

Executive Summary

Following two tragic deaths at Prestonhill Quarry, concerns over young peoples safety around open water led to the development of the Fife Water Safety Initiative. The ethos of the project is to educate young people providing them with the ability to conduct dynamic risk assessment when in, on or near water, keeping themselves and others safe.

The Royal National Lifeboat Institute (RNLI) and the Royal Life Savers Society UK (RLSS UK) teamed up with Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service and Cameron Lancaster's mother to create a pragmatic approach in looking at the physical factors in drowning, the harsh realities of rescue limitations, and the emotional impact of the aftermath of a drowning.

The project used an in-depth, hard hitting presentation to provide interactive learning on; in-water rescue kits, cold water shock and drowning statistics. Cameron's mother brought emotion and reality to the content, as she talked about the impact Cameron's death had on his peer group and family.

The initial high school presentations received positive feedback commending the effective way in which the project uses fact, real experiences and real examples to put across a difficult message in a way that was inspiring and hard hitting. The group gained the endorsement of Fife Council for the resources being used, confirming its suitability for the audience and content and linking it to the Curriculum for Excellence through health and wellbeing.

In the first five months of the project over 100 volunteers came forward to help pass the message to primary school children.

This project excelled at partnership working at a local level developing effective links between emergency services, charitable organisations, schools and individuals affected by drowning.

This project won the Peoples Choice Safer Communities Award 2016

Background and Aims

Following the deaths of two young males at a known swimming spot in an abandoned quarry there was a great deal of public pressure to tackle the issue. The Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI) and Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK) used their expertise in youth education formulating a partnership with Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service, the local authority and education services to develop a project that educated young people about the dangers of open water drowning, cold water shock and the harsh realities associated with the

limitations available to perform rescues and the emotional impact following a death from drowning.

Whilst many people were aware of deaths in the water, very few were informed about the overall statistics on accidental drowning and how Scotland compares to other parts of the UK. The project's aim was to promote awareness of the dangers with the long-term ambition of reducing harm and deaths by drowning. In accordance with the UK National Drowning Prevention Strategy 2016-2026, this aimed to reduce the number of accidental drowning by 50%.

By educating younger members of the community on the dangers of open water, the project hoped that harm and fatalities would reduce and that the number of incidents attended by emergency services near to water will decrease. Further to this, it is hoped that by discouraging youths gathering near open water, where they are known to engage in anti-social behaviour, the damage caused to property would also decrease.

Activities

The RNLI and RLSS UK developed a partnership which included Police Scotland and the SFRS. Project partners worked collaboratively:

- Agreeing the concept and investigating the local need
- Developing the educational resources
- Designing the presentations to engage the audience and hold their attention
- Giving emotional support to each other and young people whilst promoting key messages about drowning prevention.
- delivering the presentation with their unique perspective in mind

In the early stages of the project Education Officers from Fife Council provided advice and support on project writing for schools, identifying areas which matched the curriculum. This helped to secure buy-in from local high schools.

A lesson plan was produced to provide a structured approach for the sessions and ensure consistency of delivery. To extend the reach the project established Facebook and Twitter accounts.

Impact

When this initiative launched there was support from local politicians, however as awareness spread the initiative sparked a parliamentary debate. The debate concluded that young people had to be the target for future work as prevention would always be more effective than an emergency rescue.

The initiative was picked up by local and national press and the launch was covered extensively by the BBC, STV, local and national press.

Feedback from the school visits provided invaluable information. During a visit to one of the most disadvantaged areas in Fife, the reception from children who were normally difficult to engage was overwhelming. Several young people asked to

volunteer for lifeguard and peer education training programmes, whilst others hugged the presenters. Despite the school being geographically furthest from the quarry many children still knew the boys concerned and the impact on the community of their sudden loss was noticeable.

The team are also encouraged by the numbers of volunteers who want to spread the water safety messages, probably one of the strongest measures of impact to date.

The group gained the endorsement of Fife Council for the resources being used confirming its suitability for the audience and content and linking it to the Curriculum for Excellence through health and wellbeing.

Monitoring and Evaluation

Each stage of the project was monitored. Pre and post evaluations were carried out with pupils to understand the effectiveness of the sessions and a further (six month) evaluation is planned to consider how well the information has been retained.

Prior to the presentation young people were asked to complete a survey to examine their thoughts about the dangers associated with open water and what actions they might take in the event of an emergency. The pre and post responses received demonstrated changes in attitudes and behaviour as a result of the inputs.

What would you do if someone was in trouble on, in or near the water?	
Pre Evaluation	Post Evaluation
Laugh	Call the emergency services, do not climb in after them
Jump in	I would phone 999 and try to help them out without putting myself in danger
Call for help, or if nobody is around help them yourself.	Phone or call for help and if possible throw them something to help them float

“The Water Safety assemblies have made a significant contribution to how we educate our young people about risk taking behaviours around water. The practical and hands on approach to these inputs meant that pupils engaged in a highly positive way with the materials and I am sure as a result pupils will remember the key messages. We hope that the longer term impact will be that our young people are now more aware of the dangers of water as well as feeling more confident with simple steps that they can take if a friend was in danger. This is an excellent example of partnership working between services and education with pupils and their needs right at the centre of our practice”.

Depute Head Teacher (Inverkeithing High School)

Lessons Learnt and Sustainability

The lessons learned during the project were around how supportive young people were and also just how far reaching the impact of the deaths had been. The numbers of volunteers and peer mentors was unexpected and the emotional outpouring following the events showed that the subject was important to the whole community.

The project contributes to the UK National Drowning Prevention Strategy 2016-2026 and has received support from local and parliamentary members.

Sustainability of the project has been raised not only on a local level but nationally following the parliamentary debate which concluded that young people had to be the target for future work as prevention would always be more effective than an emergency rescue.

In future, the group hopes to identify specific resources and funding to allow Water Safety Scotland to take this project to young people across Scotland.

Resources

Reductions in harm, crime and the number of deaths by drowning are key objectives for the partners involved in the project. Although there is no specific budget for this project, each organisation involved contributed time, expertise and resource materials.

Practice Note Information

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