

New locals' swimming chance

A program teaching local migrants and refugees how to swim and to be safe in and around the water is set to expand and organisers are seeking more people to help fill its volunteer pool.

Northern Beaches local Tanya Carmont has been running the not-for-profit organisation Water Skills for Life for almost a decade, with a charter to prevent drowning by supporting volunteer swim programs in Australia and overseas.

Tanya was teaching at War-ringah Aquatic Centre when she discovered Dee Why was home to one of the country's largest Tibetan populations.

After learning most of the 600 people in the community had emigrated to the northern beaches without any swimming ability and with limited understanding about the dangers of the beach, Tanya reached out to local Tibetan Settlement Officer Yeshi Palmo.

"And that's when we started the Tibetan swim program," she said.

The Tibetan Community Swim Program is now in its sixth year and caters for children from the age of three to adults.

Tanya says the local Tibetan community

has grown to more than 1000 people and to date more than 360 students have been taught to swim and armed with water safety skills to allow them to enjoy the aquatic environment.

Water Skills for Life also produced a booklet in 2014 with a grant from the

Program, Summer Swim & Survive Camps, The Tibetan Community Swim Program and Assist Swim Vietnam (providing funds and equipment for a disability swim program in Hoi An).

"We have grown so much over the past nine years and hope to continue the trend

to assist people in learning to swim and be safe in and around the water both here in Australia and also in Vietnam," she said.

Whilst generous community grants from organisations such as Dee Why RSL and NB Council have helped the swim and water safety programs bubble along, Tanya has recently applied for government funding to allow the charity to specifically target other culturally and linguistically diverse communities living on the northern beaches.

"We will also be looking for more volunteers to join our team and if we are successful in obtaining funding we will also translate our water safety resource into other languages," Tanya said.

Water Skills for Life can provide assistance to anyone who may be interested in gaining the swim teaching qualification to enable them to join the volunteer team.

- Lisa Offord



State Government's Water Safety Black Spot Funding.

"This is a great resource for the community to understand about the dangers of the beach... it is given out to all new arrivals to the area."

Tanya said Water Skills for Life currently operated four programs supported by 20 volunteers - Collaroy Turtles Water Safety