

Swim Australia's SwimSAFER program: Two years on...

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Organisation

Swim Australia is the Learn to Swim and Water Safety Division of the Australian Swimming Coaches and Teachers Association (ASCTA). Through ASCTA's affiliations, Swim Australia is linked with the Australian Water Safety Council, RLSSAs Guidelines for Safe Pool Operations Committee, the International Federation of Swimming Teachers Associations and Swimming Australia (the sport). Swim Australia was an integral member of the Federal Government's Reference Committee for the development of the Kids Alive Living With Water DVD. Swim Australia registers swim schools and then works with these 'members' to enhance the learn to swim and water safety experience. Swim Australia has over 570 registered Swim Schools which, over the course of a year, deal with over 400,000 families and deliver over 15 million lessons.

Background and Aims

With childhood drowning statistics in Australia at an extremely distressing high, Swim Australia concurs with the AWSC in the value of raising awareness and education as key drowning prevention measures. Swim Australia also recognised that member swim schools had the opportunity, ability and desire to do this.

A special interest group was formed, lead by Swim Australia CEO, Ross Gage, a leadership team of Siria Thomas (Convenor), Dave Dubois, Tracey Ayton and Cameron Speechley along with individuals from member swim schools, and the SwimSAFER Drowning Prevention Program was developed.

The SwimSAFER aim is to encourage and support member swim schools to increase their 'drowning prevention' campaigns and strives to help Swim Schools 'live the water safety message'.

The SwimSAFER program was officially launched in May 2009 at the ASCTA Convention, and interest in the program from member swim schools surpassed any previous project undertaken by Swim Australia. Members are engaged, readily seeing the benefits for themselves and their clientele.

Methods/Implementation

SwimSAFER features a 'layers of protection' concept that encompasses the common themes in water safety messages used by various authorities:

1. Supervision
2. Barriers
3. Swimming and Water Safety Skills
4. Emergency Action Plan

Our goal is to help swim schools to educate parents and carers that no one of these layers will protect their children from drowning; but to have in place as many of these layers as possible will provide the greatest protection from drowning – if one layer fails, another behind it may save their child's life.

The program seeks to package these messages in such a way that swim schools can readily use and disseminate them. The SwimSAFER Leadership Team has driven the development of a range of collateral for Swim Australia to provide to its member swim schools. These include SwimSAFER booklets, lanyards, and online resources. Current SwimSAFER projects include:

- SwimSAFER posters – after a successful photo shoot, this series of posters for swim schools to display at their venues has proven very effective in highlighting each of the layers of protection; the images and text are simple but powerful.
- SwimSAFER weeks – SwimSAFER Week (water safety). Packs are now available to swim schools to support this week. Packs include a range of resources and materials.

Conclusion

SwimSAFER's leadership team and special interest group continue to work together to devise new ideas and concepts, and are currently prioritising and strategising future projects.

Through SwimSAFER, Swim Australia is assisting its member swim schools to live and spread the vital water safety messages. As a consequence, member swim schools will achieve a better balance between teaching swimming and water safety skills and disseminating water safety messages. Our goal is to reduce childhood drowning in this country and to help Australia's children to Swim SAFER.

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