

Peer Training of Learner Drivers by Offenders in Austria

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Organisation: Forschungsgesellschaft Mobilität FGM

Country: Austria

Level of government: Central government

Sector: Public order and safety

Type: Public Service

Launched in: 2010

Overall development time: 1 year(s)

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Description

Close To is an ambitious national project in Austria, with the objective of reducing the high number of accidents among young drivers. “Yes, accidents happen - but not to me” is a widespread belief among young learner drivers. Even when they have had sound training in their driving schools and been subjected to major publicity campaigns aimed at preventing accidents, many young people remain insufficiently aware of the risks they run as car drivers - and particularly as learner drivers.

Why the innovation was developed

- Young drivers tend to engage in risky behaviour and don't fully understand the risks of driving, which often leads to serious accidents. In every European country, this group is particularly vulnerable to accidents.
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Objectives

Develop staff capacity, Improve effectiveness

- The project has the objective of significantly reducing the number of accidents within the target risk group of young people.
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Main beneficiaries

General population, Students

- Young drivers
- Pedestrians and other drivers

Results

Effectiveness

- In Austria more than 10 000 learner drivers have already participated in Close To in the period from May 2008 to March 2011. More than 370 training sessions have been delivered by peer trainers in driving schools, military facilities, companies, training centres and schools. It is intended that the number of training sessions will increase to 570 in 2011.
- Statements from the learner drivers demonstrate how much they were affected by the contributions from the peer educators and their discussions together.
- As well as changing the behaviour of the young learner drivers, the project also aims at behaviour change on the part of the peer trainer. The repeated confrontation in public with his/her own behaviour, which brought about the accident, and their reflection on their behaviours during the preparatory training, done with mentors, support the re-socialisation of these offenders and help to change their behaviour. Offenders often say that they are happy about being able to prevent others from making the same mistake that they did.
- In the meantime, Austrian courts have recognised the positive impact of the peer training on young offenders. Many judges increasingly recognise participation in Close To as an alternative or complementary punishment or use it instead of a fine or prison.

Development

Design

The Close To program follows up the EU project Module Close To and is now being rolled out in Austria by the Mobility Research Agency (Forschungsgesellschaft Mobilität).

Implementation

Tools used:

- The co-production approach of the project is very simple and effective: Young offenders between 17-28 years old add to the theoretical training given in driving schools by telling their peers in a very direct and authentic way how they caused an accident (in most cases under the influence of alcohol) and by using their own cases to point out the implications of risky driving.
- The fact that the offenders are of the same age and meet with their peers face-to-face during the driving tuition creates an emotional closeness between the offender and the driving school pupils. The principle of peer education means that young learners are directly confronted with the experiences of young offenders. This approach breaks down the normal distance between trainer and trainee – it holds up a mirror to the young drivers, in which they can see reflected their own behaviour, and its likely consequences.
- The peer trainers tell about their experiences within a training unit provided by the driving schools: What happens to a young person who has caused serious injuries or even the death of a person? Why did he/she drive under the influence of alcohol? What kind of judicial, economic and social consequences does he/she have to suffer? The peer trainer raises all of these issues by sharing his personal experiences with the learner drivers.

Resources used:

- The overhead costs of the project have been financed by the Austrian Department for Traffic, Innovation and Technology. These costs included public relations and the recruitment and training of offenders. The costs of the training sessions are covered by the agencies commissioning the peer trainers.
 - Typically, the costs for one session by a peer trainer, including the tailoring of the presentation to the target group concerned, are EUR 250-300. So far commissioners have included the state government of the Steiermark, the Federal Defence Department, Austrian Railways and many driving schools.
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Diffusion

- The recruitment of peer trainers, who are often still serving their prison sentence, is often done through the courts. In other cases, offenders volunteer when they learn about the project in the media.
- Typically, the offenders have to attend a preparatory training programme, where they themselves learn how to deal with their accidents and its consequences. Afterwards, the offenders are helped to prepare their presentation, working together with a peer coach, before actually delivering the training to learner drivers.
- In the meantime, peer trainers are now also being recruited to work in vocational schools, training centres and companies. Since 2010 even the Austrian army has integrated peer trainers in its driving lessons for young recruits.

Lessons Learned

Other information

The project Close To is an effective co-production approach which influences young drivers to reduce the riskiness of their driving behaviour in a sustainable way. The involvement of peers who can provide authentic experience to other young people helps to promote responsible behaviour in future car drivers. In particular, this approach has proven to be very sustainable as it has a strong emotional impact on the young learner drivers.