

Shepparton drivers selected for trial aiming to reduce road trauma



By **Anna McGuinness**
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Keys to safer driving: Virgil Biggs and Chrystal Chapman are taking part in a trial aiming to improve access to safe vehicles and improve driving habits. Photo: Rechelle Zammit. Photo by Rechelle Zammit

Two young Shepparton drivers are hitting the road in safe cars as part of a new trial to address the rising number of young people dying on Victoria's roads.

About two thirds of car and passenger deaths during the past five years have been in cars built more than a decade ago.

The pilot program led by Empowr Mobility is supported by \$50,000 from the Transport Accident Commission and is providing four young drivers — in Shepparton and Geelong — access to a safe and fit-for-purpose car.

The ex-fleet vehicles were provided by Insurance Australia Group and are fitted with telematics to collect driving data linked to Empowr's CAR[A] app; providing feedback to the drivers after each drive.



In the driver's seat: Chrystal Chapman in her car for the next three months, which has been fitted out with telematics to provide feedback on her driving behaviour. Photo: Rechelle Zammit. Photo by Rechelle Zammit

"It's giving these cars a second lease on life as well as providing aspiring young people with a safe car," Empowr co-founder Jerome Carslake said.

"They might be the safest driver but in a crappy car they are eight times more likely to be in a crash."

In Shepparton, Empowr has linked with Ganbina, a school-to-work transition program for First Nations young people, and participants Chrystal Chapman and Virgil Biggs were selected to take part in the three-month trial.

For Mr Biggs the next three months will be quite the upgrade from his 2005 model car, which recently broke down on a trip back from Melbourne.

He said it would be nice to have a reliable car for the hour-long drive to work each day in Puckapunyal, as well as getting some feedback on his driving.



Ready to roll: Virgil Biggs is looking forward to having a reliable car to get to and from work in Puckapunyal each day. Photo: Rechelle Zammit. Photo by Rechelle Zammit

During the trial Empowr will set goals for the drivers, with incentives such as fuel vouchers to keep them on track and focusing on improving certain areas of their driving.

"Young people under 25 years of age are highly represented in road accidents and road trauma, so we want to help as many young Aboriginal people to establish safe driving habits as we can," Ganbina chief executive Anthony Cavanagh said.