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Tongan church leads its members to safety

The road safety messages being preached from a pulpit in New Lynn have helped the Tongan Methodist Church win this year's Community Road Safety Innovation Award.

The church has been recognised for the development of *Safe in His Hands*, a programme promoting road safety awareness among its congregation and in the wider community. The programme, which includes child-restraint workshops and driver licensing courses, is also a joint winner of this year's Premier Award for best overall road safety innovation.

Several church members were part of the inter-agency group which planned the programme, also including Waitakere City Council Road Safety Co-ordinators, the local ACC Injury Prevention Co-ordinator, representatives from Plunket, NZ Police and Waitakere Education Association.

Statistics show that Pacific children are more likely than other children to be injured as vehicle passengers. Motor vehicle crashes are the leading cause of accidental death for Pacific people in Waitakere, accounting for just over 40 percent of injury-related deaths.

The communications methods employed by the *Safe in His Hands* programme included a road safety song contest, drama items and workshops.

The programme aimed to reach the Tongan church's 400 members through separate but linked initiatives with three groups: pre-school children and their parents (focus on child restraints), a women's group (driver licensing) and a youth group (alcohol/speed/driver licensing).

It was found that cost was a major barrier to keeping children safe. This was addressed by the seat restraint/booster scheme, which continues to be run by the church. Unlicensed drivers were provided with the means to acquire a license and the opportunity to learn about safer driver and road rules.

Road Safety Innovation Awards' Chief Judge Dr Carolyn Coggan says the project was an excellent example of communicating to people in a place and way that was most effective.

"This innovative project was developed by and for Tongan people. Messages were translated into Tongan, Tongan people undertook much of the training, and the venue was Tongan. Church members assumed leadership of the project.

"Safe in His Hands is an innovative and exciting road safety project that we hope will be used in other churches and community groups to communicate road safety messages."

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For more information

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