

"HINDSIGHT"

60 Minutes item on child injury and death due to driveway 'accidents'
TV3 60 Minutes 7.30pm – 19 June 2006

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To: Producer
60 Minutes
TV3

cc: Staff and Trustees NZCSF
Trustees, EMFANZ
Gael Brooks
Media

**RE: "HINDSIGHT" TV3 60Minutes 7.30pm – 19 June 2006
60Minutes item on child injury and death due to driveway 'accidents'**

Your reporter and your subject, Dr Phil Morreau from the Auckland Starship children's hospital, appear unaware of the full story behind child / driveway injuries and deaths in New Zealand; this would appear to be an important part of the problem that has involved nearly 100 children in reported driveway accidents during the past five years alone.

I applaud Dr Morreau who wants to 'light the flame' of awareness of child driveway accidents *'in the hope that someone will pick up the torch and run with it'*. Sadly, and contrary to the impression given by your article, Dr Morreau is not the first to light such a torch and, as long as we retain our inadequate and fragmented response to this ongoing tragedy, he will not be the last. The 'flame' was actually ignited 22 years ago by the "Safe Playing Programme", a Ministry of Transport funded child road and vehicle safety research project based at the University of Waikato. I was the Research and Development officer for that project.

Dr Morreaux reported 93 child / driveway accidents since 2001; this in spite of the fact that, contrary to the impression given by your article, New Zealand has been "officially aware" of its appalling record throughout this period. What was done by the Government to effectively address this ongoing tragedy? Nothing. In actual fact New Zealand has been 'officially aware' of its shameful record with child / driveway injuries and deaths at the very least as far back as the early 1980s when university based research had already thrown it into graphic relief. Not only did our country have the worst record in the OECD, it didn't even shape up well against some of the so called 'third world' countries; and this was 24 years ago! What has happened in the meantime? Children have continued to die in driveway accidents.

When the Government switched off the respirator on the research funding in 1985, two things happened. The first was that we made the "Safe Playing" research project into a charitable trust so that at least part of the work – the child safety programmes – would be continued. The second thing that happened was that the Project office was shut down; all of the research, records, videos, photographs, files and papers detailing the appalling child driveway and roadway death statistics, and the research into how this wholesale massacre of our children may be averted, were boxed up and sent to the Ministry of Transport HQ in Wellington.

More important things were afoot in Wellington – The Ministry of Transport was being devolved into the Police and the LTSA. The Project material went down into the basement of Pearce House in Willis street Wellington where it immediately slipped from the consciousness of the floors of bureaucrats above - until the day came when the Ministry of Transport was no more. In the early 1990s a new broom swept clean; the Project materials and the invaluable resource they contained were removed from the basement of Pearce House, taken to a dump in the Hutt valley where they were buried under a landfill. And all the while our children continued to be injured and die in driveways.

The charitable trust that arose from the ashes of this research project was the New Zealand Safe Playing Trust. Without the support of the Government, the Trust continued to promote the child safety programmes developed out of the research conducted at the University of Waikato - itself based on earlier research out of the USA. By the late 1990s the N.Z. Safe Playing Trust had developed further child safety projects and would go on to deploy safety programmes for the A.C.C. (see www.chilfsafety.co.nz/safe2go-media.htm). The Trust changed its name to The New Zealand Child Safety Foundation (see www.chilfsafety.co.nz) and after 15 years in offices in central Auckland is now based in new offices in New Lynn. This year, after 18 years of service, Gael Brooks, the Foundation's recently retired Executive Officer, was made a Member of the New Zealand Order of Merit for services to Child Safety. Since the late 1980s the Foundation has been very successful in the promotion of child safety and the deployment of safety programmes and training – and yet our children continue to be injured and die in driveways. How can this be?

Let me pose some other questions. Given that the Child Safety Foundation has been in the business of child accident prevention, including Child / Driveway deaths and injuries for the past two decades, most of that time based in central Auckland, how can Dr Morreau at Auckland's Starship hospital, with his interest in Child / Driveway deaths and injuries, have not been aware of the Foundation and its work? How could the Foundation have not been aware of Dr Morreau and his work until a Foundation Trustee saw him appearing on 60 Minutes? How could 60 Minutes have researched an article on Child / Driveway deaths and injuries without coming across the work of the Child Safety Foundation – given that due to the work of Gael Brooks the Foundation has the largest and most comprehensive resource library in New Zealand on the subject of child safety and child accident prevention? How could that be?

During the 1990s there were at least three other research projects specifically on Child / Driveway deaths and injuries or child traffic accidents on quiet suburban streets (another area where New Zealand leads the world in appalling statistics). I am aware of these projects only by chance and catching odd items in the media. None of these research projects seemed to be aware of any previous research on the same subject. None of the researchers seemed to notice the existence of the Child Safety Foundation and its work dating back to 1984. Prior to Dr Morreau's efforts, the most recent research (that I am aware of) was conducted under the supervision of Dr. Maxine Campbell at the University of Waikato. Dr Campbell was unaware of the Child Safety Foundation; the Foundation had never heard of Dr Campbell's work. Neither, apparently had Dr Morreau or 60 Minutes. Do you see where I am going with this?

For all I know there may be many more people all working in isolation, all lighting torches, sending up flares – none of whom have heard of any of the others or of Dr Morreau's work, or the 60 Minutes article or the work of the Child Safety Foundation. Since 1984, starting with the Safe Playing Trust, each one of these projects has lit a torch and waited for someone to pick up that torch and run with it - and yet our children continue to be injured and die. I am afraid, Dr Morreau, that the writing is on the wall; unless there is a paradigm shift in the shamefully fragmented way that we address the problem of child driveway safety, your torch is doomed to splutter into oblivion with all the other torches that have preceded it.

The Government had the chance to pick up the torch and run with it in 1984. Instead it stubbed out that torch. It put the opportunity in a box, stored it for 8 years and then sent it to the dump. Fortunately all was not lost because that particular torch was reignited and has been carried for the past 22 years by the New Zealand Child Safety Foundation. New Zealand has had at least 22 years to sort this problem and come up with some effective solutions. 22 years ago we had the research to base an effective national programme on – as a nation we failed unconscionably to rise to this challenge. Since that time there have been other research projects – and as a nation we failed miserably there too; each one of these projects was left in isolation and to slip into obscurity. AND our children continued to be injured and die in driveways!

It was the job of our nation's leaders to pick up the torch and run with it but the best they could do was stand by while their bureaucrats buried it under a landfill. Our leaders seem able to foment more passion about microchipping dogs than about our children being needlessly injured and killed in driveways. Oh – the odd committee has been formed over the years, and there has been plenty of hand wringing. But hand wringing has never saved the lives of children and, to paraphrase Dr Lawrence Peter, *'committees are cul de sacs down which good ideas are lured and quietly strangled.'* Committees merely let the people with the responsibility of picking up Dr Morreau's torch off the hook.

I realize that *hindsight* is a fine thing, but perhaps it would have been more productive if, instead of joining the hand wringers, 60 Minutes had confronted some of our nation's leaders and asked them why it is that Dr Phil Morreau found that there had been 93 driveway accidents in the past 5 years and why nothing had been done in response to this. With a little more research 60 Minutes could have extrapolated the statistics back to 1984 and produced the really big numbers – then asked why, in all of that time, the government has done absolutely nothing to coordinate all of the disparate research and hand wringing into a focused response to a problem that was killing our kids 22 years ago and is still killing our kids today. Perhaps you could have asked our leaders: is this how we, as a nation, value our children?

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20 June 2006

PS:

It may be said that this is revisiting the past and that its time to move on. However for at least 20 years our idea of 'moving on' has been to continually revisit the past. Its time to break that cycle. What am I doing? Apart from writing this response to your TV magazine article, this is what I am doing: **The Electronic Media Foundation (see www.emfanz.org) is underwriting production of a series of Child Safety video/multi-media information / education programmes being designed by Gael Brooks MNZM.** The first two that we will be producing, '**Safety in the Home**' and '**Safety in the Neighbourhood**', (working titles) will cover child / driveway safety. But even these resources will be window dressing and virtually useless without a coordinated response. Hence EMFANZ will also be publicizing these resources and taking the problems defined therein to the Government to promote an end to the haphazard, fragmented, sometimes parochial and even sectarian way we have been confronting the problem of child / driveway deaths and injuries. It has been an expensive, indefensible indulgence that must stop.

Anyone with research information on Child / Driveway deaths – if they are serious in addressing this problem – I urge them to immediately forward full details of that research and any associated information to the New Zealand Child Safety Foundation (see www.childsafety.co.nz) so that it may be added to the CSF library and provide a central resource /clearing house for such information. Then it may be accessed by everyone working on this problem. To paraphrase another quote: ***What good is research if it is little more than the transference of bones from one graveyard to another...?***