



LIFESAVING SOCIETY

The Lifeguarding Experts

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

45,000 KIDS CAN NOW 'SWIM TO SURVIVE'

Lifesaving Society Gets Closer To Its Vision Of Training All Canadian Children

TORONTO, ON – May, 17, 2007 – Just as Canadians are heading to the cottage or opening swimming pools this Victoria Day long-weekend, the Lifesaving Society reports that 45,000 Ontarians have been trained at school to survive an unexpected fall into deep water thanks to its “Swim to Survive” School Grant program.

Launched in 2005, Swim to Survive teaches the minimum standard for survival. Through funding provided by the Ontario Ministry of Education and other partners, the Lifesaving Society makes grants available to schools so that Grade 3/4 students may take the program during school hours. To date, 45,000 of approximately 140,000 Grade 3/4 elementary students in Ontario – just over one-third – have participated in the Society’s Swim to Survive school program, and the Ministry of Education has provided another grant of \$900,000 to extend the program into the 2007/2008 school year.

“We are most grateful to our partners who have provided the funding and support to allow us to roll out this critically important life skill to school-aged children,” says Barbara Byers, Public Education Director for the Lifesaving Society, Canada’s lifeguarding experts. “While we’re extremely proud of the accomplishment of training 45,000 kids, we need to remember that each year brings 140,000 more Grade 3 students who need to learn this skill. There is a long road ahead, but we are making great progress.”

Swim to Survive teaches children three basic skills in sequence: roll into deep water, tread water for one minute, and swim 50 metres. It is not meant as a replacement for standard swimming lessons. It is an important first step to being safe around water, and could make the difference between life and death when immersion in water is sudden and unexpected.

Funding for the program was made possible by a \$935,000 grant in 2006 and an additional \$900,000 grant in 2007 from the Ontario Ministry of Education, a \$100,000 grant from the Ontario Ministry of Health Promotion Active 2010, as well as grants from the Stephanie Gaetz KEEPSAFE Foundation, the Lifesaving Society, the Jays Care Foundation and the Lifesaving Foundation.

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“It’s so important that every child learns how to survive in the water,” said Kathleen Wynne, Minister of Education. “By partnering with the Lifesaving Society to bring the Swim-to-Survive program to our schools, we’re helping ensure children stay healthy and safe.”

Barbara Underhill, former Canadian world champion in pairs figure skating, has been actively involved in promoting water safety and the Swim to Survive program through the Stephanie Gaetz KEEPSAFE Foundation as a result of personal tragedy when her eight and a half month old daughter Stephanie Gaetz drowned in the family’s backyard pool 14 years ago.

“It means so much to me to see that 45,000 elementary school children now have basic swim survival skills,” said Barbara Underhill, co-founder of the Stephanie Gaetz KEEPSAFE Foundation. “Drowning prevention has become my life’s work and my goal is to have every single child in Canada meet the Swim to Survive standard.”

Swim to Survive program focuses on the following swim sequence:

1. **Roll into deep water:** The deep-water roll teaches the learner to orient themselves at the surface after an unexpected fall.
2. **Tread water for 1 minute:** Canadian waters are generally cold enough year-round to trigger a gasping reflex on unexpected immersion. Treading water teaches the learner to support at the surface and protect the airway.
3. **Swim 50 metres:** Lifesaving Society research shows that most drownings occur within 3 to 15 metres of safety. Because the ability of the learner may be impaired by cold water, clothing etc., there is a 50 metre standard to compensate.

Each year, almost 500 Canadians die in water-related incidents, many which can be prevented. The Lifesaving Society believes the incidence of drownings could be cut by as much as 50 per cent if all children could achieve the Swim to Survive standard.

The program is ideal for groups from schools, camps, Girl Guides and Boy Scouts and others who have limited time and diverse abilities. The program can also be offered as a stand-alone program or on a drop-in basis. Parents should contact their school principal or their local swimming facility for more information, or visit www.lifesavingsociety.com.

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About The Stephanie Gaetz KEEPSAFE Foundation

The Stephanie Gaetz KEEPSAFE Foundation is a registered, private charitable foundation dedicated to preventing childhood injuries. The Foundation was launched by Barbara Underhill and Rick Gaetz after the tragic death of their daughter Stephanie in 1993. The Foundation funds and supports safety-related programs across the country. For more information, please visit www.keepsafefoundation.com or call 1-866-383-9733.

About The Lifesaving Society

The Lifesaving Society, Canada's lifeguarding experts, is a charitable organization working to prevent drowning and water-related injury through its training programs, Water Smart[®] public education and safety management services. Each year in Canada, the Society certifies more than 500,000 people in its swim, lifesaving, lifeguarding and leadership courses. For more information, please visit www.lifesavingsociety.com.