



**Water Skills For Life empowers migrants and refugees of all ages by teaching them how to swim.**



Story

## **Waters skills are a universal life saver**



by Keegan Thomson

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**D**ue to our geographic location, water has long been a part of the Australian lifestyle. Going for a refreshing dip on a hot summer afternoon has long been a cornerstone of the Australian way of life, but for some this can be quite a stressful and even socially isolating experience.

New migrants and refugees from landlocked countries have often never been taught how to swim or even never come in contact with an ocean, so social isolation can occur for people who can't speak much English and who can't swim.

Tanya Carmont is a Sydneysider and beach local who is teaching new migrants and refugees from landlocked Tibet to swim in her program Water Skills For Life in the hope that more people will become empowered by swimming.

Ms Carmont saw the Tibetans' lack of water skills as a potentially life-threatening safety hazard, particularly since so



*Source: Water Skills For Life Facebook Page*

“When a refugee comes to Australia they’re settled in with English lessons and some basic lifestyle information about living in Australia but strangely enough they’re not taught the life saving skill of how to swim,” Ms Carmont said.

"The majority of Tibetans who we teach are coming as refugees so there is a lot of challenges that come with that."



Ms Carmont said, and that boost of confidence carries on to many other aspects of life.

"Swimming is one of those things that is very empowering. It is a great way to maintain health and it gives you a sense of achievement," Mr Carmont said.

"Everyone gets a big sense of achievement when they've swum their first full length of a pool.

"It makes the students feel really great for themselves and it gives them a massive self-esteem boost unlike any other," she said.

Ms Carmon started her program because of the increasing number of drowning deaths of new Australians, refugees and migrants.

According to last years Royal Life Saving National Drowning Report, there were 291 drownings across Australia in 2017. In that same year, 20 of the drowning deaths were people who were not born in Australia.

"A lot of the people who come to my classes haven't





"I have adults who are fearful of the ocean and the beach because they've grown up in communities where waterways aren't to be played in or swum in.

"It is really important to teach these adults because they then take these skills on and teach or encourage their kids to learn how to swim as well," she said.



*Source: Water Skills For Life Facebook Page*



English, if any.

She uses the skills of the Tibetan students to help work through such challenges.

"A couple of my volunteers came up with the idea of making pictograms so we can point and teach as well. We're going to translate the English words and English pictures into Tibetan so we can speak to the Tibetans via pictures," Ms Carmont said.

Utilising the skills of the students is something Water Skills For Life does well. Students of Ms Carmont's program are also encouraged to up-skill and further their ambitions by joining the Water Skills For Life team as a volunteer.

Tenzin Kyishi, an 18-year-old Tibetan refugee, came to Australia in 2005 and has been swimming with the Water Skills For Life program since 2013.

After learning how to swim he was given the opportunity to train as an instructor. Today he volunteers to teach other Tibetans how to swim.



class," Mr Kyishi said.

"I'm really thankful that I've learnt how to swim. I'm not scared to go into the water and my confidence has been boosted."

One big positive of the program, Mr Kyishi says, is the fact that it doesn't cost a cent for new migrants and refugees who want to learn the swimming skills.

"A lot of the migrants and refugees who come out here struggle to make ends meet and can't afford to pay for swimming lessons but the program is free and it can be life saving," Mr Kyishi said.

Mr Kyishi, who is now studying a double degree of Business and Civil Engineer, said he has gained both confidence and new life skills after taking part in Water Skills For Life.

"My English communication skills have grown because of Tanya and her program and I've learnt how to stay safe around the water and the beach," he said.

"I feel more confident because I know how to swim in big waves at the beach and I'm not intimidated by rough surf."



travels to Vietnam to teach children and adults how to swim through the Swim Vietnam affiliate.

Tragically Vietnam has some very startling statistics on drowning deaths that occur across the country. Around 10 children and 6 adults a day drown on Vietnamese beaches, rivers, lakes and waterways.

Despite having some 2000 kilometres of beaches and coastline and an extensive network of rivers, children aren't taught water skills or how to swim.

"No one is taught water safety in Vietnam. They're simply told to stay away from the water because it isn't a good place to go," Ms Carmont said.

"People want to go down and enjoy the water but they can't because they've got no skills, they don't have life jackets or floatations and there isn't any infrastructure around life guards at beaches."







*Source: Swim Vietnam Facebook Page*

When Ms Carmont first started travelling to Vietnam, she said there wasn't a single life guard patrolling any of the beaches in Vietnam. Today there are guards at De Nang and Ha Noi.

Forming nine years ago, Swim Vietnam has grown from a small swimming school to an advisory body that consults the Vietnamese government about water safety policy.

"It is all about sustainable skills and helping the community to carry their own. Children and adults are really keen to learn and build skills because they want to take ownership of water skills," Ms Carmont said.



grows from there. People want these skills because they are skills that last a life time."

Water Skills for Life is always looking for volunteer instructors. You can contact them via their website or facebook [here](#).

If you want to curb the drowning rates in Vietnam, you can donate to Swim Vietnam [here](#).

## About Keegan Thomson

Keegan Thomson is an assistant editor and journalist for The QUO. Keegan has had his work published in The Guardian and The Sydney Morning Herald. He is a community-minded journalist who is always looking for the next story, no matter how big or small it may be. As well as working for The QUO, he works for a number of independent newspapers in Western Sydney including Western News and Nepean News.

More from Keegan Thomson

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