



# SOLOMON ISLANDS PROFESSIONAL DRIVER TRAINING SERVICES



## Solomon Islands Professional Driver Training Services, building up safe drivers

An absence of quality driving schools in Honiara motivated Joyce Lelau and her brother to leave their jobs and kick-start the Solomon Islands Professional Driver Training Services (SIPDTS) business. SIPDTS has now grown to become one of the most established driving schools in the country, providing advanced, professional training aimed at producing well-rounded, responsible and safe drivers with strong instincts on the road.



When the business started in 2019, Joyce shared that, *“it was a risky decision, especially starting from zero. But to start a driving school is good because we see the need here. We started with our own vehicles and funds and with no office.”*

She continued saying that, *“in the Solomon Islands we have a lot of vehicles and drivers who did not go through a proper driving school and it’s a bit chaotic, especially in Honiara. There are also a high number of accidents that occur.”*

*“SIPDTS has now grown to become one of the most established driving schools.”*



Now, SIPDTS conducts multiple training programs starting with a basic driving course for both manual and automatic transmission vehicles. Their driver training is delivered by their team of five certified instructors and using their two-vehicle fleet, which includes 2 Class C Extrail vehicles.

*“Our instructors are professionally trained and I’m proud to say that our chief instructor graduated with merit from the Police Academy. That is a first in the driving inspector community and a key element that sets us apart from other driving schools here,”* said Joyce.



*“Our chief instructor graduated with merit from the Police Academy.”*



*“We offer theory classes before we begin the moving classes where we then go along with them all the way and right on through until they get their license, when they are finally tested by our Testing Division from the Ministry of Infrastructure and Development. We don’t leave them anywhere. We make sure to go with them and administer their activities until they are fully licensed drivers,”* she added.

SIPDTS’ customers range from self-sponsored individuals to government officials and those sponsored by private organisations. They also deliver driving talks for local seasonal workers departing for Australia.

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Joyce shared that, “women are our favorite customers. The feedback we get from them is that ‘we feel safe,’ ‘the instructors are very good,’ ‘they teach us how to do certain things.’ Driving is a skill so you have to coordinate it with all your five senses. It’s like taking them from nowhere to somewhere.”

“In the beginning, so many think that they can’t do it, but because of how our instructors carry out their lessons, the students are able to gain great confidence behind the wheel,” she added.

Joyce recalled a particularly special moment for the business where “we had a couple come in where the



husband was blind. He wanted his wife to learn to drive so that she could accompany him. However, they didn’t have enough money to pay for driving lessons but we accepted her and put her through on a payment plan. His wife couldn’t read or write properly and it took a longer time for her to be confident to learn to drive.”

The idea of establishing SIPDTS was inspired through the ‘Waka Mere’ program. It was funded by IFC (International Finance Corporation) for working women in private organisations and state-owned enterprises.

“It’s like taking them from nowhere to somewhere.”



Joyce explained that *“the program nearly failed and I was still working for an NGO when the woman who was coordinating it asked my brother and I to help provide driving training for the women, which resulted in my brother going on unpaid leave.”*

*“Thankfully, the program turned out to be successful, where we had these women obtaining their driving licenses. Due to word-of-mouth about this driving training, we began to get all these emails and phone calls enquiring about registering. Then, my brother and I both resigned from our jobs, and we started this driving school,”* she shared.



*“I believe in the online marketing of our business and services.”*



Now two years later, Joyce has no regrets saying that, *“my most memorable moment was when I made the decision to resign from my well-paying job and to devote much more attention to this business.”*

In early 2020, SIPDTS started using Facebook with Joyce saying that, *“because of the reach, it covers broadly. It’s cheaper to use too. Our audience and our customers use Facebook, it’s like 24/7.”*

*“I believe in the online marketing of our business and services. Seeing that we’re now globally connected, social*

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*media is very helpful and we even have enquiries coming in from overseas such as Australia. The use of social media is great for our growth," she said.*

Using Facebook, SIPDTS markets themselves by posting up images of their theory and practical driving classes, certificate presentations and training sessions where *"word-of-mouth goes along too but Facebook makes a difference."*

*"The rewarding part is seeing the growth of our customer base. Before, we had to go out and tell people about our business. Now, I know that I'm doing something that is truly needed here in the Solomon Islands,"* concluded Joyce.





## SIPDTS

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