HIGHWAY 35 – A COMMUNITY ARTS APPROACH TO ROAD SAFETY BEHAVIOUR
Margaret Howard, Sue Hazel
(Office of Transport, Energy and Infrastructure)
email: margaret.howard@sa.gov.au

INTRODUCTION
In 2008 the Community Programs Section of
the Department for Transport, Energy and Infrastructure (DTEI) provided funding for a
community arts project in the South East of
South Australia with an aim of raising
community consciousness about road safety
behaviour. The conditions of funding were that
the project would be community driven; have
some longevity in the community and that
DTEI would be recognised as the funder.
Funding was made available as one of several initiatives to assist the implementation of the
South East Road Safety Strategy, the first
regional road safety strategy in SA. The
resulting project, named Highway 35, brought
together local government, police, community
members, Country Arts SA officers, Principals
and teachers, with secondary school students
(at Lucindale & Keith Area Schools) and a
professional film maker Antony Cirocco. A
series of short documentary films about the
effects of road trauma in their local areas and
television commercials highlighting road
safety issues for young people in the South
East were the outcome. These were shown on
the local WIN TV network in November 2009.

METHOD
The title Highway 35 emerged from the broad
subject of roads and the medium of 35mm film. It was derived from the communities’
initial plan to produce a short, high quality
road safety documentary for screening in
regional cinemas, on regional television and
other media outlets. Subsequent discussion
modified the project to involve students in
small teams, giving them all the opportunity
to take several roles in the production process and
a more personal slant on the outcomes. County
Arts SA involvement and representation (and
let’s not forget untiring enthusiasm!) through
project officer Tyson Brown was important in
the project’s success.
A steering committee was formed in May
2008. At its first meeting key road safety
issues for young people were identified; Lucindale had the highest rate of young person
fatalities per capita in the state, and drink
driving, invincibility, hoon driving and
travelling as passengers with inexperienced
drivers were major concerns at Keith.
The steering committee met several times
during 2008, as the project took shape, grew,
changed and eventually resulted in two ‘boot
camps’ that students attended to research,
conceptualise and produce documentary films
and the TV commercials. The project gained
recognition for a Community Studies Unit for
SACE Stage 1. (1.)
The documentary themes include personal loss
(of family and friends), the vital role of police
and emergency services in rural South
Australia, the individual life changing
consequences of road trauma, and the cost of
road trauma to communities, support services
and individuals. The TV commercials cover
the dangers of peer distractions, vehicle
overloading (passengers), texting while
driving, fatigue, the effects of speeding and
alcohol on driving and crash fatality statistics
of males aged 18 – 25.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The DVD Highway 35 Tatiara Boot Camp –
May 18 – 29, 2009 was launched in separate
events at Lucindale (31st July 2009) and Keith
(15th October 2009). Many of the people who
had shared their stories for the making of the
documentaries attended those ‘red carpet’
ights. The atmosphere is well described by a
DTEI staff member who attended: “It was
interesting seeing the effect of the micro-
documentaries and TV commercials on the
audience – the talk stopped, then the
whispering stopped, then the fidgeting
stopped... and at the end there was silence.
Someone whispered ‘oh boy’, a few others
wiped their eyes... and it was some time before
conversation started again.”
From a State Government Agency perspective,
Highway 35 has been remarkable – for its
process and influence, as much as the more
tangible outcomes.
In 2009 Lucindale and Keith Area Schools
were jointly awarded the South Australian
Area School Leader’s Association Best
Practice Award for the Highway 35 project.

CONCLUSIONS
The combination of community, the arts and
education has been a powerful way of reaching
and touching thousands of people about road
safety and the effects of road trauma.
“Learning about road safety is one thing, but
actually creating something that can influence
change was something I was proud to be involved in... thank you for giving us this opportunity to work with some great people, and hopefully, making some sort of difference.” (2.)

And as Anita Roddick, founder of The Body Shop once said; “if you think you’re too small to make a difference, you’ve never been bitten by a mosquito.”

REFERENCES
1. South Australian Certificate of Education
2. Nicholas Drabsch, Jess Cousins, Keith Area School

This extended abstract has NOT been peer reviewed.