

New young driver programme back after four year absence

Hundreds of students in West Lothian have been given a shocking insight into the dangers of drink driving through a virtual-reality 'beer goggles'

The attempt to highlight the risks came as part of a revitalised scheme across West Lothian high schools which aims to promote safety on the roads among younger drivers.

More than 800 sixth year students from across the county took part in the the WestDrive scheme. The three-day event was delivered by local police with help from the police traffic department and Scottish Fire and Rescue Service.

It was the first in five years after a previous long running scheme collapsed because of funding problems. The Covid pandemic also stalled its reintroduction.

Chief Inspector Elaine McArthur-Kerr told a recent meeting of the Community Safety Board that 66% of the county's sixth year students had taken part. While disappointed that the number was not higher the hope is to increase numbers next year and plans to find funding and other support are already under way.

West Drive first started in 2007 and was held at the start of the new school year in local high schools offering road safety lessons and driving safety to those who had just started driving or were about to take lessons.

The event included input from road traffic officers and SFRS showing road accident videos and displaying crash damaged vehicles and rescue techniques. Virtual reality technology – known as beer goggles- also gave senior students an idea of what it was like to drive drunk and the effects of delayed reaction times.

Advice was also delivered by drug and alcohol workers.

CI McArthur-Kerr said: “Starting last year the deputy area commander was keen to resurrect WestDrive because of the positive effect on driver and passenger behaviour. Police Scotland is the lead agency in delivering WestDrive and road safety is part of the Lothian and Scottish Borders Police local police plan.”

Local officer Ross Walker delivered the WestDrive programme at Armadale Academy, the James Young High School and Inveralmond Community High schools in Livingston in late September. The council funded bus transport to the schools for sixth years from across the county. Only Sinclair Academy and Winchburgh Academy, which have no sixth years as yet, did not take part.

Out of 1,267 who were eligible, the safety presentation was delivered to 842. Feedback from the events was overwhelmingly positive, with students saying they thought the course would make them safer drivers and passengers.

A further presentation took place at Oatridge College.

CI McArthur-Kerr said she hoped that WestDrive could be developed in the future to include other aspects of personal safety for those about to go on into adult life, whether it was in further education or work.

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter