

## Two Way Street program at Bello Youth Hub



Janene Carey

Ella and Tony with the blue automatic Toyota Corolla

Two years ago, Ella Hollinsworth had held a learner's licence for nine months but hadn't managed to accrue many hours of driving practice.

Both her parents worked and the family lived two minutes walk from town.

"I hadn't become comfortable or capable with driving at all," Ella said. "There was very little opportunity for me to actually get in a vehicle and drive."

Then her mum suggested the Two Way Street program running from the Bello Youth Hub, which pairs learner drivers with volunteer supervisors to help clock up the necessary 120 hours.

"We had a very bumpy first lesson in Mylestom," Ella said, smiling at Tony Dudgeon, the grandfatherly figure with the deep, calm voice who helped her get her licence.

"You were frightened," Tony said. "A young man from No 5 had been killed on the road to Thora just before you started with me. And that worried you."

"But then I got very comfortable very quickly," Ella said. "Tony was awesome. And I think the best thing about Two Way Street for me was the flexibility with location. We went up to places like Megan and Dorrigo and on back roads that as a country kid I knew I would be driving on."

Ella noted that the program was "super-duper affordable, being free".

Two Way Street, which began in 2014, runs on the smell of an oily rag courtesy of donations and volunteers.

The program has a pair of Toyota Corollas, a white manual and a blue automatic, and there's also a driving simulator that obviously isn't used much these days, as it failed to boot when Youth Hub coordinator Dean Besley tried to demonstrate it.

Costs such as registration, insurance, fuel and maintenance on the two cars are covered via fundraising, and currently the coffers are a little low so any support would be appreciated.

But at the heart of this Bellingen community initiative are the volunteers; in particular, Tony Dudgeon, who has been running it for the last three years and taking care of the majority of the students.

Instead of the hour a week that volunteers usually commit to after their induction training, he's been doing up to 10 hours each week.

"We're having to tell some kids, look, we haven't got enough supervisors at the moment, we'll give you a buzz when one becomes available," Dean said.

"They usually don't have to wait very long," Tony said. "I feel for them, so I take them on anyway."

Dean doesn't think this is sustainable, even though Tony relishes the interaction with local youth and loves helping them become skilful, safe, defensive drivers.

"The risk is Tony starts doing too much, gets burnt out, and then we lose him," Dean said.

New volunteers receive a full induction from Tony, and they also get access to the youth workers at the Hub.

A trusting relationship quickly develops in the confines of the car, and sometimes the discussion takes a turn that the volunteer supervisor isn't sure how to handle.

"On a number of occasions we've had a supervisor debrief with a youth worker," Dean said. "There's been situations when young people come to start driving and we found out we needed to support them in more important ways. And that's been as a result of these conversations that come out of the car."

Watching Tony and Ella interact, it's obvious that they've forged a lasting relationship from their year of driving around together.

She's blossomed into a confident young driver, and having finished school in December, she'll be travelling around Europe in a green Renault van for nine months from April.

"I'm going with my partner but I'll be driving as well," she said. "We're going to share the load."

For more information on the Two Way Street program, call 6655 0381 or email [info@belloyouthhub.net](mailto:info@belloyouthhub.net)