

Tragic loss of life leads to school road safety program

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A BEAUTIFUL SOUL LOST: All Saints College student James Riggien reflects on the death of his big sister Shannen, who died in a road tragedy earlier this year.

Maitland lost a beautiful soul, one that had only begun to find its song, when a poor choice took Shannen Riggien from her family.

The year 12 student at Maitland All Saints College, St Mary's Campus, was out with friends at East Maitland in January when she fell from the roof of a car. "If I could use this event to stop this happening to someone else that's good," her brother James said. "It could possibly save someone else's life."

The school will soon embark on a road safety campaign with the help of Rutherford Telarah Rotary that will bring back painful memories for James, who is in year 11 at St Mary's.

His fondest memory of his sister – a tomboy who preferred basketball to netball – involves music. "Whatever her goal was she gave 100 per cent," he said. "All the time at home you could hear her play a new church song over and over [on guitar] until she got it right. "Secret to me she loved to sing – not even mum knew." Together they performed on stage at Generate Church, Singleton, where James would sing front and centre. Shannen would drive him. "Often it was just us in the car and it was a bonding experience listening to the radio loud, singing," he said. "Over time I started to hear her singing over me [and] it was a beautiful experience." James said his big sister was always generous with her time, particularly when it came to driving her friends around. "I would often say to her 'you're driving your friends around too much', he said. "It was a lesson to me to be more engaging in life and to just go for it."

Maitland All Saints College and Rutherford Telarah Rotary will jointly convene a parent-student road safety talk on July 28. The session is open to all Maitland school students. The Rotary Young Driver Awareness program strives to inform young drivers about road safety and promote wise decisions.

Shannen travelled only 50 metres down Victoria Street on the back of a car, after a movie night with friends. She fell when the driver did a U-turn. Shannen struck her head and was knocked unconscious. She never regained consciousness. "I don't blame the driver, I don't put it on him, I don't blame any particular person," James said. "It was her choice to get on top of the car. "It's down to choices. Sure it might be fun, but is it really necessary? In the end, worse-case scenarios do happen."

Appropriate time for new program

A road safety information session will prompt some frank but constructive discussion between parents and children next month. The St Mary's campus of Maitland All Saints will lead the campaign with Rutherford Telarah Rotary but it's open to all schools across Maitland. "Everyone would agree that it's a difficult task teaching someone to drive," St Mary's student coordinator and PDHPE teacher Peter Vanderpoel said. "Hopefully it will give parents skills in this area."

The parent-student night is part of a two pronged approach to help St Mary's students become safe drivers. The Rotary club has organised road safety education speakers for the discussion which starts 7pm at East Maitland Bowling Club on July 28. Three days later year 11 students have the option to take part in the Rotary Young Driver Awareness program at Tocal. There, students will participate in six sessions that dissect good decisions and includes a braking distance demonstration. "We feel now is an appropriate time to implement a much needed road safety program," Mr Vanderpoel said. "One of the strategies of the program is it gives students some awareness of what they might encounter on the road once they're not in the car with their parents."

To register your interest head to the events page at www.facebook.com/RutherfordTelarrahRotary.