



## Overcoming youth disadvantage – the difference a license makes

Concerns are rising about youth unemployment and the risk that disadvantaged young people may remain seriously marginalised from the rest of the community. Today Victoria's peak body for young people put forward one simple question: what if all young people got the right help to become safe, independent drivers?

'We know that 41% of unemployed young Australians have no driving license,' said YACVic CEO Georgie Ferrari, referring to the recent *U-Turn* report by the Brotherhood of St Laurence. 'At a time when the youth unemployment rate is more than double the general rate, we need more practical steps to help young people secure that first job. We also know that quality mentoring makes a huge difference to vulnerable young people, linking them with adults they can trust, who model safe and caring behaviour.'

A new report from Youth Affairs Council Victoria calls for additional resourcing for the state's L2P driver-mentor program, to ensure the program can be accessed by all eligible young people. The L2P program (funded by TAC and managed by VicRoads) links learner drivers under the age of 21 who don't have access to a car or a supervising driver with volunteer mentors, who help them get 120 hours' practice in readiness for their probationary license. The young people also receive free driving lessons.

'Getting out on the road for the first time can be a scary experience,' Ms Ferrari said. 'Tragically, 22% of Victorians killed on our roads are aged 18-25, and young people are at higher risk if their parents don't model safe driving for them. We know there are young people who are driving unlicensed because they don't have help to get their P-plates. We have some great initiatives in Victoria, like the Practical Safe Driving Program for Year 10 students, but many young people need the greater support that L2P offers.'

'It's great now I have my licence,' said Sarah, a young driver who took part in Melbourne City Mission's L2P program – 'not as stressful as I don't have to take kids on public transport, I don't feel as isolated ... Can do shopping without having to get it delivered. A lot less stressful for sure.'

Josh, a young participant in Glenelg shire's rural L2P program, said 'I am now able to get myself to and from work and not have to rely on others.'

Matt, a young driver who took part in Melbourne City Mission's L2P program, found that a good mentor can help a young person in many ways besides building logbook hours. Matt said his mentor Tim 'shows me there is much more to life than just looking after your own needs. From helping out with school projects and sharing many experiences delivered with a great sense of humour, Tim is the true definition of good character. Tim also has strong work ethics and that is something that I inspire to achieve.'

The youth peak body argues that new commitments are needed to meet the higher costs of L2P's rural service delivery, to better support L2P coordinators to work with very disadvantaged young people, and to address the need amongst unlicensed young people aged 21-25, who are not currently eligible for this kind of driver-mentor support.

Kees Kroon is a L2P mentor in Gippsland's Latrobe Valley, who has been involved in the program for two years and is currently supporting his third mentee. Kees involves himself in many community based activities but the L2P program holds a special place in his heart.

'For young people living in Latrobe Valley having a driver's licence really provides a sense of independence,' said Kees. 'The young people we work with, without the L2P program would find it a major challenge to secure their licence. It also gives me an opportunity to pass on some wisdom based around my years of driving experience. I would encourage anyone who has a safe driving record to get involved with the L2P. Although the benefit at the end of the day is for the young person getting their licence I too get a real sense of pride in seeing a young person achieve their goal.'

**FOR FURTHER COMMENT from YACVic CEO Georgie Ferrari or L2P participants, contact 0411 484 428**



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