

# KIDESTRIAN

## CHILD PEDESTRIAN SAFETY

HAMILTON-WENTWORTH POLICE DEPARTMENT, ONTARIO, CANADA, 1994

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- THE PROBLEM:** In 1990, there were 252 collisions involving children under the age of 16.
- ANALYSIS:** Further analysis revealed that collisions involving children aged 6-8, showed over 80% involved a dart out phenomenon in which children would dart out into traffic from between parked cars between 1983 and 1990.
- RESPONSE:** A German child's safety book was translated into English and rewritten several times with the help of "experts" on traffic safety and children. Several public and private agencies provided resources to publish and distribute the book to children. Exercises and kits were also developed to teach children traffic safety.
- ASSESSMENT:** KIDestrians is presently being evaluating in three areas. First, we included an evaluation sheet in the book. This form asked for user input and will allow us to include suggestions in future printings. Second, a distribution evaluation will ensure that the books are targeting traffic safety organizations. Finally, an evaluation on promotion will be used to determine if people are learning about the program and being successfully reminded to use it.
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### SCANNING

On April 13, 1994, Hamilton-Wentworth reaped the rewards of several years of hard work by their Police Service and community members. This partnership produced a new and innovative children's safety book entitled KIDestrians which was distributed free of charge to parents/caregivers and community groups in the region. The KIDestrian book's goal is to increase the role of parents/caregivers and community groups in teaching children traffic safety. KIDestrians is not only the culmination of a project, which began in 1991, but is also a tremendous example of community-based policing.

In 1991, the Hamilton Wentworth Regional Police (HWRP) Community Service Traffic Safety Branch decided to evaluate the traffic safety programs being taught by the officers working in this section. One

such program being taught to first grade children was known as "Elmer's Safety Rules." The program had an elephant mascot and basically consisted of seven rules for children to follow when dealing with traffic. The program had been around for over thirty years.

### ANALYSIS

To evaluate the effectiveness of this program, traffic collisions for 1990 were analyzed. The target group consisted of children under the age of 16 who were pedestrians or cyclists. The results were surprising; in 1990, there were 252 collisions involving the target group. Moreover, analysis revealed collisions involving children aged 6-8, showed over 80% involved a dart out phenomenon. A mitigating factor was children darting into traffic from between parked cars. The result was surprising because one

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of Elmer's rules was not to play between parked cars.

To determine whether these results were an aberration or the norm, further study was done. The period of 1983 to 1989 was evaluated in the same manner. Again the results were similar. In fact the number of collisions involving this target group averaged 250 annually over the five years studied. Again children in the 6-8 year old age group were involved in dart out collisions at a rate of almost 80%. It was determined from this data that changes were needed and that a new program should be developed. This new program should address the number of collisions involving children in our region. The objective was easy to define; however, achieving it would be more difficult.

## **RESPONSE**

We wanted to develop a program that would be the panacea of children's traffic safety. We thought it would be quite simple to complete this task. We began pouring over the 5-year study looking for anything to key in on.

However, after several days work, we soon realized that presenting Elmer's rules to grade one children did not make us traffic safety experts. But, in retrospect, admitting this was perhaps the most important step in the project. Without this admission of incompetence, we would not have had the humility to ask for help.

Motivation to seek outside help was not only based on our lack of expertise, but, as well on the principles of community-based policing theory. The crux of community-based policing is solving problems in cooperation or partnership with the community. What a great idea! We decided to turn to the community for help, but where does one start looking for these people? "Expert advice on traffic safety" was not a heading in the yellow pages. We were going to have to find competent people on our own.

We began by calling people in related fields such as city traffic and public health. When advised of the problem, they were surprised that we were calling them seeking help. They thought we were the

experts! Slowly, through a litany of calls and referrals we began identifying people from key and related fields that were more than willing to help. These people were invited to take part in an advisory committee on traffic safety for children in our region.

Experts from across the region attended the first meeting in July of 1991. Representatives from the City traffic department, all three regional education boards, public health, children's aid, parents' associations, the medical field, early education and other related traffic safety councils were in attendance. The benefits of having experts from different fields that could provide a wide variety of opinions and resources proved essential as the project evolved.

At this first meeting, the problem was explored in greater detail and objectives were established. The objectives were to generate strategies and ideas that could be used to develop a new children's traffic safety program. The participants then broke up into two smaller groups of 8 and began brainstorming to develop sets of ideas. These ideas were then reviewed as one group. The committee discovered that various groups, such as public health nurses, teachers and the police, were presenting traffic safety education. However, everyone was teaching different programs. This had led to a scattered and inconsistent approach.

The committee also identified that parents would make the best teachers because they would be willing to spend the time that is required for children to learn traffic safety. It was also learned that while parents would be willing to teach their children traffic safety they often lacked the proper information or knowledge to do so. It was also recognized that in some family settings due to economics, education and other factors, traffic education would not be taught, no matter what information was provided. It was these children that the other agencies such as police, public health and teacher presentations would target.

These conclusions and recommendations provided us with two clear goals for any program we were to design. First, parents and caregivers must take an active role in providing traffic safety training.

Second, a network of community organizations should assist parents; teaching the same message and reaching the children whose parents might fail to educate.

The next task was to study existing programs that might incorporate the recommendations made by the committee. We did not want to re-invent the wheel. Hopefully, we could find an existing program that was adaptable.

In looking for such a program, we utilized the local university's medical science library. We discovered that traffic safety experts confirmed our beliefs: community agencies must work together to address traffic safety issues (Micik and Miclette); police officers are not the best safety educators, (Limbourg and Gerber); dart out collisions, are a major cause for concern (Malek, Guyer and Lescohier); parents often fail to become involved in teaching traffic safety (Rivara, Bergman and Drake, 1989); parents are an important part of any safety program (Rivara, Booth, Bergman, Rogers and Weiss, 1991).

Our research also revealed a German program entitled Verkehlstraining: Eltern Uben Mit IherniGndern; translated to mean Traffic Training: Parents Practice with their Children. The book appeared to be ideal for what we were seeking. Added bonuses were exercises that taught safe crossing at mid block and between parked cars, thus addressing the dart out problem. A request was made to the appropriate German government agency. After several weeks we received a copy of the book in German and a letter in English that gave us permission to use the material in any way we chose.

The next step was to have the book translated into English. In this instance the advisory Committee once again proved valuable. A member of the committee and representative of a local Home and School Association, Wendy Moore Spors, knew a professional translator and was able to get the translation done quickly, free of charge.

When Wendy received the English version of the guide, she became very interested in the program. Unaware of the time required to complete this task, she offered to assist in developing the Canadian version. Obviously, her request was gladly accepted.

Together with another volunteer Anglea Maloch, we rewrote this program, leading to the development of the KIDestrian book. Note: The pronoun "we," used in this report now reflects Constables Rascin and Bond and the KIDestrian volunteers as a team.

KIDestrians consists of a series of exercises that parents or caregivers teach their children, thus achieving our first goal. The exercises were designed to be simple and fun to encourage participation. Once the child begins walking and playing outside, the exercises could be started. Important throughout the beginning exercises is the idea of stopping at the curb, before the roadway or as coined in the book, developing "Kid Brakes." This skill, once learned and made instinctive, becomes an important base from which to build further traffic safety lessons.

As the child matures and becomes more independent, the exercises become more involved to meet each new stage. As children are allowed to venture out on their own they tend to take short cuts and forger safety rules. Safety rules such as always crossing at corners or never crossing between parked cars are not important when a friend is calling from across the street. Understanding that children will often take the easiest route to get across the road explains in part, the high number of "dart out injuries" as mentioned earlier.

To address this problem, the book includes exercises that teach crossing safely at mid-block and between parked cars. The book features a total of 13 exercises. Each has photos for easy reference and instruction by the parent or caregiver. To address our second goal, the book is also designed to assist community organizations in teaching traffic safety.

The book was revised several times. After each rewrite, the book was either field tested or examined by safety experts. Therefore, the book not only incorporates the results of our research, but advice from traffic engineers, health department officials and educators.

The field test included giving the books to parents of two local schools and asking for feedback. The results indicated that over 90% of parents/caregivers felt the book was outstanding. Obviously we were

onto something. The comments and suggestions received were incorporated into further rewrites.

A third field test was conducted by public health nurses, determining the effectiveness of the program in communities where English is a second language. Here, older students took responsibility of explaining the program to parents and younger children. Once again, the study results were extremely positive.

Upon completion of field-testing and re-writes, we produced a very rough prototype of the book and solicited corporations for sponsorship. It was decided that the book must be provided free of charge if we hoped to reach our goals of increasing parents and caregivers role in traffic safety training.

The first corporation to express interest in our program was Canadian Tire. Canadian Tire is an automotive, sporting, hardware retailer, with stores throughout Canada. They are leaders in children's safety through their Child Protection Foundation. After initial reluctance, the foundation agreed to offer \$19,000 worth of graphics and layout to produce a quality prototype of the book. It was hoped that this prototype would help attract additional sponsors.

After several months of rewrites, photo shoots and graphic layout, the prototype was complete. Canadian Tire made the book ready for print in both English and French. The only thing missing was the money required for the printing. We estimated that to reach community groups and parents/caregivers with children in the age range of 2 to 9, 20,000 copies were required. The initial estimate for printing 20,000 copies was \$25,000.

While contemplating fund raising, we showed the new prototype to agencies involved in traffic safety. We continued to receive letters of support from groups wanting to use KIDestrians. Even the local school boards were willing to incorporate KIDestrian exercises into the school curriculum. These letters including an endorsement from the Ontario Association of Chief of Police were very beneficial in showing community support during fundraising efforts. The local Council on Trauma Prevention also assisted in our fundraising efforts.

They provided charitable tax receipts and the necessary financial reports.

Fundraising was not as difficult as was originally feared. Once organizations learned about the program they became more than willing to assist. Donations continued to pour in, until we exceeded our goal of \$25,000. In addition to financial support, community members expressed interest in helping to get the program running. This led to the development of the KIDestrian Team. The goal of the team was to incorporate community input in making administrative decisions relating to the program. This only made sense, as it had been a community-developed program since the beginning. Note: "we" now represents the KIDestrian team, a coalition of police and community members.

Once the books were ready for printing, an unexpected expenditure surfaced. The cost of shipping, handling and storage of these individually packaged books for delivery to community groups was estimated at \$29,000. Fortunately, Canada Post, the national postal company, believed in our program and offered to provide these services at no cost. In addition to this support, Canada Post also mailed out a fundraising request, provided a cash donation, purchased sidewalk chalk to accompany the books and Put KIDestrian advertising posters on all postal trucks.

Prior to the books being printing, a national publication called *Today's Parent* contacted us about the program. They had read our prototype and believed KIDestrians had the potential to be a national project. They offered to print the books at a reduced cost. This allowed us to print 25,000 books, instead of our goal of 20,000. In addition to this support, they used their marketing expertise to enhance the layout of the book making it easier to read and more visually appealing.

*Today's Parent* also developed the idea for a children's kit. The goal of the kit was to motivate children to participate in the program. The kit included sidewalk chalk, shoelaces and a poster with stickers. The cost of 10,000 kits was \$15,000. A local organization known as The Hamilton Foundation, gave us a grant for \$10,000 toward the kits. Surplus fundraising revenue was used to help

purchase the kits. To assess the value of the kits, we will compare groups who received kits with groups who did not.

The final phase of the project was distribution. As the books were fairly expensive, we did not want to send them home with the children and hope they were used. As one of our project goals is to get parents and caregivers involved in the training, we preferred to have them understand what they were receiving. Therefore, the philosophy of distribution was that each individual centre knew the best way to promote and distribute the book to its members. With this in mind we sent letters and order forms to:

- a) School principals; (A support letter accompanied this letter from the school board.)
- b) Recreation centres and neighbourhood association through the Region's Culture and Recreation Department;.
- c) Day Cares, Tot Resource Centres, and Home Care providers; and
- d) Home School organizations and Parent Associations.

In addition, books were given to Public Health Nurses, Police Officers, and City Traffic Officials. The police video training branch also produced a promotional video, explaining the program.

We planned a media launch to kick-off the program and recognize sponsor support. The KIDestrian launch was held on April 13, 1994 and within two weeks the 25,000 books were distributed. The demand for the book exceeded our expectations.

Our distributors quickly informed parents about the value of KIDestrians, creating a demand for books. In response to our second goal, we were delighted to see several community organizations incorporate KIDestrians into their routine. The following is a list of some of the organizations already using KIDestrians.

- a) Senior centres: training grandchildren

- b) Scouting and Guide groups: part of group training
- c) School Boards: teaching KIDbrakes in gym
- d) Daycare's: teaching Walking skills and KIDbrakes
- e) Recreation Departments: Camp Councillors, day programs
- f) Baby-sitter Instruction Course: baby-sitters, participate in training
- g) Health Nurses: advise parents of program during home visits
- h) Paediatric physicians: Advise parents of program during sessions
- i) Police Department: teach KIDestrians in school visits
- j) Canadian Red Cross Society: teaching through Parent Skills Course incorporation in child safety program

This demand has lead to a backorder over 6,000 books. The KIDestrian team is also continually receiving requests for displays and presentations. We are currently organizing a group of community volunteers to help meet this demand.

The more people learn about the program, the more they wanted to help. The following are good examples. One enterprising man has offered to write a KIDestrian song at no cost. The Lions Clubs of Canada want to help promote the book across Canada. Neighbouring communities have contacted us to learn how they can KIDestrianize their children. In addition, we have received donations in the name of children killed in traffic collisions.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Evaluation is an important part of KIDestrians. The team is presently evaluating three areas. First, we included an evaluation sheet in the book. This form asked for user input and will allow us to include

suggestions in future printings. Second, a distribution evaluation will ensure that the books are targeting traffic safety organizations. Finally, an evaluation on promotion will be used to determine if people are learning about the program and being successfully reminded to use it.

The local media has been very supportive of the project. They continued to keep KIDestrians in the public eye during its development and were influential in increasing the demand for books after the kick-off.

Very recently the KIDestrians volunteer authors received the Ontario Solicitor General's Crime Prevention Award and City of Hamilton Women of

the Year honours. Without their countless hours of support, this project may have remained only a vision.

The Hamilton-Wentworth Region is very proud of this community police project. In addition, Canadian Tire, Canada Post, Health Canada and the KIDestrian team are planning national distribution of KIDestrians for April 1995. All have been positive. These results could not have been accomplished without the help of our community. We are all sure that this book will make a difference. For those of you wondering about Elmer the safety elephant. He's still alive and well, but now has help teaching traffic safety.