



● Mentor Pat Maher throws the car keys to Sheridan Harding, 17, during their learner driver L2P lesson yesterday. Picture: TARA ASHWORTH

Mentors driving learner program

BY VICTORIA MACDONALD

THIRTY years ago, Pat Maher's life was torn apart.

Her son David, driving with mates in his car in the early hours of the morning, smashed into a baker's van near Shepparton.

The 18-year-old was killed, leaving a wound that would never heal.

The loss has now motivated Mrs Maher to help a new generation of young drivers get experience behind the wheel.

early hours of the morning when a lot of young people have accidents.

"They're not as aware of what's going on.

"They think there's no one else on the road but them.

"It just affects everybody so much.

"You don't realise what it's like until it's happened."

Mrs Maher, who has been a licensed driver for about five decades, was quick to volunteer for the new L2P learner driver mentor program in Wodonga,

pairs learner motorists under 21 with fully licensed volunteers to help them reach the required 120 hours' supervised driving before they can sit their test.

Ten volunteers, including Mrs Maher, have been trained to help up to 20 new drivers in the city who may not otherwise have family or friends available to supervise them.

"I like working with young people and ... I'd really like to be able to teach them safe driving," she said.

Learner driver Sheridan Harding, 17, said her parents

12 months ago but had only managed to log about 14 hours' supervision before she was matched with her mentor.

"Since I've started this, I've got five hours up already in five weeks," she said.

Mrs Maher said she and Sheridan had developed a trusting relationship in their time on the road.

"I've never felt unsafe with Sheridan at all," she said.

"Without trying to take anyone's place in her life, I can just be another person in her life.

"I could be an adopted niece

The Border Mail

Positive steps to cut road toll

THE community is always searching for options to provide more training to young drivers and counter their over-representation in the annual road toll.

It is all very well to be suggesting young drivers need additional experience but unless there is someone available to deliver that training, then it won't happen.

Victoria's licensing system requires learner drivers under 21 years to log at least 120 hours of supervised driving before they can sit their test, with researching indicating there are fewer crashes among young drivers with more supervised experience.

The new learner driver mentor program launched yesterday in Wodonga will provide another option for young local drivers who may not have someone among their family or friends to act as a supervisor driver while they are logging sufficient time on the road.

The 10 mentors should be commended for helping up to 20 young drivers in the first year of the program.

Alongside the Victorian law changes that will result in the confiscation and destruction of cars driven by those convicted of hoon driving, the focus is on encouraging young people to do the right thing and stay safe on our roads.