

Jabari – Balancing joy and safety in the water for children

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Background/Introduction

Programs to raise awareness on water safety and drowning awareness exist around the world, yet childhood drowning deaths continue unabated. We believe that drowning rates will drop permanently if we focus on teaching water safety to children – consistently, repetitively, age-appropriately, in a non-threatening manner. After careful study of existing programs and looking at how children are best engaged to learn, we have developed a new approach to deliver important water safety messages in a positive way that is understood and internalized by children.

We have created a character, Jabari, that we believe will engage children and their parents in a responsible and proactive manner. Jabari is the Swahili word for 'brave' and our Jabari is a captivating lion cub who would like to do the right thing, but like all children, needs guidance and reminders of how to stay safe. We selected a lion cub because we believe that a fascination with lions, and a recognition that they are leaders, cuts across cultural and geographic lines. We believe that by positively introducing basic concepts of water safety using a lovable character, children are more likely to remember and model the desired behavior. We have also developed a simple, easy-to-understand slogan that will form the basis for all water safety messages.

Teach. Watch. Protect.

Aims/Objectives

We are social entrepreneurs – addressing a social issue with a business approach. We are committed to donating ten percent of our revenues to global organizations which provide swimming lessons to at-risk children.

Our goal is to introduce a character to engage children and teach them basic water safety messages appropriate to their geographic and cultural circumstances. If children engage with a character they will want to emulate his behavior and we can teach them basic water safety messages appropriate for their geographic and cultural circumstances.

Target

Our goal is to permanently reduce the drowning rate for children across the globe. Although currently based in the U.S. and Canada, both Rebecca and Kerry have spent a number of years in Europe. Kerry was born and raised in Zimbabwe and has worked extensively across Africa. We have a strong understanding of the challenges involved in reaching children in both developed and developing nations.

Methods/Implementation

We work with organizations globally to both identify new solutions to existing water safety issues and reach local at-risk populations. We will use the character of Jabari to deliver important safety messages in a positive way with the highest integrity, to become a high-profile, trusted, and lovable source of accurate water safety information. Jabari has been introduced in a book aimed at 1–5 year olds. Next, we will 'age' Jabari to appeal to children ages 6–10 and will pursue a broad range of media through self-funding, outside investment and licensing including: books, DVDs, children's television, movies, YouTube, internet, text messaging, and appropriate consumer products.

Results/Evaluation

Jabari is new. Preliminary readings of the book to preschool groups have shown that Jabari has engaged the children enough to change their behavior at the pool immediately after hearing the book.

Discussion

Jabari and his cross-cultural band of friends have the potential to be one of few internationally-recognized symbols – positively associated with life-saving messages.

Conclusion

Jabari was introduced in May 2010.

Acknowledgements

Self-funded initiative

References

(1) Dr. Monty Downs – Kaua'i Lifeguard Association

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