

Swim to Survive – Supporting rural aboriginal and farming communities

Barbara Kusyanto¹

Lifesaving Society Alberta and Northwest Territories¹

Introduction

Over a two year period, the Lifesaving Society, Alberta & Northwest Territories provided a Swim to Survive School Grant to community schools to support their access to the Lifesaving Society's Swim to Survive program.

The Swim to Survive program focuses on achieving a single skill sequence (roll into deep water, tread water for one minute and swim 50 meters). Any method that allows the learner to get to safety is acceptable, there is no one right solution.

Rural schools were targeted. Drowning is the leading cause of non-machine related fatalities in farming communities (1), while it is the second highest cause of death in Aboriginal communities in Canada. The drowning rate in the Aboriginal population is six times higher than that of the Canadian average(2).

Objectives

1. Children would get swimming lessons that will improve their swim survival skills
2. Teachers and school administrators would view Swim to Survive as a viable and cost effective
3. Communities with unique cultural needs could provide valuable swim survival skills to their children

Target

Primary: School-aged children attending reserve or colony schools in rural Alberta

Secondary: Individuals that had the capacity to deliver the program and decision makers in the school or community

Methods

The Swim to Survive School Grant involved:

- Grant funds defrayed costs of: transportation, instruction, or rental costs
- Schools were required to provide a Swim to Survive experience of a minimum of three in-water swim lessons and three in-classroom water safety lessons
- Results were collected using a pre- and post-skill assessment sheet and survey information from children, teachers and pool supervisors
- Swimming instructors were provided the Swim to Survive Activity Guide and school teachers were given Water Smart In-class Lesson Plans

Results/Evaluation

We had an overwhelming positive response to the program. Feedback included:

- From the description of the program and the funding, the colony agreed, for the first time, to allow kids to participate
- It was amazing, students who were afraid of the water, told me that after the first one (lesson) they weren't scared anymore
- This was one of the most positive swim programs, that has been offered by our school
- 90% of the teachers stated that they would like to see the Swim to Survive program become a permanent part of the Grade 3 curriculum

Over two years, 18 colonies and 10 reserve schools completed the program, resulting in 1310 students who attended Reserve schools and 493 students attending colony schools being trained in Swim to Survive.

Discussion

Teachers reported that the Swim to Survive School Grant was critical in providing funding for swim lessons as 77% of the schools had no other outside funding sources. There is a clear demonstration that further funding will be required for them to do this again.

Conclusion

Essentially, the project unfolded as planned. Feedback from students confirmed that this program achieved its goals to teach children new skills and improve confidence levels. The responses from schools exceeded our expectations and available funding. School teachers really understood the value of the program, especially for introducing in a short amount of time vital swim survival skills.

Acknowledgements

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References

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- (2) Statistic Canada, Census 2006, 2006 Aboriginal Population Profile. Retrieved July 27, 2010 from <http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/dp-pd/prof/92-594/>

Corresponding Author

Barbara Kusyanto
Chief Administrative Officer
Lifesaving Society Alberta and Northwest Territories
11759 Groat Road
Edmonton Alberta Canada T5M 3K6
Email: barbk@lifesaving.org
Website: www.lifesaving.org
Telephone: +1 780 4151755