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The International Swim Schools Association represents a diverse range of leading aquatic educators, who are engaged in providing positive learning experiences for the children and families they serve.

There are a wide range of needs served by these Swim Schools and individual swimming teachers. The culture and area of the world in which they operate can influence which needs are prioritised.

In regions where paediatric drowning is prevalent, water safety and drowning prevention are often given a strong focus. Other's primary aim may be to develop parent-child bonding and attachment, along with a broad scope of developmental benefits for the child. These areas of focus are not mutually exclusive, and all should be addressed by all programs.

ISSA Position Statement #1

Why Swim Schools are so vital and the benefits they provide.

Introduction:

The World Health Organisation's (WHO) Global Report on Drowning (2014) stated that "every hour of every day more than 40 people lose their lives to drowning." The International Life Saving Federation estimates this number could be 4 times greater, given the various events that lead to drowning and the number of unreported incidents. WHO states further that, "drowning is the 3rd leading cause of unintentional injury death, accounting for 7% of all injury-related deaths".

Such is the extent of global drowning, many refer to it as a pandemic in which children under five years of age are massively disproportionately victims.

Strategies to prevent drowning have been discussed by many organisations including those noted above. These strategies include the removal of water hazards where possible and the installation of barriers. Adult supervision is also critical when children are within the vicinity of water. The implementation of legislation and other policies provides important governmental leadership and national water safety strategies are vital for raising water safety awareness.

Also of high significance, it has been long known that being able to swim – and indeed, a developmentally appropriate learn to swim experience – enhances social, emotional, cognitive and physical growth; both in the short and long terms.

Swim Schools are vital resources:

A key element in the strategy to prevent drowning is the teaching of swimming, water safety skills and safe rescue skills. All are critical life skills for everyone, especially children.

“But these efforts must be undertaken with an emphasis on safety, and an overall risk management that includes a safety-tested curricula, a safe training area, screening and student selection, and student-instructor ratios established for safety”. (WHO)

Swim Schools play this vital role; providing dedicated services, specifically trained teachers and staff, and structured programs featuring on-going development of swimming and water safety skills – in a safer environment. This is critical to developing safer swimmers and enhancing social, emotional, cognitive and physical development.

Water Safety and Learn to Swim is their core business.

Additionally, Swim Schools regularly provide valuable information on relevant matters and create vital awareness around the likes of water safety.

The benefits provided by Swim Schools:

The benefits provided by Swim Schools are many and significant, including:

- Progressive development of swimming and water safety skills and knowledge.
- Developmentally and age appropriate learning, factoring in relevant environmental factors, aligned with appropriate swimming and water safety curriculums.
- Developmentally complementary outcomes, where programs enhance cognitive, social, emotional and physical development. Swimming kids are smarter! (Early Years Swimming – Adding Capital to Young Australians, Jorgensen, 2013).
- Skills that apply to a range of aquatic activities, in a range of environments.
- Excellent parent bonding opportunities through parent and baby participation in infant aquatic programs.
- A great social opportunity for young children. Because they can start at such a young age, swimming is often their first group social experience ... which can extend into parent/family socialising – further enhancing wellbeing.
- Combining a healthy way of life with a great way to exercise.
- A highly engaging activity in which the learner develops skills through fun, safe interactive programs.
- The opportunity to learn and network through Membership of the International Swim Schools Association and local organisations, where they exist.
- Empowering families and communities to take responsibility for their children’s aquatic education, transferring skills into the home and other environments
- A skill for life.

Conclusion:

The global challenges are significant. More than 100 countries have at least 3 drownings per day, with some close to 50 drownings per day.

There is an extreme global need for effective teaching of quality swimming and water safety curriculum and programs – which includes education, in addition to skill development.

Swim Schools are a vital resource throughout the world.

References

Early Years Swimming – Adding Capital to Young Australians. Jorgensen, Griffith University, 2013
<https://australianswimschools.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/Early-Years-Swimming.-Jorgensen-2013.pdf>

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