

## **INVERCARGILL CHILDREN GIVEN BETTER CHANCE OF SURVIVAL**

Water Safety New Zealand is heralding the praises of Invercargill's Learn to Swim programme saying it is a benchmark for all other cities in New Zealand.

"We use Invercargill as a model for all other regions trying to set up similar programmes," WSNZ general manager Matt Claridge said.

Although there were other swimming programmes throughout the country, the Invercargill programme was different because it was solely funded by the Invercargill Licensing Trust and ILT Foundation, he said.

And the fact the Learn to Swim programme used professional swimming teachers and coaches was also distinctive, he said.

The programme has been funded by the Invercargill Licensing Trust and ILT Foundation for three years with 452 Invercargill children being awarded the WSNZ 200m certificate - the benchmark distance for increased survival should someone get into difficulty in the water.

The programme gives each Invercargill school pupil aged between 5 and 12 years, 10 swimming lessons a year, covering the cost of the pool, coaching and buses to and from Splash Palace. The aim is to make sure every child will be able to swim 200m by the time they are 12.

A total of 3600 school children attended free swimming lessons in the city this year.

Both the Invercargill Licensing Trust and ILT Foundation have confirmed \$65,000 each in grants (a total of \$130,000) to ensure the programme continues in Invercargill next year.

Invercargill City Council aquatic services manager Crosbie Grieve said it was difficult for many schools to finance swimming lessons.

"Bulk funding has to stretch so far and many schools just can't afford to include swimming in their curriculums. The Invercargill Licensing Trust and ILT Foundation have taken that stress away from both school administrators and parents by funding this programme for Invercargill."

"We live in a long, skinny country. As kiwis, water is a huge part of our lives. If we don't teach kids to swim we've got a problem – a huge problem."

Although being able to swim is not a guarantee, it greatly increases the chances of someone's survival should they get into trouble.

Invercargill Licensing Trust and ILT chairman Alan Dennis said funding the programme was not negotiable as far as he was concerned.

“As a coastal city this programme is so important.

“As kiwi families head off on summer holidays many of them to beaches, rivers or lakes, or even spending time at swimming pools, it is great to know we in Invercargill are making sure our children are given every opportunity to learn a skill which could actually save their lives - there is no better investment.”

### **Swimming Stats (Fact Box)**

- **In January 2009, 23 people died in New Zealand from drowning – 18 of those were involved in recreational water activities such as boating.**
- **This year’s drowning toll stands at 94 (as at December 18).**
- **New Zealand’s drowning death tally is one of the worst in the developed world.**
- **Only a quarter of New Zealand’s 10-year-olds could swim New Zealand Water Safety’s benchmark 200m.**

### **For further information please contact:**

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