

The New Zealand Herald

Scheme aims to stop 'life sentences'

By Victoria White

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Despite a decrease in the youth toll, a road safety programme hopes to prevent more young people from giving themselves "life sentences" if they cause a car crash.

In the past decade, the road toll in the 15 to 24-year-old demographic has dropped nationwide by 52 per cent but Road Safety Education chief executive Terry Birss said the loss of a single young life was one too many.

"It is a lesson for everyone that we should drive carefully because of the precious cargo we carry. They [youth] often travel with friends in cars and have to live for the rest of their lives with the good or bad decisions they make when doing so."

On January 3, 20-year-old Bradley Charles Dobby from Waipukurau was killed after a crash involving a ute and a car near Waipawa on State Highway 2.

Last year, passenger Jesse Lee Uncles was killed when the silver 1997 Mitsubishi Lancer Evo 4 rolled on a bend.

From the August 8 crash, Stephen Edwin Palmer received two spinal fractures and Kayden Basil French was left with serious injuries.

A 21-year-old is facing charges in relation to the crash. He is yet to enter a plea.

Simone Randle of NZ programme Road Safety Education Ltd said the loss of a friend meant those involved had already been given a "life sentence".

She said through work with crash survivor presenters in the past 15 years, Road Safety Education Ltd's flagship programme RYDA had seen the devastating impact of fatal crashes on surviving drivers. "This is a trauma that survivors live with forever."

The decrease in youth road toll was due to many factors including the graduated licensing scheme, safer cars, better roads and the key role of education, she said.

Since 2007, 36,000 students have graduated from the RYDA programme in New Zealand.

The programme aimed to change the way young people think and act on the road, as passengers as well as drivers.

The organisation said on average each week a family suffered the tragedy of losing a young family member.



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