



Aquatic Staff Shortage – Addendum Report Fall 2024

Introduction

In October 2015, the Lifesaving Society hosted a day-long symposium for affiliates to explore the issue of aquatic workforce recruitment and retention gaps and concerns. Specifically, the objective was to assess a staff shortage occurring within the aquatic community.

Following the symposium, in 2018, the Society drafted and released a report outlining the results of the symposium. The report listed several conclusions including:

- Affiliates were engaged in a variety of strategies to help curb their aquatic staff shortages. However, there was inconsistency across affiliates, and a combined approach of various strategies within a single affiliate may gain better results.
- While identifying barriers in recruitment and retention, it was noted that relations between management and unions may create some resistance to mitigating the staff shortage.
- Affiliates indicated that the Society could engage in proactive activities such as engaging with leadership candidates and developing a stronger social media presence.

In 2023, because of continued challenges, the Lifesaving Society Council of Officers requested another assessment of the aquatic staff shortage issue. The task was assigned to the Chair, Management Proficiency on the Management Training Activity Council. This work was further supported by the Vice President, Management Training.

Method

In fall 2023, a survey was circulated to Lifesaving Society affiliates collecting information on the landscape of the aquatic workforce. Questions were posed to determine current gaps and concerns with aquatic workforce recruitment and retention. Respondents were asked to consider and provide information on factors that may be contributing to any aquatic workforce recruitment and retention issues. Respondents were further asked to provide commentary on effective strategies to mitigate and/or eliminate gaps and concerns relating to recruitment and retention as they relate to an aquatic staff shortage.

A workgroup led by the Vice President for the Management Training Activity Council, analyzed respondent information and produced a listing of:

1. Current, or ongoing, root causes leading to the aquatic staff shortage.
2. Potential strategies to mitigate and/or eliminate the aquatic staff shortage.

Results

22 affiliates responded to the survey, providing responses to identify potential causes of the aquatic staff shortage and information on mitigation measures to address the shortage. Survey information was presented to the Council of Officers meeting September 18, 2024, where more feedback was received.

The collated results are presented in Table 1.

Efforts have been made to address the ongoing aquatic staff shortage. Findings indicate that the most effective ways to share information on current challenges and potential solutions include partnering with local aquatic organizations and Lifesaving Society Area Chairs.

There are many supports the Society has available to its affiliates consolidated here:

- [The Hilary M. Weston Award program](#).
- [Find a Course](#) on the website.
- [Job posting](#) on the website.
- [Lifesaving Society Area Chairs](#).
- [New Canadian Outreach Program](#) (which supports our new Canadians in their swim journey and possibly becoming future staff).
- The Buck Slip Program – Advertising courses and jobs – Contact the Lifesaving Society for more information.

The Society is also committed to disseminating successful staffing strategies through Lunch 'N' Learn webinars, featuring case studies from municipalities that have effectively expanded their aquatic teams.

A proposal was made to establish a centralized system, or dedicated workgroup, to lead efforts in researching, monitoring, and sharing information on the aquatic staff shortage.

Discussion and Conclusion

The fall 2023 survey results reinforce the work conducted by the Society between 2015 and 2018, showing that the staffing situation has not significantly improved since 2018. Although affiliates have adopted various mitigation strategies, no single affiliate has implemented the full range of measures outlined in this report. A layered approach, incorporating a variety of strategies, may help affiliates better address staffing shortages.

Given the continued challenges surrounding the aquatic staff shortage, it is recommended that the Society formalize its approach to monitoring the situation and exploring solutions. The Management Training Activity Council Chair for Management Proficiency should take on a formal role in regularly reviewing workforce trends, researching emerging challenges, and collaborating with affiliates to develop evolving strategies to alleviate staff shortages.

Table 1

Causes and Mitigation Strategies to Address Aquatic Staff Shortage

Causes	Mitigation Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial barriers to become certified (e.g., cost of courses, including manuals/workbooks, cost of trainers, transportation costs/logistics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Loan course materials through the library. Employers can elect to subsidize the cost of courses for candidates (including recertification courses); offer incentives for advanced leadership and/or safety management courses. Can include letter of intent/contract for employment conditions. Examine strategies to obtain additional funding to offset/recuperate subsidized programming for candidates (e.g. Jump Start, government/ government grants, etc.) Work with the Society to put together a program where the Hilary M. Weston Award can be utilized for selected youth who otherwise could not afford to participate in the Society's training program to pay for examination fees and materials and possibly the organization can waive the registration fees. Volunteer Incentive program — If a volunteer works a certain number of hours, they could receive a discount on the Society Swim Instructor course. Municipalities could offer transit pass discounts.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Difficulty associated with the role(s) / job(s) / course(s) (e.g. regular training, physical standards are too difficult). The Endurance Challenge too difficult specifically (examiners are finding this is where people are not passing the course). The difficulty deters people from registering for the program as well. Candidates experiencing difficulty/becoming disinterested relating to gaps into age/ certification requirements/ logistics from bronze courses to NL/Instructor (e.g. candidate with Bronze Cross at 13 years of age, with 2-year gap to NL). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop/offer free lifeguard clubs (aka “Junior Lifeguard Clubs”) for older children/younger teenagers (i.e., 10 to 15 years of age) for the purposes of recruitment. Organization offers skill practice sessions, and swim times to help build endurance and increase competency in skills. The Lifesaving Society Committee could review and re-evaluate the endurance challenge/timed swim and look to allow for more time to complete the skill. Organization can address potential gap in certification age(s) between Bronze Cross by: (1) creating a development/preparation course for Instructors/NL; or (2) re-evaluate the Bronze to NL/Instructors certification stream logistics/requirements for age(s). Organizations can recruit immediately upon completion of NL and Instructors (from courses offered, or for registrants in NL and Instructors) so fully trained participants don't have to wait to be hired, which means their skills will be fresh in their minds. Employ 15-year-old staff per Ontario Regulation 565.

Causes	Mitigation Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concerns with not committing to: (1) work schedules (e.g. work times/shifts); (2) type of work (e.g., lifeguarding versus instructing). Wages may not be sufficient to attract and/or retain staff. As minimum wage increases wages that were traditionally higher have not increased in line. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations can offer a homework club right after school so staff can come right to the pool and do their homework prior to their shift. Implement a stipulation in the contract that states staff must work at least 2 shifts per week. Examine payment for staff such that employers: (1) can provide wages that are reflective of the preparation/costs/training/time/responsibility compared to minimum wage; or (2) restructure payment based on work schedule shortage (e.g. pay daytime staff at higher rate than nighttime staff). It was mentioned that higher wages would help attract the daytime adult staff. <p><i>Note: Lifesaving Society/Parks and Recreation Ontario (PRO) can evaluate the feasibility of conducting a municipal analysis of wages.</i></p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Course availability issues based on regions/municipalities (e.g. insufficient courses offered, lack of available Instructors, or Instructor Trainers, remote locations, etc.) <p><i>Note: this is an indirect cause of financial barriers in accessing courses/offering courses based on trainer.</i></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Organizations can offer more online portions, so candidates don't have to travel or spend as much on accommodations if needing to spend a few days in a location to take a course. Work with other nearby organizations to share the cost of training and to try and secure enough candidates to run a course. Organizations can review local transportation and build schedules around transportation schedules. Course postings on the Society's website to ensure everyone knows where they can travel if courses are not in their area.

Causes	Mitigation Strategies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Perception that aquatics is not a career, nor does it lead to career development/leverage experiences to other professions (both by future employers and the public). • Adult recruitment and work scheduling are difficult to manage for successful employment. • Recruitment in general is an issue in some areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Advertise in the Lifesaving Society Buck Slip program to advertise jobs to candidates receiving awards from the society in the mail. • Post your job on the Society website. • Attend job fairs in area including High School career fairs. • Enhance social media such that: (1) respective organizations can implement stand-alone social media messages for recruitment and (2) Lifesaving Society/PRO (governing organizations) offering aquatic career highlights to attract talent and promote the profession of aquatics. • Create a campaign like the previous Heroes in Action campaign that was a multi-agency campaign. • Note: this would be a larger project, however municipalities could recognize their own staff and publicize on social media. • Gain interest through demonstrations and engagement with the recreational swimmers. Lifeguards provide Lifesaving Sport activities the public can try during the rec swims. • Collaborating/partnering with local high schools to advertise jobs. • Collaborate/partner with schools with the Physical Education course credit. • Host a booth advertising leadership program at community events, have lifeguards present to talk about the joys of the job. • Attend job fairs in area including high school career fairs.