

# ROAD TRAUMA SUPPORT SERVICES VICTORIA 21 years

Tell me a fact and I will learn.  
Tell me the truth and I will believe.  
But tell me a story and it will  
live in my heart forever.



VICTORIA • COUNSELLING, SUPPORTING & EDUCATING

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# WELCOME



The RTSSV staff decided that, more than 21 years down the track, it was time the organisation stopped and reflected on all that has been achieved.

This has been the guiding principle of the RTSSV 21 years publication, and the event of coming together to mark what is a significant milestone in the 'life' of this vital community organisation.

As we can read from the articles that have been gathered, it is an organisation that has been, and which continues to be, a lifeline for so many people. We might sometimes say we are a 'little not-for-profit' but our stories – and the level of service we are called to provide to those impacted by road trauma – are 'big' in the sense of being extraordinary.

Jeanette Suhr (OAM), RTST's founding volunteer, who lost daughter Tanya in 1991, tells us that comradeship and the sharing of stories were the main ingredients of the early work that got the organisation off the ground.

These components were there at the very beginning when Jeanette accompanied another bereaved mother to a public meeting about road trauma at the end of 1993 and met a third woman who had lost family members in road crashes.

Reading about this meeting now, you can appreciate the 'good' that came just from people making connections and telling their stories, in the sense that a new organisation was formed to fill a gap in the community. As we know, this was the RTST, which in 2008 became Road Trauma Support Services Victoria.

We started out calling this the RTSSV 'history project', but became overwhelmed by the task of wanting to gather everybody's story; the list of names was quite long (and then we worried about the people we did not know about, or only vaguely knew about, who were not on the list).

At any rate, RTSSV 21 years is the result of interviews done and articles received by people who have contributed to this organisation – by no means a complete review.

Firstly, we would like to thank Jeanette, without whose help this project could not have been realised. She gave us the original list of names of people to contact, subjected herself to two long interviews, went through boxes of files (with the help of long-time friend, Irene Harrington) and was always available to answer our questions.

We would also like to sincerely thank all the other contributors to this booklet for their time and for finding materials, (though the responsibility for any errors of historical fact are ours).

A special thank you to Jess Hofto and Irene Harrington for writing, proof reading and for their immense help in putting this booklet together.

We hope that by sharing knowledge of all that has been done in the name of Road Trauma Support Services Victoria, the organisation can stay strong in its mission of helping the community of Victoria. No other is doing what we do.

Bronwyn Saville and Wendy Bowler  
Writers/coordinators

As we celebrate 21 years of working to reduce the incidence and impact of road trauma, we mark more than two decades of extraordinary contributions, stakeholder partnership and community support in the road safety industry.

From humble beginnings in 1994, we rightfully commend ourselves for our successes and thank our supporters. Without their passion, dedication and dogged determination, it would have been too easy to succumb to the challenges that so often see many community organisations falter.

The keys to a successful future are to create for ourselves a place in the road safety industry that is specialised and expert. We need to expand our reach through service diversification and increased presence in regional Victoria, promote the quality of our work through research and evaluation and continue to grow strong and sustainable quality partnerships, all whilst engaging and acknowledging our clients, staff and volunteers.

We must have the courage to continually question our practices and to critically evaluate ourselves so that we don't fall into complacency and risk losing our way.

With all this said, all we do must be for the benefit of our clients. Whether through counselling, education or community engagement, we must continue to place our people at the centre of our deeds.

Thank you to all who have supported RTSSV over the past 21 years and I eagerly anticipate your partnership with us into the future.

Cameron Sinclair, CEO

# TIMELINE

- 1989** Road Accident Victims Support Group founded in Tasmania before name change to Road Trauma Support Team (RTST)
- 1993** Jeanette Suhr accompanied a friend to a public meeting at the Prahran Town Hall. "Would anyone interested in helping to form a Road Trauma Support Team in Melbourne please sign a sheet," the organisers asked
- 1994** 'Befrienders' training course held for volunteers. Rural Access Program Grant from federal government to develop support services and develop 'befriender' program in rural communities
- 1995** First rose garden weekend held by John Nieuwesteeg at Nieuwesteeg's Rose Nursery
- 1997** Move to Hawthorn Offices. Initial seed funding from Victims Referral Assistance Service (Department of Justice). Rose garden committee formed
- 1998** Bereavement Support Group meets for first time. Road Trauma Support Team receives Victoria Day Award
- 1998** The Transport Accident Commission funding is secured
- 1999** Shoulder-to-Shoulder newsletter is circulated
- 2001** Inaugural Time for Remembering ceremony held. Commencement of outreach counselling in areas such as Niddrie, Dandenong, Shepparton, Frankston and Geelong

- 2002** Traffic Offenders' Program (TOP) introduced (becomes Road Trauma Awareness Seminars or RTAS)
- 2005** Moved to Blackburn office
- 2007** Youth (RTAS) seminars. Jeanette Suhr receives an Order of Australia Medal for her work with RTST
- 2008** Change of name to Road Trauma Support Services Victoria (RTSSV)
- 2009** Different creative support options commenced in conjunction with Centre for Grief and Bereavement (eg walking, writing workshop, art, self-care). First Life membership presented to Ken Lay
- 2010** Second Life membership presented to Andy Calder
- 2012** Art Therapy Group forms
- 2013** Recharge Days commence
- 2014** Shine a Light on Road Safety campaign launched
- 2015** Life membership presented to Jeanette Suhr and Irene Harrington

# I felt inspired to help start an organisation

## Interview: Jeanette Suhr, OAM

Written by Wendy Bowler

In December 1993, Jeanette Suhr accompanied a friend to a public meeting at the Prahran Town Hall about the devastating effect on communities of road crashes and the national road toll. "Would anyone interested in helping to form a Road Trauma Support Team in Melbourne please sign a sheet," the organisers asked.

At the meeting, convened by the Jaycees, Jeanette met Tasmanian woman Colleen Hall who had founded the Road Trauma Support Team in Launceston. It was Colleen's vision that there would be a network of support teams Australia-wide.

The meeting and introduction to Colleen Hall would have far-reaching consequences. However, it was the early-morning visit from police two years prior that changed Jeanette's life irrevocably. That was when Greg and Jeanette Suhr, then of Boronia, learned that their 19-year-old daughter Tanya, the eldest of their two children, had died in a two-car crash.

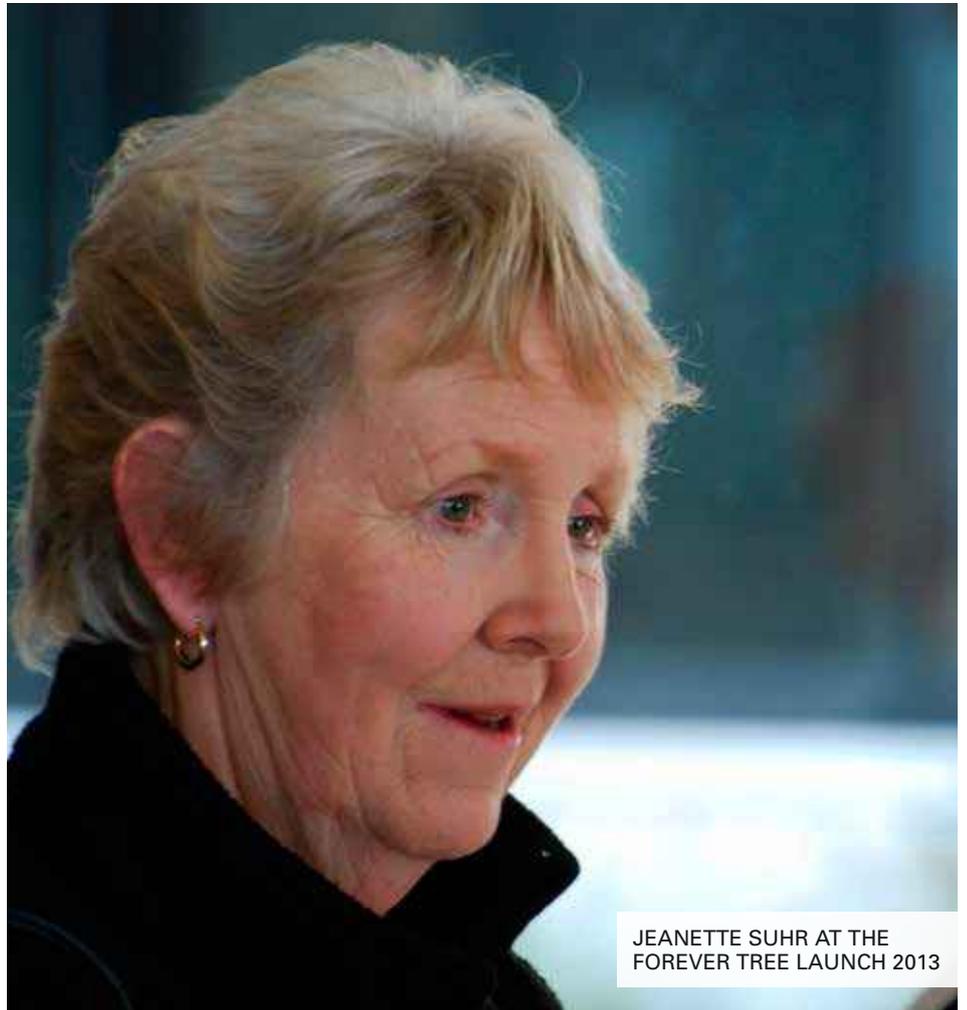
How are you meant to go on after news like that?

In the aftermath, Jeanette knew she needed someone she could always talk to, but felt the help that had been so forthcoming after the crash had already waned. She was at a loss.

Jeanette went to Prahran Town Hall in support of a recently bereaved mother: Delma Calcagno had courageously agreed to be one of the speakers about the traumatic impact of losing 16-year-old daughter Elizabeth, who had been killed in a bus crash in Coober Pedy only several weeks prior, while on the Mt Lilydale Mercy College excursion. Sixteen students had been injured, some seriously.

Another speaker was Rod Watts, Bethesda Hospital's manager of social work services and co-editor of an upcoming book, *Coping with Trauma: the victim and the helper* (1994).

Meanwhile, Colleen Hall's story was that over the years, she had lost nine people from her wider family in road crashes, a



JEANETTE SUHR AT THE FOREVER TREE LAUNCH 2013

personal toll that included her mother.

"Listening to this, and hearing of her determination to create a support system for road toll-affected people in her state, I felt inspired to help start an organisation in Victoria," Jeanette says.

The sudden death of a student on an excursion had rocked the Mt Lilydale College community, of which Jeanette and Delma Calcagno were both part; Tanya Suhr had been a Mt Lilydale student and Jeanette still worked full time in the office there.

It was the type of empathetic connection that came to typify the work of Jeanette and the early volunteers. She was learning, that to endure the pain of traumatic grief "you have to take people with you".

"In the beginning it was all my friends and connections ... I worked very closely with Colleen and used to ring her, 'Colleen, what do I do here?' She was my sounding-

board."

Other vital ingredients were the comradeship and the sharing of stories, often too confronting to tell elsewhere, and the power of these both to help with healing and to bring about change, such as the forging of a new community-support organisation.

"I tended not to speak to people about it," Jeanette reflects, "because I thought they would be saying 'here we go again' ... when you really want someone to travel along with you until such time as you don't need it."

### MY CHILD WENT OUT AND NEVER CAME HOME

Greg and Jeanette Suhr were awakened by "a knock at the door at 12.30am on December 15, 1991 with two policemen telling us they thought our daughter had been involved in a car crash". Two



passengers, a young woman and a man, had been killed in a two-car collision at 8.30pm the night before in Chirnside Park.

The Suhrs doubted the woman was Tanya and asked the policemen, a senior sergeant and a new officer fresh from the police academy, for more proof. Three hours later the senior officer returned with some belongings – a watch and a ring. “Then we knew the young woman was Tanya. It was like we had been hit by a tidal wave and were being swallowed and drowning under the water,” Jeanette remembers.

Also killed was Tanya’s new boyfriend, Malcolm Moore. Both were passengers in a car driven by Malcolm’s brother, who was left with a serious head injury. The three had been on their way to the Moore’s house to watch videos and for Tanya to meet Malcolm’s parents.

The driver of the second car, who tested positive for alcohol and drugs, had crashed into them at the intersection of Maroondah Highway and Manchester Road. His passenger sustained spinal injuries.

Jeanette recalls: “Greg and I had had a conversation several weeks before saying, ‘Aren’t we lucky? We’ve got two terrific kids’.” Paul Suhr was in Year 11 at school while big sister Tanya had just finished her first year at the University of Melbourne, where she was doing a Bachelor of Education and nurturing a passion for the visual arts.

“These words rang in our heads afterwards and we were frightened to think of what else could happen.”

“My child went out one night and never came home again.”

In the immediate aftermath, Jeanette says she coped by throwing herself into her job, counting herself lucky that her workplace was a supportive one. Husband Greg was not as fortunate, with some people being unable to understand why his work in the computer support field should be affected even a few months after losing Tanya.

In 1993 Greg took long service leave and the couple went travelling. It was when Paul picked them up from the airport that



JEANETTE SUHR AND COLLEEN HALL AT TIME FOR REMEMBERING 2010



JEANETTE SUHR AT TIME FOR REMEMBERING 2010

they heard about the tragedy of the Mt Lilydale college bus crash.

### FINDING CONFIDENCE TO ASK FOR MONEY

The first steering committee meeting of the Road Trauma Support Team in Melbourne was held in March 1994. The following year 22 volunteers undertook a training course to work as “befrienders” and Jeanette says, with \$5,000 in the bank, a mobile phone, a donated fax machine and an office in her home “we were off and running”.

The training course, held at Bethesda, was in basic counselling skills to equip the volunteers to handle telephone calls to people impacted by road trauma and make home visits as required. Rod Watts was the Team’s first contact person. At the same time volunteers prepared posters and small notices about the new RTST, which they posted in medical centres, police stations, libraries and other public places.

The question of organisational scope arose as volunteers made contact with the four other support teams running in Victoria at the time – in Shepparton, Bendigo, Warrnambool and Swan Hill. After several months of discussions, the teams agreed to amalgamate into a state-wide organisation to help with the appeal for public funding. Jeanette says that although the work of the regional groups petered out, a Geelong office opened in her time as chief executive (a RTSSV counsellor now works in Geelong).

Lawyer Michael Lombard got the ball rolling for incorporation and for gaining not-for-profit status for the organisation, and by 1995 the initial steering committee had morphed into a board with Jeanette as the first president.

A local newspaper reported the public launch of Road Trauma Support Team Victoria in September 1996, which had been held at the Victorian Rehabilitation

Centre in Mount Waverley. Jeanette warned that "if funding is not granted we'll have to put everything on hold." Sustainability of the fledgling organisation had quickly become an issue.

At that stage the volunteers were awaiting a response to the organisation's first submission for state government funding. A contact from the Melbourne Coroner's Court had told them about a pool of funding through the Department of Justice to support crime-related counselling services. Working to a very short deadline, Jeanette and Gil Matters, a counsellor at the Coroner's Court, put together a submission.

Some months after, in 1997, Jeanette went to her mailbox and pulled out a letter granting the Road Trauma Support Team \$75,000 over 18 months. "I remember dancing on my lawn in Boronia," she laughs.

On the community fundraising front, a RTST rose garden committee formed to organise what was to become the volunteers' happiest event of the year: the public opening for one weekend in November of Nieuwesteeg's Rose Nursery in Tarrawarra Road, Coldstream. John Nieuwesteeg, owner of the specialist nursery and a well-respected rose man, was a volunteer of the organisation. "Many of us worked so hard; we were all so keen – everybody wanted the same thing," Jeanette says.

Validation of that hard work came in July 1998 when the Road Trauma Support Team won the Victoria Day Award for the community organisation of the year.

Nevertheless, by the end of 1998 finances were strained to the extent that "we thought, can we continue or not?" As a consequence everyone on the mailing list, including businesses, was asked to pay a small membership fee. Jeanette also remembers borrowing a particular networking idea from a friend: ask as many people as possible to write to their state MP about the work of the RTST and its need of funds. For example, she asked all her friends at Mt Lilydale college to write letters.

"I can't believe I was able to do the things I did, that I found the confidence and

courage to ask for money, including having people say no," Jeanette reflects. Yet she adds that "you don't ever tell me that things can't be done".

"All the letters ended up on the desk of Jan Wade, the Minister for Justice, who rang the TAC and said, 'Why aren't you funding this organisation?' " Working pro-bono, Michael Goldsworthy, Manager of Australian Strategic Services, submitted a strategic plan on behalf of the organisation, which Jeanette remembers being like "a big thick book".

The result was that, from 1998, the TAC decided to pay an overall amount of \$1 million payable over three years. The TAC financial support has continued since that time. The money went towards renting an office in a church hall in Hepburn Street, Hawthorn, and the hiring of the organisation's first two staff members: a counsellor/co-ordinator and an office manager.

It was about this time that Jeanette received a letter from Andy Calder, a Uniting Church Minister who had been crushed by a reversing garbage truck in Darwin 1993. "He said he would like to give back," and after holding a small memorial ceremony for staff and volunteers in the Hawthorn office went on to establish the annual public ceremony at Queen's Hall, Parliament House, that is now Time for Remembering.

Besides the Befriending work, the early Team ran three regular peer-support groups: for carers of people with Acquired Brain Injury (ABI), for the bereaved, and a group to support drivers involved in a crash.

In 2002, an education service was started with the monthly Traffic Offenders' Program (TOP), run by counsellor Michelle Roberts in the Hawthorn office. The Broadmeadows Magistrates' Court asked the RTST if it would be prepared to take over its program, with the court initially doing all the administrative work. The organisation agreed. As Jeanette explained, this arrangement provided a vital second source of income, forming the basis of the Road Trauma Awareness Seminars (RTAS) of today

In 2005 RTST moved from Hawthorn to its current premises in Blackburn to gain extra space and for geographical reasons to help people – staff, volunteers and clients – who needed to travel to the office by public transport. An organisation that had started in a bereaved mother's home had already come a long way.

### WE FEEL A HAPPINESS AGAIN

Jeanette Suhr does not like to champion her achievements over those of her peers in the organisation, yet has twice received official recognition: she was awarded the Centenary Medal in 2003 and the Medal of the Order of Australia in 2007.

The awards were for her work in helping to establish the RTST, which at the October 2008 Annual General Meeting changed its name to Road Trauma Support Services Victoria Inc. Her roles have included president, secretary and two stints as chief executive in 2003-2006 and 2012. She retired as CEO in 2007, though filled this position again for three months in 2012 while a new appointment was made.

Speaking about her OAM, Jeanette said in a newspaper report that the work of starting RTST had been "a very personal project for me". She was driven by the memory of Tanya and her family's experience of there being a lack of support at an extremely difficult time.

"It was about me needing hope that I was going to survive and to do that I needed to work with people who had been through something similar."

Today there is joy in her personal life in the form of grandchildren with Paul being the father of two young sons and a step-daughter. She remembers her son, after the crash, "he just buried himself in his own world ... and a few years later, when he'd left home and I didn't know where he was, I just felt like I'd lost both my children." Twenty-four years have passed but a recent event showed her that "his pain is still raw and where he will go with that I don't know." There is now more open communication in the family.

As for herself, it took her five years to feel that she would be ok: "I remember walking out of Mt Lilydale college – it is beautiful there – and looking across to see the hills. I

never thought I'd feel again, but on that day I could appreciate the beauty of our trees and sky."

Speaking publicly at the 15th annual Time for Remembering ceremony in 2015, Jeanette said: "Greg and I now have two beautiful grandsons and feel a happiness that we never thought possible again. We still feel Tanya's loss every day and that will always be part of what our life is now."

Speaking more privately, her final thoughts for this RTSSV 21 Years project came after a long conversation in which she could recognise all that had been achieved: "I'm so glad we started this. Thank you, darling Tanya. Thank you for giving me strength to do something with my life."



KEN LAY, CHIEF COMMISSIONER VICTORIA POLICE ACCEPTING HIS LIFE MEMBERSHIP IN 2009 WITH JEANETTE SUHR



JEANETTE SUHR AT THE ROSE GARDEN WEEKEND

Do you know how hard it is  
to hold my tears inside.  
I have lost someone very special and it is  
hard for me each and every day.  
I may look strong but I am fighting  
daily to be this way.  
So please have patience with me, I will  
never be the same person I was but I am  
trying to be the best that I can right now.

Poem read by Jeanette at the 2015 Time for Remembering

# “The power of asking for help

## Reflection: Irene Harrington

My involvement started at the very beginning. When my long-time friend Jeanette Suhr lost her beautiful daughter, Tanya, in a road accident she needed help and support. Jeanette was unable to find either. One day we sat together to work out what could be done to help all people suffering this kind of trauma.

Officially, I did not ‘get on board’ immediately because of other work (I was on the National Board of Australian Jaycees) and the needs of my two children. But I watched Jeanette forge ahead with typical tenacity and take some wonderful people with her. The original Road Trauma Support Team was formed with foresight, determination and a lot of hard work. Jeanette’s Order of Australia award is testament to that hard work

When the organisation moved to a church hall in Hawthorn, Jeanette called to ask for help in setting up office; I offered some shelving from work and other bits and pieces. Later, as I was retiring from my office manager’s job and this role was becoming vacant at Road Trauma Support Team, Jeanette asked for further help.

I started work as a fill-in until a permanent person could be found, but found myself loving the role, the dedication of its people and ethos of the organisation they were creating. The result was I stayed on as Office Manager for 10 months. Then, after attending a few Board meetings to take the minutes, I decided to fully involve myself in this capacity also. I was asked to become a full board member as Assistant Secretary.

So began my long involvement in Road Trauma Support Services Victoria, as it became known, and devotion to the cause of its vital work in the Victorian community.

Over many years I have held various Board positions, including President and Vice-President, work that included sitting on a panel to interview a prospective CEO. I also spent time searching for a new office, which led us to Blackburn and the place that has been home to RTSSV for 10 years.

While I was President, I suffered some ill health and had to pull back from a lot of activities. However, since 2005 I have



JEANETTE SUHR AND IRENE HARRINGTON RECEIVING THEIR LIFE MEMBERSHIPS AT THE 2015 ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

spent many months, at different times, volunteering in the office: working on reception and in administration and helping to set up the online system for Road Trauma Awareness Seminars (RTAS is a love of mine, I have to admit).

Today, I see RTSSV having three major aspects, with many attributes and asides:

- Comfort, support and assistance to road trauma victims: the reason the organisation came into being. I am delighted to see it’s continuing to focus on this role, mainly thanks to the efforts of the counselling staff. I stand in awe of their ability to help people who have suffered from what are deeply painful, life-changing events.
- Education about road trauma: RTAS provides a wonderful benefit to our community besides being a good source of income for the organisation. The educative aspect also stands us in good stead with organisations such as the TAC, Victoria Police and the

Magistrates’ Court. The staff and volunteers involved are remarkable; how volunteers are able to stand before groups of offenders and tell their traumatic stories is beyond me.

- The volunteers of Road Trauma Support Services. They give so much to the organisation and get a lot in return, I believe.

During my involvement over all the years, my family and friends and especially my husband Fred, have always been incredibly supportive. I have two children, Alicia and Glenn and four grandchildren. My sincerest wish is they never need the services of this great organisation.

I still have a passion for this organisation and the work that it does. I am proud of my friend Jeanette and the many wonderful people I have met on the journey so far. A record of 21 years of dedicated service to the Victorian community is something of which we can all be very proud.

# It has been rewarding for all of us who were involved

## Reflection: Michael Lombard

Unlike all of the other founding members of the Road Trauma Support Team, I did not have a direct involvement in a road tragedy. I did, however, have a strong interest in people injured in road accidents as I was a specialist in personal injury law. I had had the privilege, in the year before the first meeting starting the Road Trauma Support Team, of working with a group of parents whose children had suffered bad head injuries in accidents.

Through demonstrations, press conferences, meetings with members of parliament and general agitation through the media, the Kennett government and Treasurer, Alan Stockdale backed down from the plan. The fears the expertise that the TAC held would be lost, did not come to realisation.

As a lawyer working in the area, I had seen the need for people who had been injured in car accidents needing emotional support. There appeared very little counselling and appropriate understanding of the grief that people suffered through the loss of a loved one or the emotional trauma of the accident. The concept of having a 'befriender' who had experienced similar difficulties being available to road accident victims, was a greatly needed resource.

I with a number of parents from the group called the Action Committee for Transport Injured Children (TACTIC) attended the first meeting at the Prahran Town Hall.

I learnt that the concept had been developed in Tasmania and been successful and a number of dedicated people were prepared to support the concept in Melbourne.

I have always believed that being a lawyer and having skills that have been obtained through University Education, gave me a responsibility to not only use them to have a career but also to use them to benefit the community generally. As I had an understanding of the Transport Accident Scheme and the suffering of people injured in car accidents, I believed that I should assist in this worthy cause.

I therefore joined the initial committee and continued on until I became secretary and concluded my major involvement after about 10 years.

The early days were extremely difficult and we were assisted by an independent advocacy organisation called 'Headway' which enabled us to meet at their offices. We had a donation of one telephone and the services of a social worker who was able to man the then large mobile phone and take calls from people in need.

An immediate, major need was obtaining some funding or financial resources to at least pay for the telephone bill! We then aimed to pay for some premises and marketing material and eventually staff.

A rose grower, John Nieuwesteeg from the Yarra Valley was prepared to open up his property and special rose garden for a weekend each year and after having 300 people attend the first weekend, we were able to develop this over a decade to it being a major event with thousands of people attending. His dedication and the dedication of the 'rose garden committee' was an enormous benefit to the both the initial and subsequent financing of the team.

Through my work, I was lucky enough to be invited to a lunch at the TAC. After the lunch I rode in the lift with the CEO.

During that time I was able to make a quick representation about the needs of the Road Trauma Support Team and at the end of the lift ride, it was suggested I contact the appropriate people within the TAC to see what funding could be provided. It was from this point, thankfully, that the TAC came on board and provided enormous support.

The aims of the TAC and the Road Trauma Support Team, of course, are aligned as recovery and rehabilitation are important parts of caring for the injured.

Through the generosity of other organisations, we were able to obtain premises.

It was, of course, not all plain sailing. Being a voluntary organisation relying upon funding, it was difficult to find staff who



were prepared to take the risk that we could run out of funding after a year or two. Unfortunately, on a number of occasions I had to personally warn the staff that if we didn't find funding, their position may become untenable. Thankfully, we never had to follow through on this warning.

Jeanette Suhr as the CEO and President was the life blood of the team, and richly deserved the Australia Day honour which she received. During our time, the Road Trauma Support Team also won Victorian Community Group of the Year award.

The team has changed its name slightly and moved on and developed as all good organisations do. I feel proud to have been involved with Road Trauma Support Services and it has been rewarding for all of us who were involved. I believe people have benefited from the work and many meetings and organisational discussions that took place. I wish all involved with Road Trauma Support Services Victoria the best for the future and encourage their commitment both emotionally and physically to a very worthwhile cause.

# Provided assistance to countless people suffering

## Reflection: Ann Holland

Ann's work with RTST commenced in 1998 when the organisation first opened in Hawthorn. A small amount of funding was received to set up RTST and two part-time employees were employed – a counsellor and Ann as office manager. As client numbers grew and they were able to attract more funding, their hours were increased until they both became fulltime.

The RTST worked together to set up all the accounting, payroll, data base and other office systems to run the office efficiently and to be accountable to the funding bodies. At that time they were answerable to the Board of Directors who met monthly and had a relatively hands-on approach in assisting the organisation to get off the ground.

One of RTST's first events was a road traffic and emergency services day at Calder Raceway with the police, the fire brigade and emergency services. The event was created for Melbourne's school-aged students and was a great way of getting the RTST name out there, as a new community-based and support-oriented entity.

The client base continued to grow with referrals from the public, the TAC and emergency services that was a flow on from the work already undertaken by Jeanette Suhr, Michael Lombard and a number of others who had previously been involved.

One of the first priorities was to seek the assistance of a volunteer base that would allow RTST to match clients with befrienders (people who volunteered to assist clients who had been in a similar situation, or had a similar experience).

The team advertised and interviewed a large number of interested parties who were keen to assist their work. Many dedicated and passionate people who believed in RTST's mission were selected and trained for the role. They were responsible for raising awareness, funds and for the promotion of the organisation, both in the community and in the affiliated professions.

As RTST progressed through the first year in its own office, the organisation was able



to assist some tertiary institutions with student placements and hosted a number of student placements from the social work and psychology departments who were involved in the day-to-day assessment and counselling of clients who had been involved in road trauma. This was an important initiative which assisted the tertiary students to gain skills and experience, easing the suffering of clients and of course to those institutions that relied on the expertise of people in the field to assist new students become involved in new initiatives in the community.

Sue Gorman was one such student who was extremely successful in the organisation and became a volunteer and then a board member. Such was the dedication of the people who came in contact with the organisation who wanted to be a part of it.

RTST developed a number of volunteer sub committees, such as the ABI Carers Group and the rose garden committee, whose dedicated members secured much

needed funds and provided assistance to countless people suffering as a result of bereavement or permanent incapacitation.

Ann spent five years with the organisation before she moved on in 2002.

A while later she was asked to become a board representative, a position which she kept for a number of years. Ann was also a member of the rose garden committee and worked with an amazing bunch of very dedicated people who assisted the organisation to care for and educate people about the consequences of road trauma.

Ann also became a member of the Magistrates Education Group which assisted those people who had been charged with driving offences and were given orders to complete as part of their punitive measures.

Ann's association has been a long and rewarding one.



# Something good out of something bad

## Interview: John Nieuwesteeg

John Nieuwesteeg is a man who knows a rose by many names.

He became involved with RTST after his eldest daughter was injured in a car accident in 1992. John's daughter, 20, suffered a fractured pelvis and an Acquired Brain Injury (ABI) after which she spent three months in rehab. John remembers how time stood still after the crash: "One minute I was 46 and the next thing I was 50".

The ABI changed John's daughter's personality; rendered her unable to complete her accountancy degree and caused a shift in the family dynamics, but is very proud of how his beautiful daughter overcame this extremely difficult period of her life. She is now 43, happily married with three children and runs a successful small business.

After his daughter's crash, John attended the RTST ABI support group. John found the kindness and peer-support from other members to be of great help as he worked towards his own emotional healing and wanted to 'give something back' to help others.

"At one of the support group meetings we got to talking about fund raising and I asked if there was anything I could do." Someone said 'Why? don't you open your nursery to the public for a weekend' – so I did".

A fourth generation rose breeder, John ran a renowned wholesale rose business from home where his stunning nursery, featuring a collection of hundreds of varieties, covered 12 hectares at Coldstream in the Yarra Valley. Garden enthusiasts would line up in the car park to view John's amazing garden. The open weekend would take John and his team of workers months to prepare and make sure the garden was at its best for the weekend.

From this initial idea, a rose garden committee was formed and the first rose garden weekend was held in November 1995. A small admission fee was charged and a sausage sizzle and devonshire tea was provided by the RTST. There were



JOHN NIEUWESTEEG



also potted roses for sale along with local Yarra Valley produce and wines, with all proceeds going to support the important work of RTST. It was a way to get "something good out of something bad", reflects John.

300 people attended this first open weekend and its success ensured that the event ran for an additional 11 years, raising

more than \$100,000 and attracting over 1000 people to each fundraiser in the later years.

John's hard work, dedication and generosity served as an inspiration to others and his contribution to the success of RTST over the years has been invaluable.

Bronwyn Saville

# Her life never slowed despite the addition of a wheelchair

## Interview: Beverley Withers

Bev became involved with RTST in 1994 after seeing an advertisement in her local paper for RTST stating: "There are many people out there whose lives have been wrecked by death or serious injury to a loved one because they don't know where to turn". Beverley recognised the need for a community road trauma support system where there was none and joined the organisation.

One night in 1991 Bev's daughter, Melinda who was 23, fell asleep at the wheel while returning home from one of the three jobs she was working. The crash left Melinda a paraplegic but thanks to the support she received from family and friends and to her love for sport, her life never slowed despite the addition of a wheelchair.

Melinda opened a successful catering business which "gave her life back" and returned to competitive tennis. In 1994 she represented Australia in two international wheelchair tennis tournaments and returned home with a bronze medal, ranked the No. 2 wheelchair tennis player in Australia.

Melinda went on to pursue her love for team sports, taking up wheelchair basketball. In 2005, she travelled to Athens as part of the Australian wheelchair basketball team to take part in the Paralympics, where the team won a silver medal. Upon returning home, Melinda was honoured to be named as the Maroondah Leader Senior Sports Star winner.

Having her daughter and son-in-law both impacted by road trauma and another son-in-law in a wheelchair, Bev says, "In some families, people bring a bottle of wine to dinner, but in our family they bring their own chairs".

Bev's first role as a volunteer, was to help organise the rose garden weekend to bring in vital funds to support RTST.

Bev says in those early years they did everything themselves to save on outgoing costs – even cooking 40 dozen scones for the weekend! Bev was the President of the rose garden committee for the first few years. Being an ex-school teacher, she was an extremely organised



BEV WITHERS

and busy person, so she stepped back as the President, but continued on the rose garden committee until it finished. Bev was also on the RTST Board for a few years, during this time.

Bev contributed her time and skills to RTSSV to play her part in laying a solid foundation for the volunteers who followed. Her strength of character, her passion, as well as her positivity ensured her family and RTSSV benefited enormously.

Irene Harrington

# It was like a big family reunion

## Interview: Marianne Redfern

An important part of the organisation's growth in terms of peer-to-peer support and fundraising were the annual rose garden weekends, which ran for 12 years until 2007.

Marianne Redfern, coordinator of the rose garden committee from 2000 to 2007, remembers these weekends as "like a big family reunion, a very happy occasion with everybody pitching in".

Overall the weekends raised more than \$100,000 for RTST and enabled the organisation to buy its first vehicle.

For one weekend in November, RTST volunteers John and Mary Nieuwesteeg opened the gates to their wholesale business Nieuwesteeg's Rose Nursery in Tarrawarra Road, Coldstream. Admission fees were charged and visitors could buy plants, food and beverages and enjoy some entertainment.

Besides the 12 to 15 people from the rose garden committee, volunteers from other organisations came to help. About 30 organisations and businesses were thanked in the 2007 rose garden brochure, for example.

Marianne says her husband Paul Redfern, the first treasurer of RTST, was content to do the washing-up and work in the background at the weekend events while others took on the public roles.

The events were widely advertised, including via the ABC with the support of gardening expert Jane Edmanson.

Marianne remembers fitting in her volunteer work for RTST with a nursing job on the children's ward of Box Hill hospital, working three night shifts a week, plus school volunteer work and care of her three boys, Marcus, Angus and Amos.

She became involved in the early development of RTST through her personal links to Jeanette Suhr: both were parents of Mount Lilydale Mercy College students who were affected by road trauma. Jeanette lost a daughter and Marianne's eldest son, Marcus, was left with an acquired brain injury (ABI) after a car crash in December 1991. Four and a



half years later he developed epilepsy and died in May 2002 from sudden unexplained death in epilepsy.

Marianne says of the accident: "It was at the end of Marcus' first year at university. He was driving and had had his licence for a month." He was driving several friends home at night when his car went over a hump and crashed into a light pole. One friend died.

The Redferns volunteered with RTST while caring for Marcus and his brothers and working. Support group meetings at Bethesda Hospital, where Marcus went for rehabilitation, fed into the establishment of the Road Trauma Support Team, as Marianne remembers.

Along with her work on the rose garden committee, from the mid-1990s to 2008 Marianne ran a support group for carers of family members with acquired brain injury as a result of road accidents.

Her advice now to carers of people with ABI is "to talk about it with someone, work on developing a good support network and find something to do for yourself". The Redferns have taken up ballroom dancing and like travelling when they can.

Marianne no longer works at RTSSV, but still catches up with friends made through the rose garden committee and the carers' support group. "I have made many friends," she says.

Wendy Bowler

# Positively touched the lives of the many

## Interview: Glenda Barker

After losing her mother, father and sister in a single car collision in 1992, Glenda joined RTST in 1998, acknowledging her need for support and comfort which she feels she received in abundance.

Glenda decided to train as a Traffic Offenders Program Volunteer Speaker and delivered numerous presentations. She told her personal story in the hopes of making our roads a safer place, so that no other family would have to suffer the same loss she had experienced.

Glenda also joined the rose garden committee and the Time for Remembering committee, donated her time as an admin volunteer and spoke with the media, corporate groups and schools as well as at volunteer training sessions. Over time she co-facilitated the Bereavement Support Group and 'befriended' a number of others in need of support while on their own journey of grief and loss.

In 2006, Glenda was honoured with Gold Service Award at the Volunteer Recognition Evening for her hard work and dedication. In 2008, she proudly presented RTST with the beautiful custom-made outdoor furniture made by her son, Steven, in memory of "Con, Bob and Judy" which remain in pride-of-place in RTSSV's outdoor office space.

Endeavouring to remain a 'constant' volunteer by offering her time, Glenda says she became aware that she was also getting as much as she was receiving! During the course of her 15 years volunteering with RTSSV her broken heart had been helped to heal and, along the way, she positively touched the lives of the many grieving people she met.

Married with three adult children and five grandchildren ranging in age from twenty four to nine, Glenda enjoys gardening, reading and travelling the world when she can. As she steps out from the shadow of her grief, she know the sadness in her heart has softened with the love and support available to all associated with RTSSV. Glenda acknowledges that memories of her family are never far from her mind and she welcomes them, as they represent her background.



GLEND A BARKER WITH HER TWO SONS PAUL AND STEVEN 2008

## Down the Track

Nowadays my grief is a distant hurt,  
tucked way back – but when country  
music plays, or someone whistles,  
or I hear a magpies' call; images rush my  
heart and mind and I'm with my family  
again, filling three voids with memories  
I invite to stay.

Glenda Barker

# You give a lot of yourself but get an enormous return

## Interview: Stuart Riley

Stuart Riley started volunteer work for RTST in 1997 after seeing an advert in his local paper that struck a chord. He had lost his partner Angelique van de Laak, 29, in a collision near Colac on 19 July 1995 and he felt like a lost soul.

Angelique had gone on a day trip to the Twelve Apostles with her mother and relatives from Slovenia; they were travelling back when the car her mother was driving collided with a truck. All three backseat passengers, including Angelique, were killed.

Stuart describes the days following the crash as his darkest – but “you survive”. “You reach a milestone, say six months, and think ‘I am OK now,’ then another milestone and think ‘I wasn’t OK, but I am now,’ and it continues.”

He trained as an RTST befriender even though people around him thought it might be too early in the grieving process for him to volunteer in this way. But he thought he would plunge in and just see how it went.

Stuart was a befriender for two years before moving on as, by then, the role was “wearing him down”. His goal had been to reassure his clients that they would be able to find a way through their hard times, and to say: “If I have survived, you can too.” He remembers helping a man at Epworth Hospital who was the only survivor from a car that had rolled.

Stuart says the RTST’s peer-to-peer support gave him an opportunity to “actively grieve”. “You give a lot of yourself, but you get an enormous return when you have helped someone who is down feel a little bit better and it gives you a sense of community.”

Stuart was on the organisation’s rose garden committee for more than 10 years. “The rose garden weekend wasn’t just about fundraising, it was also about peer-to-peer support, friendships and the connections that were made with people who came back year after year.” Stuart, who owned a nursery in North Balwyn, asked for donations from his contacts in the wholesale nursery industry to sell at his plant stall at the open weekend, with all proceeds going to RTST.



ANN HOLLAND, ANDY CALDER AND STUART RILEY  
AT THE 2007 ROSE GARDEN WEEKEND

Stuart says he went to monthly counselling sessions (separate to RTST) for at least two years, where the most important thing was being listened to. “A lot of the things you’re thinking, you don’t want to bore other people with.” He would urge especially men, who may think counselling is not for them, to ask for help and “go and talk to somebody”.

Besides the befriending role and rose garden committee, Stuart sat on the RTST board for a few years and was part of the education team for three, working with Glenda Barker and speaking to offenders every month at the Hawthorn office.

As hard as it was at times to speak, if telling his story could prevent someone else going through all he had experienced, then it was worth it. “Often, there was not a dry eye in the place.”

During the time that Stuart was volunteering with RTSSV he met Ann Holland, the office manager and one thing led to another and they got married in 2011.

Stuart, who says he has always liked doing community work, has been involved in the Forest Hill Lions Club since 2007.

Bronwyn Saville

# TIME FOR REMEMBERING



“A beautiful ritual of remembering”



# This is important, we are supporting the citizens of Victoria

## Interview: Andy Calder

It is nearly 30 years since Andy Calder's accident. He was 30, turning 31, when a garbage truck reversed over him early one morning in Darwin. He was on a working holiday, in a job as a garbage collector, which he'd taken because he liked the running. "I still get flashbacks but it doesn't consume my life now," Andy says.

Today he is a Uniting Church minister and convenor for the past 15 years of the Road Trauma Support Services Victoria's (RTSSV) annual Time for Remembering (TFR) ceremony in Melbourne.

"Mine is a survival story. I'm very mindful that others have stories worse than mine," Andy reflects. "I have a sense of appreciation of having been given another chance. When I wake up each morning, I never take the day for granted."

During his shift on July 4, 1986, around 6.30am, Andy jumped off his garbage truck incorrectly, fell on the road and was pinned by the outside wheel as the truck reversed. The former marathon runner spent three weeks in Darwin Hospital with multiple injuries, including a fractured pelvis and ribs. This was followed by three years of rehabilitation.

For the first few years back in Melbourne, Andy worked in the disability sector and for the state government. He also set himself the goal of running the 1991 Melbourne Marathon. "After that I went cold turkey and didn't run a marathon again. It was a statement to myself of strength restored."

It was in this period that he made a big decision about the course of his life: after a strong upbringing in the church, Andy worked to become a Uniting Church Minister. "Seven years was a significant turning point to let things go. Then I got to thinking, what can we do as an offering to the wider community?"

On July 4, 1993 – seven years to the day from the date of his accident – Andy gathered family, friends and people who had supported him through his rehabilitation for a "celebration of healing" at a community centre in Collingwood. "It was my way of saying thank you and it



ANDY CALDER

was a powerful occasion for myself and my wife (who had been in Darwin in 1986)." Andy Calder and Julie Perrin are now 31 years married with two grown children.

"A few years later, around 1995, I started thinking that there must be something more to this feeling of walking around and being alone in the community [carrying the experience of road trauma]. I saw a tiny advertisement in the Richmond library about the Road Trauma Support Team, as it was then known (RTST) and I contacted and met Jeanette Suhr and we talked about my ceremony."

Andy held a ceremony in 1999 for RTST staff and volunteers at the organisation's former premises in Hawthorn. This simple ritual in the rented office of an old church hall for 20 or so people was the prelude to an annual public ceremony now held in Queen's Hall, State Parliament.

The inaugural 'Time to Remember' was held on Sunday 8 April 2001 in St Paul's Cathedral. It started outdoors in the City Square with some addresses and interfaith prayers, a time of silence during which traffic was stopped at the nearby intersection and a procession to the

Cathedral for a memorial service "open to all people who suffer as a result of road trauma," as the invitation said.

The event was reported in *The Age* (with details of the personal story and a photograph of Glenda Barker of the RTST): "Yesterday, on Palm Sunday, the traffic at the corner of Swanston and Collins Streets was cleared for two minutes for a remembrance service for road accident victims and those left behind in grief.

"It was a gathering of a few hundred people, a mix of ages, cultural backgrounds, religions and status, united in the common bond of having lost people they loved."

The newspaper report continued: "Transport Minister Peter Batchelor and a senior road safety policeman, Acting Assistant Commissioner Bob Hastings, recounted grim statistics of our on-road behaviour." The road toll for the previous year of 407 people was, in Mr Batchelor's words, "as many people as you would find in a primary school". The then head of the TAC, Steven Grant, and the RTST's Jeanette Suhr also spoke.

Andy remembers the quietness as the

## Andy Calder continued

intersection was closed and the traffic stopped in a symbolic “reclaiming of the roads” by people impacted by road trauma. For a time a part of the city was made safe. He also recalls the procession from the City Square to St Paul’s behind the-then head of the Uniting Church, the Rev. Alistair Macrae and a cross made out of wrecked metallic car parts.

The TFR ceremony was held at St Paul’s for a second year, Wesley Church on Lonsdale Street for the third and the Melbourne Town Hall for two years, before moving to its present location in Parliament House. The date was also shifted to near Christmas, specifically the third Sunday in November, which is the United Nations’ World Remembrance Day for Road Crash Victims.

Andy says there have also been changes of form to the ceremony, but centrally the same set of prayers or thoughts are offered for the bereaved, and the injured and their carers; for or emergency services personnel; witnesses of road crashes; for health and healing services; and for lawmakers and the wider community. When the ceremony moved from St Paul’s, the intention was to make it as accessible as possible to the citizens of Victoria’s diverse community.

In earlier years the TFR committee organised various rituals to mark the road toll and raise awareness of the work of the organisation: a display of table settings – plates, knives and forks – to symbolise people who would not be with their families for Christmas; the release of balloons; rows and rows of pairs of shoes placed on the Parliament House steps; and the arrangement of too many photo frames with blanked-out portrait images.

“At that time we were trying to capture the media’s interest, but in the last three or four years we have confined the event to the ceremony inside,” Andy says, partly due to resources, but also to allow privacy for participants. Recently, there have been displays mounted inside Queen’s Hall of collective works made by the organisation’s Art Therapy Group.

So what are the issues for the organisation 21 years on? Andy, a former RTST/RTSSV board member over 13 years and



President for two terms, names “sustainability” of the organisation. “This is about having a profile and being known in the community because so many people suffer from not knowing there are other people who can support and care for them.

“We shouldn’t be shy of profiling. If the demand is such we are overwhelmed, we need to say to our political leaders that we need more support. It is about caring for our community. Whether directly or indirectly, I suspect everyone in Victoria has been affected by the road toll,” Andy says.

“This is important, we are supporting the citizens of Victoria, and no other organisation is doing what we do.”

The great strength of what is now called the Time for Remembering is the organisation. “RTSSV has taken it on so that it is an important part of the organisation’s calendar.”

The ceremony has a dual obligation in, firstly, helping people impacted by road trauma and then in raising the profile of RTSSV to help ensure its survival. “It is a tangible opportunity for the organisation to

have contact with people who otherwise would not know about us. It helps to make us more real to those with the power to allocate resources,” Andy says.

“Time for Remembering shows that road trauma is an ongoing thing. Grief doesn’t go away.”

Wendy Bowler

# TIME FOR REMEMBERING

“Time for Remembering shows that road trauma is an ongoing thing. Grief doesn’t go away.”



# We need a cultural shift in our attitude towards speeding

## Interview: Robert Hill

Robert Hill, until recently the Assistant Commissioner for Road Policing, has been able to experience first hand the effect of volunteers' stories at the Road Trauma Awareness Seminars.

"Despite all the work I've done in the area of road trauma, hearing from someone who has lost a loved one on the roads brings tears to my eyes," says Mr Hill, now the Assistant Commissioner for the Southern Metro Region.

After more than three years in the job, he would like to see the RTSSV play a bigger role in the promotion of road safety in partnership with Victoria Police.

"Changing community attitudes in relation to road safety is a challenge but hearing a heartfelt personal story certainly makes a difference."

After starting as the state's "top traffic cop" in August 2012, Mr Hill says he contacted education services manager Chris Harrison to ask for help with some Victoria Police media launches, so "our road policing messages were not just white noise".

"I thought that having people from RTSSV was so important, that we couldn't do it without you."

During his time, the training relating to road policing was redesigned and an investigators' course introduced. RTSSV helped with this training.

"Today, supporting victims is critically important for our organisation and RTSSV plays a significant role in that regard."

He recognises the effect of road trauma on police officers. "Responding to crash scenes that involve trauma and the loss of life can take its toll on our members. While we have invested heavily in our support systems for our staff, we need to do more."

In terms of road safety messages, he says agencies need to improve their engagement with young people, "who usually don't watch the evening news". Meanwhile, research has shown that "the shock TAC-style ads of old are not as relevant in 2015".



ROBERT HILL, ASSISTANT COMMISSIONER VICTORIA POLICE AT OUR 2015 SHINE A LIGHT ON ROAD SAFETY COMMUNITY WALK

"We can be more effective in delivering our educational material," for example, by recognising the impact of people speaking from personal experience.

Mr Hill also cites the importance of the peer-based learning model utilised in the Fit2Drive (F2D) Foundation for Year 11 students in Victorian secondary schools, aimed at reducing youth road trauma.

During his time as AC of Road Policing, Victoria Police launched its Road Safety Action Plan: Road to Zero, its first road policing strategy, based on the "safe systems" philosophy (safer people, safer roads, safer vehicles and safer speeds).

"Drink-driving is now seen by the broader community as being unsociable but there is still the attitude that it's ok to speed and get to your destination as quick as you can," Mr Hill says.

Moreover, speed settings need to be reviewed, particularly in rural areas. "In urban areas there have been more 40 kilometre speed zones introduced aimed at protecting vulnerable road users. Now more work needs to be done in rural Victoria on the lower standard roads."

"We need a cultural shift in our attitude towards speeding similar to drink driving."

Half of the fatal road crashes in the 1970s and 80s were caused by alcohol



consumption, a figure that was reduced to 25 per cent when the .05 blood alcohol limit was introduced in Victoria. "But now, in 2015, it remains at 25 per cent. As a community we need to consider the separation of the behaviours of drinking and driving completely."

As a minimum, Mr Hill advocates extending the P-plate licensing period to age 25 so young adults are required to drive with a zero blood alcohol level for an extra three years.

Wendy Bowler

# I want to share my experience to help raise awareness about road trauma

## Education Services

In 2003 discussions were held about Road Trauma Support Team running a program called the Traffic Offenders Program.

The program was held at the Hawthorn offices once a month and was conducted by a RTSSV counsellor.

Geoff Spowatt and Debra Garlucci, from the Magistrates' Court were instrumental in setting up the program and were of great assistance to RTSSV. The Magistrates' Court did all the administrative aspects of the course and RTSSV conducted the programs and retained the fees paid by participants.

The program evolved over time.

Chris Harrison started as Manager, Education Services in 2006 and was contracted to write up the TOP program.

At that time, there were three venues: Broadmeadows, Nunawading and Sunshine.

Around 2007, RTSSV took over the total role of administering the Road Trauma Awareness Seminars (RTAS) program.

Today, the program runs at 18 venues throughout Victoria. In 2015 from January to October, there were 828 participants in the courses. It was evaluated by MUARC in 2013 for best practice

Trained volunteer speakers continued to speak to year 11 and 12 students as part of their driver education, on a regular basis across Victoria as well as to many community groups, such as emergency services, Rotary groups, community forums and businesses as part of their OH&S responsibilities.

With the success of the RTAS program, other programs have been developed over time to work with Traffic offenders through Youth Justice, The Children's Court and now a two-session program with Community Corrections.

Youth Road Trauma Awareness Program is a six weeks' course for youth justice programs and was set up after meeting with young people through focus groups and individual interviews, who had long offending histories in relation to driving.



This was set up in 2007 after an initial pilot of a three hour program run in Dandenong through Dandenong Youth Justice. This program is now facilitated by youth justice staff and we deliver two sessions within it.

Drive to Learn is a three hours' session to divert young people from the justice system which began in 2013. MUARC completed an evaluation report for best practice in 2014 and this project is in the throes of processing a stage two evaluation.

Accelerated Insight Program was also set up in 2014 with the Hume Region Community Corrections Office and is a two-session program over two Saturdays, is aimed at high risk, repeat offenders.

Since 2009, RTSSV has delivered a session to road police which since 2012 has become a part of the Road Policing Investigation Course. A police wellbeing package has now been developed and is an opportunity for road police to look after themselves.

In the 2014-2015 year, ten presentations have been made to community groups in Melbourne which reached 593 people.

# The selfless work and integral role played by our volunteers

## Volunteers

RTSSV is very much a volunteer-based organisation, with volunteers comprising 75% of our workforce, and contributing more than \$100,000 in salary savings each year.

The volunteers work in all functions of the organisation from governance and administrative work, to direct service delivery and client support.

Our volunteers are the faces behind the statistics we hear reported in the news and the road safety messages we see.

Each volunteer has a vital story to tell and a unique perspective on road safety. They draw on their experiences to highlight the risks associated with driving.

This year, as RTSSV celebrates 21 years of working for road safety, that support for those impacted by road trauma continues, with volunteers and their contributions being truly celebrated.

We gratefully recognise the selfless work and integral role played by our volunteers as they share their stories in an effort to educate the community about the ripple effects of road trauma.

“I volunteer because I’ve been in a road crash that could have easily killed me. I want people to understand what being in a crash is actually like and what it has done to my life. By telling my story, it will hopefully raise awareness about the impact on individuals and communities after a road crash and how quickly your life can be turned upside down.”

**Bill Hodges**

“Being a volunteer has helped give meaning and purpose in my life after the death of my 25 year-old son Ben who was killed in a single vehicle crash in 2009.

Telling my family’s road trauma story to RTAS participants helps to give these young people an opportunity to rethink their risky driver behaviour. It is remarkable the impact this has on participants and as a volunteer speaker you know that what you have told them is going to save lives, help to reduce serious injury and lessen the ripple effect of road trauma on family, friends and the wider community. It is the most worthy task I do – in memory of my son Ben”

**Karen Robinson**



GEORGE GREAVES AT THE 2014 CHRISTMAS PARTY



CHRIS AND KATE PARKIN AT THE 2014 CHRISTMAS PARTY



KAREN ROBINSON



# Everybody's story is different, no two people are affected the same way

## Interview: Michael Perkins

Late one Friday night in 1988 Michael, then 18, fell asleep in the front passenger seat of his friend's car. He does not remember the collision, but that night his parents were told his injuries were so bad that he wouldn't survive.

Michael spent the next two weeks in a coma on life support and then another two weeks in and out of consciousness in Intensive Care.

When Michael's condition stabilised he was moved to another hospital. Michael can still remember waking up one morning a few days after he arrived – five weeks of his life had just vanished and he didn't know why or what was going on. When Michael's mother and sister arrived he found out what had happened. The driver had turned around to talk to the passenger in the back seat and had driven into the back of a parked semi-trailer. In one second three lives and three families had been changed forever, they were now on an emotional roller coaster.

Michael's finger was so badly broken it had to be amputated, but the real devastation was that he had fractured 90% of his skull. Michael spent the next two weeks laying in a hospital bed crying and trying to work out why this had happened to him. There was no explanations; it happened and now he had to deal with it – this was the start of a very long road.

Michael spent the next 23 months in and out of different hospitals, six months of that in a wheelchair while he learned how to walk again. Michael has had three operations on his eye and nine operations to fix a spinal fluid leak from his nose. Because of his Acquired Brain Injury (ABI), Michael also has epilepsy and will be taking medication for the rest of his life.

After almost two years in hospital Michael thought he would be able to go back to his normal life, but things had changed and he couldn't do the things he used to. Michael lost his job and his Driver's Licence because of his injuries and spent many days alone feeling sad, lonely and isolated.



MICHAEL PERKINS AND CHRIS HARRISON, EDUCATION SERVICES MANAGER AT THE V8 SUPERCARS IN 2015

Since then Michael has volunteered with Road Safe and the Teenagers Road Accident Group and has worked at the Casey Council and as a personal care Assistant.

In 2004 Michael saw an advertisement in the newspaper recruiting volunteers for RTSSV and he felt he would like to use his experience to help others. Michael trained for six weeks in Hawthorn to become a volunteer speaker to tell his story. He then started working with RTSSV in Blackburn and met Chris Harrison, going on to help her with the Road Trauma Awareness Seminar programs in Ballarat, Geelong and Box Hill.

Michael recalls how RTSSV listened to him and gave him a voice. He really enjoyed working on the youth program with Chris and travelling around Victoria. For 11 years Michael spoke to people about his life and could see the change forming in people's minds after hearing his story. Michael could see that he was making a difference. Michael emphasises that the work RTSSV does is so important – "when something like this happens I can guarantee it will change every part of your life, your family,

your friends, your jobs and most of all it will change you. It is important that people understand this".

"The emotional scars will never go away, they will get better but they will always be there. You learn to live with the changes and get on with your life. But you can never forget and it took me a long time to accept it. It has changed me, the things I can do and my approach to life and some of my injuries will never get better. The fact I can still function and have a relatively normal and independent life, I am very lucky".

"Everybody's story is different, no two people are affected the same way, so be careful and enjoy your lives".

Bronwyn Saville

# “The support I received was key to my recovery

## Reflection: Gary Haken

I came to RTST in 2002 after being a driver involved in a fatal collision.

My first step on the journey was to come and receive counselling from RTST. The support I received was key to my recovery and I was privileged to meet other road crash survivors going through the same journey I was, and it showed me how generous people can be finding the time to help other.

The outstanding support work of the organisation inspired me to volunteer and give back. I volunteered as a speaker for the Road Trauma Awareness Seminar (RTAS) program, young offenders program and had a role helping facilitate the drivers support group working with drivers recently involved in fatal crashes.

In 2006 I was privilege to be offered a role as an educator for both the young offenders programs and RTAS. Our educational programs give us a great opportunity to present to those “not touched by the road toll” and an opportunity for our volunteers to deliver their message.

I was privileged to work beside so many amazing volunteers sharing their stories and experiencing their passion for road safety.

When I started my road to recovery my goal was to “be normal again”. Living a life without flashbacks and not fearing the road ahead when I am driving.

I drive on the road now with the acceptance that things can and do go wrong, but I cannot and must not let these fears control me. I know when I am in a car there are no guarantees that I will make it home, I acknowledge and accept this feeling and in many ways it makes you a safer driver and it gives you a sense of a higher state of awareness. I will make mistakes behind the wheel, sometimes I will think of other things while driving other than concentrating on the road ahead.



But to me that’s normal, that was my goal. Not living in fear behind the wheel, not putting your foot on the brake as you approach a green light because you are scared of what may be coming the other way, not being scared to drive at night, not being scared to go on a trip away. These days I feel normal again and I know I could not be where I am now without the support of so many people from RTSSV past and present, staff and volunteers.

# Print service has never been a burden

## Interview: Gary Galvin

Gary Galvin and wife Vivien were friends with Jeanette and Greg Suhr, a friendship that was the beginning of Gary's long involvement with Road Trauma Support Services Victoria as printer for the organisation.

Gary says the sudden death of the Suhrs' daughter, Tanya, in a car collision in 1993 made a big impact on him as his daughter Loren was a similar age to Tanya.

"It was a very difficult time for Jeanette and her family, and she did retreat," Gary remembers.

Gary was at an early function to support the Road Trauma Support Team in Melbourne when he asked Jeanette what he could do to help. She said the organisation needed some brochures printed and he agreed to take on the job.

This was the start of a business relationship lasting 21 years, much to the benefit of RTSSV.

Acton Print Services did all the printing pro-bono until just a few years ago. But as the organisation has grown, so has the printing requirement, and now Gary does all the printing at cost with Acton absorbing the extras.

RTSSV has been Gary Galvin's charity of choice as he is a strong believer in "giving back to the community". He also believes that a business is a service and is about building relationships.

"I like to provide a service; it is not so much about the printing for me," Gary says.

"It was a business decision that I made early on, and it has never been a burden."

Irene Harrington

# A great organisation that plays a key role in addressing road trauma in the Victorian community

## Interview: Belinda Clark, MUARC

Belinda Clark is a Research Fellow with over fifteen years research experience at the Monash University Accident Research Centre (MUARC). She specialises in illegal driving behaviours such as: drink driving, driving while disqualified, and 'hooning'.

During her time at MUARC, Belinda has been involved in numerous research programs resulting in a substantial range of research experience including: conducting extensive reviews and evaluations, data analysis and interpretation, survey design, face-to-face interviewing, facilitation of focus groups, and project management.

- Belinda first became involved with RTSSV about five years ago when she was asked to do a desk top review of the Road Trauma Awareness Seminar programs, with Jessica Edquist from MUARC, which was finalised in 2013
- Belinda and Dr Jennifer Oxley from MUARC did an evaluation of the 'Driving to Learn' Young Driver Offender Program in 2014
- In 2015, a paper on Enhancing Offender Programs to Address Recidivism, was written and submitted by Belinda, Jennie Oxley, Steve O'Hern from MUARC and Chris Harrison, to the Australasian College of Road Safety which was followed up with a presentation at their conference
- In 2015, Belinda worked with Bernadette Nugent and the counselling team to develop a meaningful and purposeful evaluation form for clients
- Belinda "believes RTSSV is a great organisation and is needed in the Victorian community" and she has helped Chris Harrison, Bernadette Nugent and Cameron Sinclair with evaluations and advice on research as needed – mostly pro bono
- MUARC have been strong supporters of RTSSV over the years and the organisation is extremely grateful for their valuable input.

Irene Harrington

# The TAC is committed to helping people get their lives back on track

## Reflection: Sam Cockfield

The original partnership between Road Trauma Support Services Victoria (RTSSV) and the Transport Accident Commission (TAC) came about in the early 1990s, when the TAC realised how many people were psychologically impacted by road trauma.

The road toll was around 700 and there were many people who were indirectly impacted by car crashes who had limited ability to make a claim through the TAC scheme – such as witnesses and family – and needed more support.

We also knew then, that there were some clients who could benefit from a more community based approach.

RTSSV offered a peer-based program which saw people who had been affected by trauma helping them through their grief.

The TAC felt this complemented the medical support and benefits that the TAC funded for its clients.

Initially funding was quite limited, just assisting RTST to coordinate the volunteers who were offering the peer support.

TAC's Senior Manager of Road Safety, Samantha Cockfield, became involved with RTSSV when the TAC was considering extending funding to meet growing demand and to meet a desire to provide a more professional offering.

With the introduction of professional counselling as well as the peer support services, the TAC and RTST worked together to ensure that these services were best practice and met the specific needs of those affected by road trauma.

In the mid-1990s, Samantha was part of the TAC team that used the Psychiatry Association guidelines to evaluate the program and offered recommendations on how the program could be made sustainable.

From this work, the TAC became a major funder of RTSSV. The new model was developed from this review of the services and a greater evidence base, allowing the TAC to increase funding over time.



JOE CALAFIORE, TAC CEO AND SAM COCKFIELD, TAC SENIOR MANAGER, ROAD SAFETY AT OUR 2014 TIME FOR REMEMBERING CEREMONY

This eventually allowed RTSSV to increase their services and expand their paid workforce, in particular the appointment of a communications and marketing professional to better cross promote our respective key messages. For the TAC this was about highlighting the burden of road trauma on the community and for RTSSV this was about promoting the availability of the counselling service.

Through that relationship, we became involved in the Time for Remembering memorial service, which has now been running for 15 years. The TAC has also become involved in other initiatives like the investigation of roadside memorial for the victims of road trauma (this work is ongoing).

In looking to the future, while the TAC's is busy working on trying to reduce the numbers of people experiencing road trauma, we recognise that there's still a strong need in the community for road trauma counselling. It is part of the hidden road toll that often goes unrecognised. The TAC is committed to helping people get their lives back on track with the help of organisations like Road Trauma Support Services Victoria.

# COUNSELLING AND SUPPORT SERVICES

RTSSV started as a peer-to-peer support organisation in 1994 with a group of people trained as befrienders. In late 1997 funding from the TAC was secured for a Counsellor and an Office Manager. In 2015 we have a Counselling Manager and the equivalent of two full time counsellors.

Each person referred to the counselling service reinforces the need to continue to raise awareness about the devastating impact that road trauma has on our community. In 2014-2015 counselling services had more than 1300 referrals and there were more than 2300 recorded contacts made with people who had agreed to engage with our service.

Over the last 21 years, RTSSV has had an ABI, drivers, meditation, art therapy and bereavement groups, to name just a few of the initiatives. Offering different groups and programs over the years has allowed the counselling services to further meet the needs of clients by allowing them to engage with our service at many different levels.

In 2013, an external evaluation of the counselling program was conducted (Maddy Harford and Associates) and the evaluation results indicated that RTSSV's counselling services meet world's best practice in the areas of trauma and grief, as well as providing Victorian road users with a unique service.

In 2013 and 2014, with funding from the Ian Potter Foundation, RTSSV was able to host two Recharge Days for clients and volunteers. The events were held at the YMCA Camp Manyung in 2013 and then at YMCA Camp in Mt Evelyn in 2014, with over 170 participating on both days. There were a range of activities providing fun, challenges and pampering. Some of the deepest scars caused by road trauma are not visible. It was a great honour and privilege, to be able to host a day that offered some respite from the pain and an opportunity for reflection and connection.

Our wish list for the future – To provide a safe space where clients can come and participate in workshops and counselling, to engage children in their recovery from trauma and grief and to increase client's options of face to face counselling in regional Victoria. We would also like to



COUNSELLORS CHRISTINE RAWSON, MAREE BURNS, LYNNE IRVING, BERNADETTE NUGENT AND MARIA SMART AT THE 2015 TIME FOR REMEMBERING

consolidate a diverse range of therapy options as permanent offerings in our service to enhance the healing journey for bereaved and injured people. This would include offering sessions such as music and art therapy, creative writing and the exploration of the mind and body and its response to trauma. In addition we acknowledge the value of providing people with access to professionals who are able to provide our clients with assistance as they navigate the complex processes associated with being involved in a serious or fatal collision.

RTSSV acknowledges and thanks all of the counsellors over the last 21 years for their diligence and commitment to the thousands of people impacted by road trauma. It is an honour and a privilege to work with all of our clients. As a team, it is the goal to be of genuine assistance to each person referred to the organisation.



RECHARGE DAY 2014

# These people understood when others could only imagine

## Reflection: Manny Marchesin

Our 13-year-old son Jack was killed on 23 December 2010. Jack had been cycling with my husband, Claude, that morning when a prime mover overtook him and turned left into a side street in front of him. Jack was unable to avoid the truck. He was struck and suffered a catastrophic brain injury. Jack was dragged under the truck and run over. Our beautiful son died under the truck while his dad held him.

I arrived at the scene of the collision a short time later. I am grateful that I was able to see Jack and to hold this beautiful child one last time. A police officer handed me a pamphlet for RTSSV, explained it was an organisation that helps victims of road trauma, and suggested I call. I held on to the pamphlet like it was my lifeline.

Shortly after Jack's funeral, and feeling desperate for help, I called RTSSV. I was not coping and barely able to function. I arranged for my family, including our older son, to meet with the counsellors. The gentle, caring lady on the phone calmed me down; she reminded me to breathe and to take care of myself until I saw her. At the time, I had no idea of the important role this incredible woman would have in my journey with grief.

Our first counselling session was three weeks after Jack died. We had so many questions. We needed to know how to get back to some kind of normality. The counsellor, Lynne Irving, explained that unfortunately things would never be the same; that in time the pain would become easier to manage but that it really would never leave us. We would always miss our son. We were all frightened and absolutely devastated to hear this.

Lynne described how the grief and loss would be different for each of us and that this might cause friction in our relationships with each other. She assured us that what we were experiencing, the shock, anger, fear and loneliness, were all typical responses to traumatic loss. This counsellor tried to prepare us for the long, hard road ahead of us.

I would meet with Lynne weekly, and these sessions quickly became something I relied on. The unbearable loss had



MANNY MARCHESIN AND LYNNE IRVING WORKING ON THE FOREVER TREE 2013

shattered my family. Everything had changed. She encouraged me to take one day at a time and to believe that I had the strength to keep going.

RTSSV counsellors have provided advice and understanding that no family, friend, GP, psychologist or psychiatrist was able to give us. These caring people have the day-to-day experience of dealing with people who, like us, are suffering the complicated grief of losing a loved one suddenly on Victoria's roads.

I was encouraged to attend the organisation's monthly Art Therapy Group, and I now look forward to this each month. I have met some incredible people at these classes and have particularly connected with other bereaved mothers. These friendships are extremely important to me; between us, there is no judgment, just acknowledgement and an understanding of each other's losses and hurt.

It is almost five years since Jack died and the grief has not left me, but it has shifted,

changed. The pain is still heavy, and the tears still flow, but I am learning to live with the heartbreak. I feel strong enough now to be able to share my family's story, and have just completed my RTAS volunteer speaker training course. My family, our friends and community have suffered so much, and I want to share my experience to help raise awareness about road trauma and the irreversible effect it can have on people's lives.

My son is gone. I cannot change that, but I can do something to honour his memory. If sharing my family's story helps to educate others, and can change the attitude and driving behaviour of even just one person, I will feel that Jack has not died in vain.

Our family will always be thankful to everyone at Road Trauma Support Services Victoria, but particularly the counsellors for their care since our tragedy. I cannot imagine how we would have pulled through without their guidance and support. These people have understood us when others could only just imagine.

# It was the most sickening feeling I have ever experienced

## Reflection: Jan Dilworth

I was 25 before I got my driver's licence as I did not wish to face the responsibility of driving. My father was hit by a car and spent 12 months in hospital. My mother didn't drive at all, so I got my licence and drove her to the hospital almost every night to visit Dad. My youngest brother was killed in a mining incident in 1979. Then in 1981 road trauma hit again when my young nephew was killed in a car accident. I have known the grief of losing loved ones and all that it entails.

In June 2002 I was driving in Melbourne on a cold winter's night. I drove over a hill and saw a man in the middle of the road. I tried to steer away from him as far as possible. There were cars parked along the street and another car was coming the other way. I prayed the man would not move and maybe we would both miss him.

At the last second he took a step back. He hurtled towards me, his face hit the windscreen and it shattered. Then he hit the roof of the car, it caved in over my head, and he fell behind the car on to the road. I could not see out of the windscreen except through the hole that his head had made. In a state of shocked disbelief I managed to stop the car a bit further along and get out to see him lying on the road. It was the most sickening feeling I have ever experienced. He died in hospital a few days later. In an instant my life and that of his family were changed forever.

Although the police who attended the accident assured me that I would not be charged, I was unsure of that until after the Coroner's verdict in October of that year. It was a hard and lonely time. Apart from two friends, most people I knew avoided me and I experienced the judgemental attitudes held against drivers although 99 per cent do not intend to kill or injure anyone. Luckily, I was given a leaflet for the Road Trauma Support Team and I joined a drivers' support group that was running at the time. This group, along with the help of the counsellors, got me through.

When I retired in 2009 I decided to become a volunteer at what was by then



JAN DILWORTH WORKING ON 'THE FOREVER TREE'

Road Trauma Support Services Victoria, and I have been helping out in the office at Blackburn since then.

More recently I have been a member of the organisation's Art Therapy Group, which works towards making something for the Time for Remembering ceremony each year. It has been a very special time for me. It is good to be with others who understand if you shed a few tears while you are working and who will just pass the

tissues. In 2013 we made the beautiful Forever Tree together, gently guided by Barbara Joyce as she introduced us the world of felting.

# A special feeling of blossoming friendships and stories shared

Counsellors first explored the concept of using art in a healing way in 2012. The Art Therapy Group started with the activity of creating small painted rocks to be given out at the Time for Remembering ceremony in November of that year. Members appreciated the opportunity to come together to make these gifts.

After securing a grant from the Ian Potter Foundation, RTSSV appointed me to guide an art therapy project the following year. More clients of the organisation's counselling service were encouraged to join the group, held at the Surrey Hills Community Centre on the first Thursday of each month. Participants soon discovered the peaceful feeling of coming together in a safe place and the stimulation of learning a new creative means for self-expression.

The focus for the project in 2013 was the creation of a felted wall hanging representing a Tree of Life. Participants explored dry felting techniques in the making of leaves and the ancient technique of wet felting for the tree itself.

This project helped to bring people together and form a sense of belonging. Friendships were formed and empathy and mutual support developed as characteristics of the group. Emotional release came as the felt-makers' feelings of grief, loss and recovery became entwined in the tree. Some members became so inspired as to embark on new life directions and creative felting projects of their own, thus experiencing post-traumatic growth in the midst of grief.

Through financial donations, the Art Therapy Group has been able to continue meeting on a monthly basis. A felted mandala wall hanging was undertaken in 2014, and this year participants have embarked on a series of mosaic projects including planter boxes and trinket boxes, wall tiles and mosaic rocks to be placed in memorial and healing gardens at home.

Each year members of the Art Therapy Group find a connection with the piece they are working on. In the case of this year's mosaic works, there has been a symbolic journey of breaking apart and reassembling something that is then dedicated to a loving memory of someone.



The process of coming together forms a special energy and through conversations and shared stories new friendships continue to emerge. The group offers acceptance, compassion and empathy for all. Through their artworks, participants have a creative focus and yet have companionship and supportive conversation readily available.

The value of group art therapy is that it contributes to the recovery of people by:

- Allowing individuals to acquire and build skills to allow for safe expression of thoughts and feelings related to grief and loss
- Providing art materials and instructions that allow for the expression of an individual's grief process
- Contributing to the development of a more integrated sense of self with increased self-awareness and acceptance.

Barbara Joyce, art therapist





“The physicality of that connection with others who also know the suffering of trauma helped, temporarily, to ease the isolation that goes with deep grief. Thank you to all the women – clients and counsellors working as one.”



# Get involved and Shine a Light on Road Safety

Shine a Light on Road Safety is a community led campaign to raise awareness of the importance of road safety and the part we can all play in making our roads safer.

The idea originally started with the TAC in 2009. To mark 20 years since the first TAC advertisement went to air, Premier John Brumby called on Victorians to show their commitment to road safety by turning on their headlights as a simple, free and highly visible gesture, to remember those who have died on our roads. It was also to show a commitment to reducing road trauma.

Mr Brumby said every Victorian should take their responsibility on the roads seriously: "Drivers, passengers, cyclists and pedestrians can all play a part in being responsible when on the roads," Mr Brumby said.

After 2009 the TAC generously passed the idea on to RTSSV to use.

The team at RTSSV thought Shine a Light on Road Trauma was a great opportunity to give voice to Victorians impacted by road trauma and to allow the community to come together to support safer roads for all. Raising public awareness about how road trauma affects people's lives is one of the cornerstones of our work.

With virtually no budget but a lot of passion RTSSV re-launched the campaign in May 2014 as Shine a Light on Road Safety. We purposefully made our focus safety rather than trauma and worked to the goals to raise awareness, to stop deaths and injuries on our roads and to raise funds to support those impacted by road trauma.

Initially the campaign comprised three key elements:

- **Headlights on:** On Friday 16 May 2014, with the support of VicRoads and EastLink, Victorian motorists were asked turn on their headlight to demonstrate their commitment to safe driving.
- **Community walk:** On Sunday 18 May 2014 more than 200 people joined in a day of glorious sunshine, at Jells Park in Melbourne. Acting Assistant Commissioner Neville Taylor spoke and everyone walked together for road safety.



- **Your voice:** It was envisaged that a voice be given to those impacted by road trauma. Participants at the walk wrote down their road safety wishes so these could be shared with RTSSV's major stakeholders and political leaders.

The campaign was very much due to the outstanding support we received from our partners. The campaign was made possible thanks to Victoria Police, VicRoads and our founding sponsor EastLink. Most importantly we were heartened by the participation of the community. People consistently say: "I don't know what to do" and "no family should have to go through what I went through" and it was good to be able to provide a small opportunity for people to "do something" to show their support for family and friends and for road safety.

Fundraising has always been a key goal of the campaign. The TAC covers less than half RTSSV's operating costs and finding new ways to increase our revenue has been an ongoing challenge.

The second campaign ran from 1 May to Sunday 3 May 2015 to align with the United Nations Decade of Action for Road Safety. In 2015 working with the SARAH group (Safer Australian Roads and Highway) we introduced a fourth arm to the campaign to include Illumination of key landmarks in yellow.



These illuminations would not have been possible without the support of the Government of Victoria (illuminating and launching the campaign at Parliament House), AAMI, the Arts Centre spire and Transurban for lighting up the Bolte Bridge.

In 2015 work also started towards realising the long held vision of a national alliance of road trauma support agencies. New partnerships were developed with Enough is Enough New South Wales, Northern Territory Government Department of Road Safety and Education, and Road Trauma Support Teams in Tasmania, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia. Our Interstate partners were given free access to the campaign resources as a unified voice is a louder voice. Robert Hill, Assistant Commissioner from Victoria Police was the 2015 Ambassador.

The 2015 campaign reached more than 35,000 people in Victoria thanks to the



support we received from the Recording Artists Against Drink Driving (RADD), the TAC, Victoria Police, VicRoads, V8 Supercars, CFA, MFB, SES and many other community based organisations.

We'd like all Victorians to know about our services and we hope that the Shine a Light on Road Safety campaign continues to grow.

*"That everyone takes responsibility for staying safe. Zero deaths and injuries"*

*"Driving is not a race. Take your time and live"*

*"Give probability a chance. Plan ahead. Pay attention"*



*"Imagine driving like the person you love most is in each vehicle around you!"*

*"Amazing to see so many people connecting through road safety"*

*"Coming together as a family and celebrating the life of our son"*

*"Although the reason we were part of the Shine a Light on Road Safety walk is a horrific one, I am grateful that this event exists, not only because it was healing for us, but also so that we can help prevent others losing loved ones on the roads"*



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