



Press Release
(for immediate release)

Learn to Swim initiative recognised with national award

Monday November 28: The Swim Safe Southland Learn to Swim programme has been recognised on a national level, winning the Sealord Water Safety New Zealand Education Award in Wellington last week.

The programme, seed funded by Sport Southland's KiwiSport Fund and Water Safety New Zealand, was piloted in 11 rural Central Southland schools in Term 1 this year and has taught more than 800 children in Years 1 to 8 potentially life-saving skills in the water.

Sport Southland Sport Manager Peter Dunne had been thrilled with the positive feedback it initially received from teachers, parents and pupils and the Water Safety New Zealand Award was fantastic recognition of the positive impact the programme was having, he said.

"The skills the kids gain with Learn to Swim are vital and it is great that it has been recognised nationally by Water Safety New Zealand," he said.

"It is important to recognise that the key to success was the contracting of professional instructors to work alongside the school teachers for whom professional development was also provided."

"We really felt Learn to Swim was a great place to direct KiwiSport funding. The programme mirrors the successful ILT and ICC supported programme in Invercargill and is the start of ensuring rural Southland children get the same opportunities as those in Invercargill."

"This Award reflects on, what has been from day one, a real community initiative. It also provides real impetus for our Swim Safe Southland Advisory Group to progress the three Learn to Swim programmes operating in Invercargill, Eastern and the rest of rural Southland."

Water Safety New Zealand chief executive Matt Claridge said Water Safety New Zealand wanted to address a national decline in swimming ability amongst youth in New Zealand.

"The rural Southland programme is a great example to the rest of the country of what can be achieved when communities recognise an issue and work collaboratively to seek solutions," he said.

"The initiative is broad in its approach and through supporting access to pools, the provision of quality teaching, the collation of assessment data and continually updating schools on the level of achievement is making a real difference in the swimming ability of the youth involved."

Sport Southland is contracted to run the Learn to Swim programme by Water Safety New Zealand and shares an administration role with Southern REAP (Rural Education Awareness Programme). Earlier this year the Southland District Council committed financial support for the next three years.

"The national award, combined with the programme outcomes to date, really indicate that this is a successful method of teaching kids skills they need," Mr Dunne said.

“We would love to offer Learn to Swim in all Southland schools and hopefully this recognition will give us a footing to attract wider support so that we are able to do that.”

“Currently we only have about one third of the funding required to do that so the inequity between what Invercargill children and rural Southland children receive remains for many.”

ENDS

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