

CALL FOR PARENTS TO SIT IN ON YOUNG DRIVERS' LESSONS

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Young drivers might be less likely to crash after passing their test if their parents sit in on driving lessons.

That is one conclusion that can be drawn from the Staffordshire Young Driver Coaching Programme (YDCP), which found that parents' involvement in driving lessons also helped to cut out the age-old quarrels between learner drivers and the mums and dads who offer private practice.

An evaluation of the project, which was carried out as part of the Royal Society for the Prevention of Accidents' scholarship scheme, found that an accompanying resource pack also proved vital to producing better, safer drivers.

Although the study, by Staffordshire County Council and the University of Keele, did not quantify long-term goals, such as reduced crash rates, it did highlight the kind of good practice - such as parents sitting in on lessons - that RoSPA hopes might enable those aims to be achieved.

A quarter of all approved driving instructors (ADIs) in Staffordshire signed up to the scheme, which saw close to 20 families taking part.

As well as parents recording progress in the learner's training book, they also received guides about how to support the lessons conducted by the learner's ADI.

An evaluation of the resource pack's effectiveness found that it improved the structure of private practice by giving parents a better understanding of their child's progress with their instructor, while also updating their own knowledge of the Highway Code. This resulted in parents having more confidence to supervise learners and more efficient paid-for lessons - not to mention the guides being used to solve arguments in private practice!

It also culminated in a closer working relationship between ADIs and the local authority road safety unit.

The programme's evaluation was funded by the RoSPA scholarship scheme, which was set up after British Nuclear Fuels (BNFL) donated £500,000 to support research that would have a significant impact on improving safety in the UK and around the world.

There is an urgent need to better protect 17-24-year-old drivers, as they are most at risk of being killed on the road. Although that age group represents about 10 per cent of the population, it makes up 28 per cent of all fatal driver casualties.

The coaching scheme has proved so successful that it could result in the production of more resource packs and the participation of more ADIs in Staffordshire. Another aim is to roll out the programme to other local authorities and to provide further driver development for parents and learners via workshops.

Lindsey Simkins, RoSPA's road safety research and evaluation officer, said: "One fear was that by involving parents, ADIs would eventually be frozen out. But the opposite has been true. It's vital that we all pull together to give society's most vulnerable road-users advice that is consistent and relevant and that will stop them dying needlessly."

Irene Williamson, road safety officer for Staffordshire County Council, said: “We have received an encouraging response from local driving instructors. We now have more than 90 who have already joined the programme.”

Helen Wells, of the University of Keele, said: “The scheme helps to ensure that young people are given up-to-date and accurate guidance, both in lessons and in private practice. It also provides something of a refresher course for some of the parents.”

Driving instructors in Staffordshire who would like to join the free programme should call Irene Williamson on 01785 276611 or email irene.williamson@staffordshire.gov.uk