

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Remembering Genevieve – an experience for life

A split second decision behind the wheel took the life of 18 year old Genevieve Matarazzo and a close friend, causing a lifetime of grief for those left behind. The tragic loss of these two young lives is told in the “Remembering Genevieve” video shown to students attending the RYDA road safety education program and provides a powerful lesson to help students make smart decisions on how to stay safe as a novice driver or passenger.

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Genevieve Matarazzo was a beautiful, smart, friendly and responsible young woman who loved to have fun and had her whole life ahead of her. An up-and-coming Australian Army cadet, she was well liked by her peers and loved to spend time with her family and two best friends, Shannon and Kate.

It was 4.10pm when Gen was driving with Shannon along a familiar stretch of highway in country Victoria on their way to meet Kate. Described by her parents as a very good and careful driver who always listened and tried to do the right thing, they didn't think they had reason to worry. **“The radio was on and there was a traffic report saying there'd been an accident but we didn't think anything of it...you don't think.... oh accident, that'll be my child. I just thought, I wonder if she's been caught up in it,”** said Joanne Matarazzo.

Not far from their destination, Gen decided to overtake the car in front of her – a quick decision we so often make but a complicated manoeuvre for a young, inexperienced P-plate driver. After overtaking, she over-corrected her steering, lost control of the vehicle and spun into the path of an oncoming 4WD. Both girls died instantly.

Police concluded that inexperience was the cause of the crash, and sadly, their death. It's a story all too common to many of us and the loss of such a young life is devastating. The ripple effect of such loss or serious injury is huge and is felt across the whole community, with the impact bearing on family, friends, school communities and workplaces long after the headlines fade. As Gen's friend, Kate Webber, said, **“you pick up the phone to call them about something...or to text them, and then realise you can't because they're not around anymore”**.

Genevieve will be forever remembered as a daughter, a sister, a friend, a work colleague and now a teacher as her story is shared with over 50,000 new young drivers and their passengers every year through the award-winning RYDA Program.

Road Safety Education (RSE) Limited's, RYDA Program, was developed in response to the tragic loss of young lives - like Genevieve's - on our roads. The program is targeted at senior high school students and aims to change the way young people think and act on the road - not only as drivers but also passengers.

Evidence suggests that young people are most at risk of being involved in a serious crash in the first six months after transitioning from being a supervised learner to an independent provisional driver.

Greg Rappo, National Program Director at RSE, said **“we need to ensure young drivers are better prepared at the start of their driving lives. Young people are often encouraged to take risks in their life as part of their personal development. Generally, risk taking is a good thing but not on the road where the outcome can be devastating to themselves and other road users”**.

Genevieve's Story features in one of six interactive sessions over the course of a RYDA program day. Students look closely at factors involved in the crash and devise strategies to stay safe - making

Genevieve's inexperience become part of their experience. Focusing on planning, the session aims to reduce the need for those split-second decisions by thinking through different scenarios and planning, ahead of time, possible responses to dangerous road situations.

One student said **“it provided a realistic perspective on how a simple bad decision can be fatal. Genevieve was relatable as a young, happy, successful schoolgirl and made us realise how important it is to be safe on the roads.”** While another added, **"it had a significant and positive impact on my attitude towards driving"**.

After reading feedback from students, Genevieve's Mum, Joanne said **"it's nice to know it is making them think about their driving, which is what we hoped to achieve by telling her story, and the effect it has had on all of us"**.

The one day RYDA program is being run for all local schools in the Illawarra at the Croome Road Sporting Complex, Albion Park, from 13 October to 5 November 2015.

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For more information, please contact Greg Rappo, Program Director RSE, on (02) 9886 9409 or at greg.rappo@rse.org.au

[Web: rse.org.au / Facebook: facebook.com/roadchoices / Instagram: [ryda_program](https://instagram.com/ryda_program) / Photos: rse.org.au/ryda-photos/]

About RSE and RYDA:

ROAD Safety Education Limited (RSE) – the leading road safety educator in Australia and NZ – has seen over 400,000 students attend its flagship program, RYDA, since it began in 2001, with 50,000 students now attending it annually across 90 venues. RYDA is a community-based initiative coordinated through local Rotary clubs and high schools and facilitated by local police and driving instructors. A non-profit organisation, RSE relies heavily on voluntary support and donations from local sponsors and the community.

