Child Safety in Cars - Traveling Information Center
Portugal

**Background**

The main idea of this community-based educational campaign addressing the use and misuse of child restraint systems (CRS) for transporting children in cars was the creation of an “traveling information centre” or road show running in all districts of Continental Portugal to support existing legislation. The road show was supported by a strong media campaign (TV spot and programmes, radio spot and programmes, press advertisements), which slogan was “Don’t let this be the last goodbye”.

The educational campaign led by APSI, the Portuguese Association for Child Safety Promotion, was developed at a national level and included community-based actions in the 18 districts of Continental Portugal. In each district, a main city was selected and the “traveling information centre” was installed and run over a two-day period. This included:

- **Educational sessions for children ages 8-9 years**, developed in local schools and leisure centres and facilitated by APSI staff.

- The sessions started with a film of an automobile crash followed by a discussion where booster seats, booster cushions and reflective vests were available for demonstration and experimentation. At the end of the session, all children were weighed and measured and a prescription with the recommended CRS for their age and size was provided.

- **Seminars for families and professionals**
  These were held in the evenings and involved a standard PowerPoint presentation about road accidents and the importance of a correct choice and use of CRS. The local police, emergency and hospital services were invited to participate as speakers and share local reality and concerns related with protection of children in cars.

- **Child Restraint Systems (CRS) Check Points**
  Checkpoints were held at strategic locations using trained inspectors who checked appropriateness of CRS including misuse and provided direct feedback to families including teaching them how to correctly install CRS in their cars and whenever necessary give advice on criteria to choose a new CRS. Before leaving the checkpoint an informative leaflet with recommendations for the choice of CRS for different ages was given to all families.

**Policy Background/Driving Force**

In Portugal, despite the reductions in road related deaths from 75/1,000,000 children to 18/1,000,000 children in in the last 10 years, road accidents are the main cause of death or permanent disability in children and adolescents. Up to the age of 14 years, almost half (46%) of these traffic deaths affect child passengers.

The number of deaths with child passengers has decreased in all age groups (0-5, 6-9, 10-14) between 1998 and 2006 with a parallel increase in the rate of CRS use by families. Studies carried out by APSI between 1996 and 2007 show increasing CRS usage rates for children under 3 years of age. However, misuse rates have not changed, with misuse ‘severely
enough to reduce significantly the level of protection’ still observed in 50% of all cases examined.

Over the years, APSI has developed several campaigns to promote CRS use and reduce misuse. Considering this experience, a model community-based educational campaign was undertaken during 2007 in support of the current legislation. The campaign was also the basis for a study on CRS use and misuse patterns in urban settings, as the only existing systematic studies in Portugal were the annual APSI surveys on CRS use conducted in the highway setting.

Partners
- National Ministry with the Responsibility for Road Safety
- Brandia Central (a Portuguese Communication Agency)
- National media
- Local media
- Local authorities (Municipalities, Police, Emergency Services, Hospitals), universities and non-governmental organisations (Fire prevention NGOs)
- Local schools and leisure centres

Aims & Objectives
- To increase the rate of use of CRS
- To reduce misuse of CRS
- To raise awareness of the importance of correct choice and use of CRS amongst families, professionals and institutions
- To characterise the rate of CRS use and misuse in urban settings and compare and monitor CRS use and misuse patterns in Portugal

Evaluation
A survey of CRS use and misuse rates was conducted before and after each site intervention to evaluate the impact of the campaign on behaviour change regarding protection of children in cars. This survey also allowed the characterisation of the use and misuse of CRS in urban settings. The ‘before’ survey was conducted on the morning of the first day at each site with the ‘after’ survey conducted 3 or 4 weeks after the intervention. The surveys were carried out by staff and volunteers specifically trained for the purpose and took place near schools when families were leaving children for the day.

The before and after surveys were compared with each other and with results of previous studies. While use rate did not significantly change, CRS misuse was found to significantly decrease from 40% to 30%. In addition several specific misuse patterns were observed to decrease, including the prevalence of ‘very serious misuse’ of the CRS harness. Finally the number of children travelling rearward facing increased for both children aged 9-12 months (from 30% to 53%) and those aged 13-18 months (from less than 8% to 21%).

Key Steps
- Obtain official support from the Government, not only financial, but also institutional
- Obtain involvement of local community stakeholders in the evaluation studies (police, health professionals, university students, municipal technicians and NGOs)
- Develop programme materials
- Engage participation of the local authorities (municipalities, police authorities, local government, local health services, schools) in the promotion of the initiative and in the seminar with the presentation of local needs and reality
- Explore possibilities to work directly with families in each community
- Encourage active involvement of national and local media in advertising and reporting on the events
- Implement programme and monitor impact

Lessons Learned
- The involvement and the participation of local authorities and organisations in the different actions from the beginning of the initiative promoted greater acceptance of the “traveling information centre” coming to a community and increased involvement in organising and promoting the event. Inviting these organisations to participate actively in planning and implementing the actions fostered a sense of ownership and ensured that their work, needs and concerns were valued and taken into account.
- The training of local community stakeholders already working with families and community organisations as observers for the CRS surveys builds capacity and specific knowledge about the transport of children in cars that can then be applied
in their daily activities fostering greater spread of information to families in the future.

- Direct interaction with families, and in particular hands on education as part of CRS checkpoints, is more likely to create a climate of trust that fosters acceptance of counselling, uptake of new knowledge and resulting behavioural change.

- The information given to families represents the best evidence for providing the highest levels of protection for children in cars; however currently the CRS market in Portugal has few models to offer that provide the safest solutions for children from 1 to 4 years old, such as a CRS that would allow rearward facing to 3 or 4 years of age.

Advice to Countries/Transferability

- Consider allocating regular financial resources to the development of this type of campaign to guarantee a systematic, coordinated and harmonised work with populations and free permanent CRS checkpoints all over the country.

- Consider including in the community activities training sessions for local professionals that have a role in counselling to families (health professionals, CRS sellers).

- Consider holding seminars in the evening and free CRS checkpoints during weekends when parents are not working.

- Before starting the campaign, try to encourage suppliers to expand CRS models that allow children to remain rearward facing up to 3 or 4 years of age.

- Implement systematic monitoring of CRS use and misuse in different traffic settings and as possible consider having fixed teams of observers so that observations will be more homogeneous over time.

- Consider starting with a smaller pilot and if successful extending to other parts of the country.

References, Additional Information

1. ETCS, European Transport Safety Council (2009), Pin Flash 12 “Reducing Child Deaths on European Roads”. February: Brussels

2. APSI, Portuguese Association for Child safety Promotion (2007). Analysis of the number of road traffic deaths up to 14 years, during 1998-2006. Lisbon


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