

'Stay alive on 5' campaign sees unprecedented success

Jordan Smith

Motivation to create change comes in many forms, but for Seargent Steven Knox, it came with a tragic undertone.

When he was just a teenager, Knox's good friend was killed by a drunk driver. From then, he vowed he would spark the change.

"I made a graveside promise that I'll join the police one day and make a difference," he said.

At age 40, Knox joined the force and road police shortly after to honour that promise, with his main deployment being State Highway 5 in the North Island. He and his team had "started to notice a trend of fatalities increasing" in the late 2010's, so in 2020, he decided it was time to take action.

"Here I am thinking 'this is my opportunity to do something good for the community, but also, it lives my graveside promise I made to my friend that I'll make a difference.'"

From there, Knox got in contact with police officers, both the Taupō and Hawke's Bay Councils, Waka Kotahi and contractors, and thus, 'Stay Alive on 5' was born.

The campaign encompassed many changes, with road safety billboards and electronic signs urging motorists to slow down and alerting them to tight corners put in place.



Seargent Steven Knox, Eastern District Road Policing

Additionally, police presence increased on the road, with both marked and unmarked patrol vehicles working in tandem as well as utilising speed camera vans.

The results speak volumes to his work.

In the 20 months prior to the campaign, SH5 had seen 13 fatalities along with 183 accidents, totalling at a social cost of over \$84 million dollars.

The first 20 months of Knox's campaign? Not a single fatality.

Only 81 crashes were recorded, with two being serious, only costing \$3.5 million. Four years later (2020-2024), there were only two fatalities recorded, lower than the four year period prior to the campaign's implementation.

Even Kiwi motorsport legend and Hawkes' Bay native Greg Murphy took notice, as Knox said he called him "out of the blue".

"[He] said 'I've been seeing the good work that's been going up there that you've been driving'."

"He said that he'd like to use his media platform to promote the good work as well... on his reach he's got a few thousand I believe from my last look."

Off the back of some truly remarkable mahi, Knox was awarded with the National Award for Road Safety in 2024. The acknowledgement recognises achievements made by individuals and/or organisations that improve road safety through excellent practice, design or technical application.

"I was quite chuffed because it's a big thing. I hadn't been nominated before for any national award, so it was pretty cool," Knox said.

"We don't do the job for awards, but it was nice to get a pat on the back."

He exemplified rubbing shoulders with large organisations such as Auckland Transport left him feeling a strong sense of pride and accomplishment that he'd made that promise cast many moons ago a reality.



Sergeant Steven Knox, Eastern District Road Policing
Photograph supplied by New Zealand Police

"It was a very good event, and I felt quite humbled," he said.

"I thought in my mind 'yeah, I've done a good job. I'm happy'."

Like many of his fellow award winners, Knox whole-heartedly backed the importance of the award's existence, as he said it helps celebrate people doing "some fantastic work out there."

"To get people put forward for any recognition is huge, because not a lot of people get a pat on the back and it's very nice when you do, especially at that level."

He also praised the simplistic nature of the nomination-to-award process, highlighting how "to write what I needed to put forward for the whole process was fairly easy."

Knox strongly encouraged those out there doing it to nominate others, saying there's no feat too small.

It doesn't have to be huge things... if it's done good by the community to do with road safety and the results are showing, put through a nomination."

"Don't be afraid to give someone a pat on the back because I reckon that's a good place to be."

Looking forward, Knox hopes to implement a similar campaign on State Highway 2 due to a rise in fatalities, and possibly beyond.

"Obviously I can't brand stay alive on five down there because five doesn't rhyme with two," he said laughing.

"I'm quite keen to go to the National Road Police Headquarters in Wellington with everything on this and say 'hey, this could be a good template or resources that are going to be very helpful for other people around the country.'"