors on trends and issues that are impacting on young people from refugee and migrant backgrounds. CMYI also has a role in promoting culturally sensitive and effective approaches for service providers working with CLD young people and their families.

Since 1988, CMYI has undertaken a broad range of projects and initiatives addressing the needs of refugee and migrant young people in Victoria and Australia. These responses have been initiated as a result of issues identified by both government and community services in contact with young people from CLD backgrounds. Significant projects undertaken by CMYI have focused on a range of areas including employment, education and training, sport and recreation, sexual and mental health, drugs and alcohol, young people and the law, racism and homelessness.

Acknowledging the roles outlined above, the key organisational goal of CMYI is to strengthen and provide leadership between young people, support services and the community to enhance life opportunities for young people from CLD backgrounds. CMYI has an important role to play, in

partnership with Government, to develop policies and strategies that are responsive to the needs of CLD young people, particularly marginalised refugee and newly arrived young people.

1.3 Methodology

In order to strengthen our submission to the Discussion Paper, CMYI convened a Statewide Network Meeting in September 2005 to explore the issue of CLD Young People and Road Safety with key organisations and workers in the youth and multicultural sectors. Key speakers representing Dandenong MRC, Vic Roads and Consumer Affairs provided context and background. Over 60 participants from a diverse range of agencies provided their perspective on the issues that impact on CLD Young People and Road Safety, contributing to proposed strategies and recommendations.

1.4 Sector Rationale for Submission

Feedback received by CMYI from sector representatives consulted as part of the Statewide meeting were concerned that issues relating to road safety and licensing as experienced by migrant and refugee young people could be under represented in the submissions. Many believed that the issues faced by their client group were of a complex and serious nature warranting a focussed exploration. As a result, workers and their organisations welcomed CMYI's initiative in consulting the sector and reflecting their views in our submission.

1.5 Areas Addressed by CMYI's Submission

The Discussion Paper outlines several key areas including:

- Key safety issues for young drivers in Victoria;
- The current Victorian Licensing system, possible measures to improve young driver safety; and
- Graduated licensing - the international experience.

CMYI's submission will supply additional insight into:

- The key road safety issues for young drivers from refugee and newly arrived communities;
- The proposed measures; and
- Additional strategies;

2. The Literature

The mix of culture and ethnicity, adolescence and age as factors in road safety has rarely been examined in depth.

An analysis of the literature reveals one Australian report released in 2000. This report entitled: Road Safety Issues for People from non-English Speaking Backgrounds, highlighted other factors that may have an impact on driving practice but did not focus on young people specifically.

The report identified that non-English speaking drivers were less likely to use restraints, including child restraints than other Australians. However, the report noted that a lack of knowledge regarding restraints and drink driving did not necessarily translate in to dangerous behaviours. However, risk factors, particularly to young men and women were identified. (N. Haworth, M. Symmons and N. Kowadlo, 2000)

Other information is inconclusive as data regarding culture and ethnicity is not generally kept relating to road fatalities and serious injuries experienced by specific groups of young people. Haworth stated that other factors like:

variables such as socio-economic status, education level, employment, residence in areas of high population density and duration of residence may be as important or more so as a predictor of crash involvement than ethnicity. Statistics should also be analysed to take account of exposure, such as unit of travel or number of trips taken.

Substantial research exists regarding the increased risk factors experienced by young drivers in general on our roads. These common safety issues for young people are outlined in the Discussion Paper. However, more focused research is needed.

3. Factors Impacting on CLD Young People and Road Safety

3.1 Background

A major concern for workers present at the consultation was the increased incidence of young people driving without a licence. This occurrence had significant implications for the young people themselves, their interactions with the police, their own safety and the safety of the broader community.

Following the consultation undertaken by CMYI, we believe that there are a number of key factors that impact on CLD young people and their experiences on our roads. These include:

- 1.) The perception of levels of safety on public transport experienced by CLD young people;
- 2.) Language barriers and a lack of support in the complex licensing process;
- 3.) The cost of obtaining a Driver's Licence, including driving lessons; and
- 4.) The lack of access to a safe, roadworthy vehicle and learner driver support (the frequent absence of a mentor or role model).

A key overriding and distinguishing factor that impacts on young people regarding road safety is their refugee and migrant experiences and their post arrival settlement experiences. These experiences are significant and are therefore reflected in the limited and varying levels of young peoples' understanding of Australian laws and systems.

3.2 Safety

The consultation found a number of issues stemming from young peoples' perceptions of safety. Young people from CLD backgrounds often fear for their personal safety and that of their friends and families - when in the street, on public transport and at night.

Workers identified that young people felt particularly vulnerable when on public transport. The CLD young people that they worked with had said that their levels of anxiety on public transport manifested from two sources. The first, from fear of attack and racism from other transport users. The second, from the targeted approach they had experienced from transit police. Encounters with transit police had not been positive. Issues relating to the young people and transport were documented following the July *Metropolitan Young Peoples' Public Transport Forum*.

Participants at the forum concluded that the following issues contributed to young people driving unlicensed :

- The cost of public transport;
- The lack of service after-hours (availability and frequency), to and from interface suburbs;

- Feelings of being targeted by transit police; and
- Feeling unsafe while waiting for, and travelling on, public transport. They believed that they were far more visible and easily distinguished from other Australians and therefore, more vulnerable to verbal and physical attacks (especially young women wearing the hijab and young Sudanese men).

3.3 Language barriers

Workers identified a number of key concerns regarding language barriers that decreased young peoples' chances of obtaining a license. Some of the issues raised were:

- Young people were concerned about their language skills and were not confident enough with English to attempt the exam;
- If young people failed on their first attempt they were less likely to try again without additional, intensive support;
- Vic Roads did not offer the test in their community language; and
- Young people felt overloaded with school study and general language acquisition.

3.4 Cost

The cost of the licensing process is a major barrier for young people from CLD backgrounds. Newly arrived young people are usually situated within families of lower socio-economic means. In many situations the cost of getting a license is outweighed by more immediate needs such as contributing financially to rent, bills and food or perhaps even sending money home to relatives overseas who are perceived to be in a more desperate situation.

If a young person is unsuccessful on their first attempt they are less likely to reinvest a substantial amount of money into the same process again. Further, for those CLD young people who learned to drive overseas, they see little benefit in entering into the costly Victorian licensing process.

3.5 Access to a vehicle and driver support

Upon arrival, young people and their families are often consumed by urgent needs such as finding work, settling into school, language acquisition and housing. Long after they arrive, some of these issues and concerns may persist. Due to these circumstances, young people often cannot access safe and roadworthy vehicles. In many cases they can not access a vehicle at home as the family do not own one. The type of vehicles that are available to them are usually older second-hand cars. Like all Australian young people, their access to a vehicle is dependant on their capacity to buy or borrow one.

However, unlike other young Australians, it is often much harder for them to access driver support - especially in the critical early stages of learning to drive. This is usually because:

- Families are dealing with the immediacy of settlement issues and do not prioritise driver support as an urgent need;
- Newly arrived families often have more than the average number of children in the household, and the needs of younger siblings are prioritised;
- The impact of family reconfiguration - young people from refugee families may not have a male role-model. Many arrive under the care of their mother (who in most cases, does not drive and is unlicensed). Tensions can exist between young people and males entering the household through remarriage (new step-father);
- Outside of the household (within their own community) the situation may be similar and it is difficult for the young person to secure driver support;
- Many young people come from a household where no adults possess a licence; and
- Some young people have already acquired the skill to drive overseas. However, in some places, driving without a license is a common practice.

4. The Proposed Measures

CMYI supports the new measures favoured by government outlined on page 18 of the Discussion Paper. However, the organisation holds significant reservations regarding the effectiveness of the new measures in relation to changing road safety practice within groups of young people from newly arrived communities. Simply put, these measures will not alter the driving behaviours of newly arrived young people without significant resources implemented through a targeted approach.

Any introduction of proposed measures needs to consider the specific issues experienced by newly arrived young people and their families.

5. Good Practice

Programs have been designed and developed to address the urgent need to respond to the specific issues of CLD young people in relation to road safety.

These programs have been very successful and popular with CLD young people and their families. For the most part, acquiring on-going funding for such programs has been an issue. This has resulted in a number of effective programs being cut.

Programs have run in partnership with Local Government, Victoria Police, schools and community centres.

Dandenong Migrant Resource Centre

- *Lets Learn Together Program* - Developed to address an alarming trend in road safety practices among local CLD young people. Responded to demand.
- Ran in partnership with Multicultural Liaison Unit of Vic Police and was funded by Triple J. In-kind support was provided by the local VicRoads Office.
- This program is no longer running and is seeking funding.

Collingwood College

- Program developed to address need identified by local police and CLD young people themselves;
- Program delivered within the school context;
- Program content included aspects of safety, environmental issues and dealing with masculinity;
- Partnership with local police and funded by the TAC for less than \$400;and
- The program is no longer running - TAC will not provide on-going support.

Sunbury

- *Driver Mentors Program* - Developed to address the serious issues encountered by newly arrived young people when attempting to get driver support;
- A team of local volunteer driver support people established;
- Local Police initiative in partnership with local youth workers;
- Seeking additional support and funding.

Workforce Plus

- *Pole Position* - Developed in response to issues raised by local young people and workers in the area.
- Initial partnership between CMYI and the LLEN;

- The program has a vocational focus for CLD young men.
- The program has secured on-going funding from WorkForce Plus.

6. CMYI Recommends

In reviewing the options outlined above and the developed models that exist to address the specific needs of CLD young people, CMYI offers the following recommendations.

6.1 School context

CMYI Recommends:

- That a statewide schools initiative be adopted;
- That programs use a wholistic approach to road safety: involving responsible vehicle use, environmental factors and consider gender as a compounding factor;and
- That programs that run in schools with high CLD populations provide pathways into vocational study with English support.

6.2 Family Context

CMYI Recommends:

- Targeted strategies need to be employed regarding the specific road safety issues relating to young people;
- A community education strategy needs to engage families regarding the support needs of young people learning to drive;
- Families that do not have access to a safe, roadworthy vehicle need to be linked into a community support program.

6.3 Community Context

CMYI Recommends:

- That significant investment into supporting locally based programs be implemented;
- The establishment of driving programs using community mentors; and
- Closer partnerships with government departments, Vic Police and community agencies be encouraged.

6.4 Structural Context

CMYI Recommends:

- The Department of Infrastructure and transport owners provide a safe, cheap, accessible, effective, reliable, user-friendly public transport system that accommodates the needs of young people.
- That young people under the age of eighteen travel on public transport free of charge.
- That VicRoads provide more language support to young people and their families in the licensing process.
- That the cost of obtaining a Driver's Licence, including driving lessons, must be addressed with the introduction of concession rates for particular groups in the community.
- That increased supported testing be introduced, post P plate testing included.
- That an advisory body be established to ensure ongoing issues regarding the safety of young people on Victorian roads are addressed;
- That the advisory body comprises key stakeholders including: VicRoads, TAC, Department of Infrastructure, MetLink, Victoria Police, Office for Youth, Department of Education, CMYI, YACVIC, community youth leaders and other agencies; and
- That ongoing funding be provided to support developed initiatives state wide.

7. References

N. Haworth, M. Symmons and N. Kowadlo, 2000, #176 *Road Safety Issues for People from non-English Speaking Backgrounds*, Monash University Accident Research Centre

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Department of Victorian Communities, July 2005, *Metropolitan Young People's Public Transport Forum*, Office for Youth.

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