

# Fife Water Safety Initiative Practice Exemplar

## Name and Timescales

The Fife Water Safety Initiative was launched in Cowdenbeath in November 2015 and is ongoing.

## Summary

This water safety initiative is a partnership involving Fife Council Education, Royal National Lifeboat Institute (RNLI), Royal Life Saving Society UK (RLSS UK), Police Scotland, Scottish Fire and Rescue Service (SFRS) and Gillian Barclay, the mother of Cameron Lancaster who tragically drowned in Prestonhill Quarry, Fife in 2014. RLSS Coast Guards and the Scottish Ambulance Service have also expressed an interest in being involved in the initiative.

Initially piloted at five secondary schools in South West Fife, Dunfermline and Cowdenbeath, the initiative has since been delivered to almost all high schools in Fife. The initiative involves an engaging and emotive presentation, and takes place in local secondary school assembly halls targeting around 200-300 pupils, including teachers, at each session.

## Need for Initiative

Following the tragic deaths of two young people within a matter of weeks at the abandoned Prestonhill Quarry, a well-known swimming spot in 2014 there was a great deal of concern from both Fife Council and the public around the issue of young people's safety in open water. Fife Council instigated an emergency meeting to tackle the issue, which led to the development of this initiative.

According to Water Safety Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy 2018-2026, data indicates that Scottish fatalities differ from the rest of the United Kingdom. Although England records the highest number of accidental drowning in the UK, when the relative population rate is taken into consideration, Scotland carries a disproportionate burden and the accidental drowning rate is almost double the UK's average.

Whilst many youths are aware of deaths by drowning, very few are informed about the overall statistics in Scotland and how this compares with the rest of the UK. This initiative therefore promotes awareness of the dangers to young people in Fife and elsewhere, contributing towards the long term, wider ambition of reducing harm in open water and deaths by drowning.

## Aims and Objectives

The initiative aims to contribute towards the national strategic aim within Water Safety Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy 2018-2026 and reduce danger amongst the highest risk groups and communities.

The objectives of the initiative are to:

- Create opportunities to work in partnership with other organisations to educate young people about the dangers of water;
- Provide young people with the ability to conduct a dynamic risk assessment when in, on or near water, keeping themselves and others safe;
- Increase awareness of everyday risks in, on and around water;
- To advocate that all recreational activity organisations should have a clear strategic risk assessment and plans that address key risks;
- To achieve a reduction in the number of accidents, fatalities and incidents attended by emergency services by educating younger members of the community on the dangers of open water;
- Through education and awareness of the danger of water, discourage youths gathering near open water, where they are known to engage in anti-social behaviour;

- Improve understanding of water-related self-harm.

Long term objectives are:

- Every child should have the opportunity to learn and receive water safety education at primary school and where required at key stage 3 (age 11-14 years);

*Note: All high schools and primary schools in Fife are targeted but the Fife team assist other areas by providing them with copies of their presentation. The programme has been delivered in Perth and within areas of Glasgow and Aberdeen. It is proposed that the presentation be delivered to every school in Scotland. The presentation has also been delivered to a Chief Fire Officers' meeting as part of the UK's National Fire Chief's Council.*

- Every community within Scotland with water risks should have a community level risk assessment and water safety plan;
- All recreational activity organisations should have a clear strategic risk assessment and plans to address key risk;
- Reductions in harm and the number of deaths by drowning.

## Delivery

The SFRS Officer liaises with all agencies following the schools' summer holiday to check availability for the next term and co-ordinates timetables with schools. If there is a change in staff/volunteers attending it is imperative they are trained. This ensures that they feel comfortable with the material and will ensure continuity in approach. A large number of community police in Fife have now been trained to deliver the presentation.

A lesson plan provides a structured approach for the sessions and ensures consistency of delivery. This was developed collaboratively by all partners. An in-depth, hard hitting presentation was compiled providing interactive learning on; in-water rescue kits, cold water shock and drowning statistics. A representative from each agency takes part in the session. Gillian Barclay gives a highly emotive presentation which brings reality to the initiative as she talks about the impact her son Cameron's death had on the family, his peer group and the wider community.

Around 30,000 pupils have received the presentation so far, with over 7,000 in 2018 alone and already 4000 already this year with more already booked in. It is anticipated that numbers will exceed 7000 in 2019.

## Successes and Challenges

### Successes:

- The initiative excels at local partnership working, developing effective links between emergency services, charitable organisations, schools and the community.
- The Initiative was awarded a prize of £2000 by winning the 'People's Choice' award at the Scottish Community Safety Network Awards in 2016. The money was used to develop resources and although the face to face sessions are the "gold standard", if these aren't possible there is a video resource which can be used by schools together with a lesson plan.
- The initiative led to a debate within the Scottish Parliament (March 2016) which resulted in extensive media coverage, promoting the initiative to a wide audience throughout Scotland.

### Challenges:

- Schools were initially reluctant. The initiative was targeted initially at High Schools which proved to be difficult due to busy timetables. Through 'word of mouth' between Head Teachers and the promotion of the initiative by a retired Head Teacher, greater numbers of schools incorporated the presentation into their timetables.

- Difficulty in co-ordinating dates and availability of the various partners involved. The SFRS lead officer now co-ordinates availability of partners and arranges the dates for the following year at the end of the school term.

## Impact/Change

Feedback from school visits provides invaluable information regarding impact. 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 further from the quarry, many children knew the boys concerned and the impact on the community of their sudden loss remained tangible. Testimonials from individual teachers, schools and parents also demonstrate the impact of the initiative.

In the first five months of the project, over 100 young volunteers came forward to help pass the message to primary school children and this number continues to increase. Training has also been carried out with all Police Scotland Youth Volunteers in the Dunfermline area, who can also train other pupils to become advocates. This high (and continually increasing) number of young people involved demonstrates the cultural shift in the area around the risks associated with open water.

This project has grown rapidly due to the enthusiasm of pupils from all year groups and we have five new high schools all set up to deliver the message post exams. These pupils are from all year groups in the school and have worked very well, building confidence. The primary school pupils enjoy the fact that it is their peers who deliver the message and the feedback from the school pupils and teachers has been excellent.

Prior to the presentation, young people are 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 demonstrate changes in attitudes and behaviour as a result of the inputs and highlights that information is being retained. These surveys are completed during PSE classes before and a few months after the presentation. This has proven to be an excellent opportunity to talk with the pupils and gain more feedback.

## Reflections

The main lessons learned are how supportive young people can be and also just how far reaching the impact of the deaths in the quarry had been. The number of volunteers and peer mentors was unexpected and the emotional outpouring following the events revealed that the subject was important to the whole community. The sustainability of the project has been strengthened not only on a local level but nationally following the Parliamentary Debate (March 2016) which concluded that young people should be the '*target of future preventative work as prevention would always be more effective than an emergency rescue*'.

## Additional Information

It should be noted that Gillian Barclay has been awarded an MBE for her work around water safety.

Article, Scottish Community Safety Awards 2016:

<http://www.safercommunitiesscotland.org/2016/09/05/902/>

[Water Safety Scotland](#): Scotland's Drowning Prevention Strategy 2018-2026:

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