

Culture Counts: Reaching Newcomers with Lifesaving Road Safety Information

Nearly 250,000 immigrants arrive in Canada from all corners of the world each year, giving Canada one of the highest per capita immigration rates in the world [1]. In Ontario alone, the population is expected to grow by more than four million in the next 30 years [2].

Data has shown that minority populations, recent immigrants, non-English speakers, people with low incomes, and people with low literacy are at especially high risk of injury as motor vehicle occupants [3]. It has also been found that health promotion initiatives created for the general population often do not work for ethno-cultural communities [4].

In late 2006, Safety Drives Us (SDU) was formed to address such concerns and make road safety education more accessible to newcomers. This committee is a unique partnership between the Ontario Ministry of Transportation, Ontario Provincial Police, Halton Region Police Services, Halton Multicultural Council, Brampton Multicultural Community Centre, SISO, Road Today, St. John Ambulance Peel, Safe Kids Canada and Halton, Hamilton and Peel Public Health Departments.

The committee members represent three regions in Southern Ontario (Peel, Halton and Hamilton). Based on community readiness, our initial efforts were focused primarily in Halton Region. Halton is located southwest of the Greater Toronto Area and is one of Canada's fastest growing regions[5].

SDU's initial focus was to address the barriers to child passenger safety identified through anecdotal feedback and secondary research [6]. Although the following barriers also exist for some of the general population, they were found to a greater extent among Halton's newcomers.

Low-income Barriers

- older vehicles with older seatbelt systems and/or no tether anchor bolts
- second-hand child car seats with missing car seat instructions/parts
- vehicles too small to accommodate family size
- old/expired seats
- seats not appropriate for child's weight/height

Low Literacy/English Proficiency Barriers

- limited English proficiency (both oral and written)
- difficult to understand vehicle and/or car seat manuals

Cultural Barriers

- low perceived need for car seat use; car seats may not be the norm 'back home' and their need not well-understood

- fear/distrust of police (was found to be a barrier to attending car seat clinics)
- majority of health education materials and programs only reflect the cultural values of the majority and these concepts are often not directly transferable to communities with different cultural backgrounds [4]

SDU Initiatives

The following initiatives were developed by SDU to address these barriers:

- Using grant funding, two MTO child passenger safety pamphlets were translated into Punjabi, Arabic, Spanish, Korean, Urdu, Portuguese and Chinese. These resources were made available through settlement and community agencies, libraries and at special events. Based on their popularity, further printings of the materials are now supported by MTO and can be ordered through Service Ontario.
- Recognizing that language is only one barrier faced by newcomers, SDU applied the concept of using peer partners to reach newcomers. As members of the focus population, settlement workers provide the insight necessary to eliminate barriers to interventions and ensure strategies are culturally sensitive [7]. Settlement workers not only speak their client's language, they are often members of their clients' geographic community and therefore can provide greater cultural competence, motivation and trustworthiness [8].
- Initially a group of settlement workers from Halton Multicultural Council were trained as certified car seat technicians through a 2-day training program. However, due to staff turnover, time limitations and liability issues, the settlement workers were found best to be used as supports at the car seat clinics as opposed to technicians. Subsequently, a car seat safety presentation was developed to target all settlement workers to provide them with basic car seat safety information to support their clients.
- Car seat clinics were offered specifically for newcomers in Halton Region. In order to ensure a welcoming and safe-space climate, settlement workers personally invited their clients and ensured that they were present at the clinic to provide translation services as necessary. Certified car seat technicians inspected the car seats and ensured safe installation. In attempts to build relationship and debunk myths, technicians from police services were assigned to work with families who had expressed fear of police. Also, an auto mechanic was present to install anchor bolts to older vehicles and funding was available to donate car seats to families in need.
- Newcomers were also reached through a variety of media sources that included local TV and ethnic radio interviews, televised car seat installation demonstrations in Arabic and magazine articles.
- Information displays were used to target newcomers at various cultural community events to raise awareness and normalize the use of car seats, including booster seats.
- A road safety survey targeting newcomers is being conducted to measure their road safety attitudes, behaviours, barriers and incentives. It is anticipated that the survey results will assist SDU in further strategies, messaging and resource development.

Future initiatives include further development of the SDU website (<http://www.safetydrivesus.org>), pedestrian and cycling safety information, translating MTO's car seat installation "how-to" videos and expanding road safety efforts in Peel and Hamilton Regions.

With over 200 ethnic groups, Canada is rich in diversity [9]. However, many of these groups are missing out on the benefits of health promotion. Although translation is an effective strategy in increasing access to health promotion information, this strategy alone does not take into consideration the influence of cultural norms and differences. Using trusted and culturally aware front-line settlement staff has been a successful method to disseminate important road safety information to traditionally hard-to-reach groups.

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