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## **Background**

What is the aim of this resource?

This document aims to give an introduction to the concept of survival swimming. This introductory section provides a brief overview on issues such as child drowning globally, survival skills and the importance of sound implementation of survival swimming programs.

## **The importance of survival swimming programs for children**

Child drowning: How big is the problem?

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) recently released Global Report on Drowning has identified drowning as a serious and neglected public health issue that is estimated to claim the lives of 372,000 people a year worldwide. More than 90% of these occur in low and middle income countries (LMICs) 1.

Drowning is an issue that has major impacts on children and youth, with children under five the age group most at risk. Globally, over half of all drowning deaths are among those aged under 25 years. The report identifies proven strategies which are implemented at household, community and national level range from teaching basic swim skills (survival swimming) and installing barriers that control exposure to water hazards, to providing safe spaces for children such as creches and learning about safe rescue 1

Research has shown that drowning is the leading killer of children in Asia, post infancy. Evidence provided by The Alliance for Safe Children (TASC) research in collaboration with local partners (Hanoi School of Public Health, Centre for Injury Prevention and Research Bangladesh, College of Public Health Sciences, Chulalongkorn University in Thailand, and country offices of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF)) on child drowning in Asia shows that a basic level of swimming ability, called survival swimming, is sufficient to prevent most of the child drowning that is occurring in children older than 5 years of age. To be effective as a public health intervention and to eliminate drowning as a leading cause of death, it is necessary for most (75%) children over 5 to be trained in this skill<sup>2</sup>.

The World Health Organisation recommends several key strategies for reducing drowning in children including installing barriers to control access to water, providing a safe place (such as creches) away from water for pre-school aged children and teaching school-age children basic swimming, water safety and safe rescue skills.

## **Why are children at risk of drowning?**

There are a number of reasons young children are at risk of drowning. These include: Developmental, lifestyle and environmental factors. Factors include: an absence or lack of supervision; the fact that young children are attracted to water; children do not understand the consequences of falling into water and the risk of drowning; absence of safety barriers; underestimating a child's inability to gain access to water and injury or illness (e.g. being knocked unconscious or suffering an epileptic fit).

The burden is higher in LMIC's. The profile of child drowning differs between LMICs and HICs with drowning predominately occurring in home swimming pools whilst LMIC child drowning occurs in wells and other natural waterbodies around the home such as ditches and fields etc.

### *Reference*

1 World Health Organisation (2014) Global Report on Drowning: Preventing a Leading Killer. World Health Organisation, Geneva. 2 UNICEF Office of Research (2012) Child Drowning: Evidence for a newly recognized cause of child mortality in low and middle income countries in Asia and its prevention.

## **What is Survival Swimming?**

What are survival skills and how do they differ from traditional swimming skills?

There are a wide range of definitions for swimming and water safety skills. The ILS position statement on Basic Aquatic Survival Skill defines survival skills as the ability to demonstrate the following set of skills, in a consistent and competent manner. These skills include:

- Enter and exit water safely
  - Float for a minimum time of 30 seconds whilst breathing in a relaxed manner
- Move through the water using any form of propulsion and combination of strokes on the front, back or side for a minimum distance of 25m.
  - Rescue and be rescued by extending or grasping a rescue aid
- Practice putting on and swimming and floating using a lifejacket or other equipments.

## **Why are survival swimming programs important?**

Survival swimming programs are important due to the sheer number of people drowning. The 2014 World Health Organisation Global Report on Drowning identified drowning as a global public health issue which claims the lives of an estimated 372,000 people a year. Those at an increased risk have been identified as young children in low and middle income countries who drown as a result of the activities associated with daily living.

Survival swimming programs can be low or high resource and provide a minimum level of competency (and hopefully protection) for children in a minimum number of lessons. Survival swimming programs, such as those are delivered in Bangladesh, Vietnam and Thailand, have proved extremely cost effective and aim to teach a basic level of skills to large numbers of children to achieve significant coverage across the at-risk population.

Who are survival swimming programs aimed at?

To date, existing survival swimming programs have been aimed at children aged 5, with notable programs targeting children in low and middle income countries. Due to the basic level of skills taught through the survival swimming approach, these programs are easily scalable to a variety of different contexts (from public pools to ponds modified with bamboo structures to control depth) and different audiences (e.g. children to adult non-swimmers).

How are survival swimming programs best implemented to be most effective?

Survival swimming programs are best implemented within the community as part of a community development framework. This allows for programs to have their best chance of being sustainable and readily accepted by the target community.

At all times, the health and safety of the students under instruction or assessment is paramount. Organisations conducting teaching and assessment should ensure the safety of their program participants through the provision of adequate surveillance and supervision that may include the use of additional lifeguards and/or rescue equipment as appropriate. The training of instructors is also paramount to safety, as is observing appropriate instructor to student ratios and assessment of skill level at the beginning of a program.

A full risk assessment should be done prior to consider all safety issues and potential risks prior to implementing any survival swimming program.

## **Objectives**

- Increase the number of participants in the Swim and Survive program.
- Increase the number of Swim and Survive Partners delivering the program.
- Provide lessons for 10,000 children for expats, multi-cultural, indigenous, and rural and remote backgrounds.
- Increase community awareness on issues such as children missing out or not achieving benchmarks as well as encourage participation in the Swim and Survive program.

## **Impacts and outcomes**

The Swim and Survive program has made a great impact on the development of swimming and water safety skills of children in other nations such as Australia, United States, Canada, Bangladesh, India, UK. Without such as program that can be nationally implemented, it is most likely that many children would missed out entirely in learning these essential foundation skills and the drowning death statistics would of remained at the similar rates of the 1960's and 1970's and of course earlier.

## **National Media Campaigns**

The Swim and Survive program will be an annual media campaign aiming at highlighting the key issues and promoting the Swim and Survive program. Program ambassadors will bring attention to the campaign and including past and current Olympians .

## **Statue and Sustainability**

Swim and Survive that Gatsby International is going to spread to expats in Korea is a continuing Royal Life Saving initiative and has proved to be a sustainable program for over 30 years. With continued evaluation, consultation and development of quality resources, as well as further development of partnerships, the Swim and Survive program will continue to being Australia's most successful swimming and water safety program.

The extent to which the program reaches all children living in Australia is dependent on government funding and corporate partnerships which Gatsby International expects. Building relationships within the Aquatic Industry is vital for continued impact at the grass roots and to ensure that the program can be accessed for all.

Continued research is valuable to underpin the program and investigation into improved delivery and implementation strategies would support increasing the number of Swim and Survive Partners and gain an understanding of how Gatsby International can further support the program.

Further investigation of how access to the Swim and Survive program can be broadened to those that are currently missing out on learning to swim or who have little or no swimming ability and insufficient foundation skills primary to leaving primary school.