HARD-HITTING TALKS TO SHOCK YOUNG DRIVERS

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Driving has become part of everyday life. It is vital for getting around – and teenagers can’t wait to learn.

But teenagers are both blessed and cursed with a misconception of their own invulnerability. Combined with inexperience, this can have tragic consequences.

A driving course is using graphic images and real-life experiences to shock a new generation of motorists into slowing down.

The StreetLife Young Driver Education scheme takes place at Colchester United’s Weston Homes Stadium on the first Sunday of each month.

Teenagers, from 15-years-old, can have an actual driving lesson in the safe environment of the stadium car park.

But before they are allowed behind the wheel, they are given a talk from a guest speaker warning them of the dangers of the road.

Guests have included police officers, paramedics, wheelchair-bound car crash victims and even bereaved parents who lost their children in road accidents.

StreetLife owners Karl Rushen and Gary Lipman want teenagers to see the real-life consequences of bad driving – even if those images are difficult to look at.

Mr Rushen, 33, said: “I know we won’t change the world but these kids are still in the schooling frame of mind and can take on information.

“The people who speak to them are real people. The images we show are real. We didn’t want actors and fake blood.”

“I know as well that, their parents are standing at the back thinking ‘I text while driving’ or ‘I sometimes go a bit fast’.

“They are here for the driving lessons, we know that. But they have to take in this information first.”

Mr Rushen, of Tollesbury, has been a driving instructor for 13 years and owner of StreetLife for eight years.

He is also a retained fireman in his home town and was inspired to run the classes after attending two fatal road crashes within a fortnight.

The Weston Homes Community Stadium offers an impressive venue, with its spacious conference room and giant TV facility.

A total of 85 youngsters turned up for the latest hour-long session and heard a talk from Essex Air Ambulance volunteers.

Volunteer Peter Hennessey gave them, and their parents, a history of road accidents.

He showed shocking images of road crash victims, some alive and some not so lucky.

There were audible gasps during shocking video footage of a high-speed crash on an American highway.

In one particularly candid film, two reckless young drivers had mounted a camera inside a makeshift rally car which they took for a spin on some country roads.

The audience drove with them as they careered into a lorry, their heads colliding during the devastating impact.

Mr Hennessey said: “Young drivers are unlikely to be driving a modern car with all the safety features. They need to see these images.”

The sessions, in association with Colchester United Football Club and supported by the Gazette, are a hit with the young attendees.

Abi Gosling, 16, from Tiptree, said: “You learn how to drive safely and the dangers of the road.

“We have had talks and seen videos of crashes and I think it will stop people driving too fast. I am enjoying it as well as learning.”

The next session takes place on December 2 costing £25, and can be booked online at www.streetlifedriving.com