

RNLI | Research Project ID: 13:2

Evaluation of Swim Safe

Sponsor: RNLI Coastal Safety and Amateur Swimming Association (ASA)
Department: RNLI Operations Research Unit
Date started: July 2014
Date completed: August 2014
Contractor: Cloud Chamber
Principal researcher: Matthew Terry

Summary

During the Summer of 2014, the RNLI, in partnership with the ASA, ran open water swimming safety lessons, called Swim Safe, for 7–14 year olds.

This evaluation of the project assessed that Swim Safe 2014 met its overall objectives – 3,287 children (target 3,000 children) attended sessions across four locations (target three locations).

Children increased their awareness of the dangers of cold water and swimming in the sea, for example by taking part in water-based practical sessions involving self-rescue and survival skills.

They also improved their ability to recognise a lifeguard and beach safety flags, and increased their knowledge of how to respond appropriately if they, or someone else, got into trouble in the water.



Background to the project

Swim Safe 2014 provided free lessons to children aged 7–14 years, who were already competent in swimming 25m, with the aim of learning about the differences between swimming in a pool and the challenges of swimming in open water.

The swimming sessions were run by Amateur Swimming Association (ASA) staff, with the support of RNLI staff and other volunteers across the sites.

The key objectives were to:

- deliver 3,000 open water safety sessions across three sites
- increase awareness of the dangers of cold water and swimming in the sea
- change behaviours towards the risk of cold water swimming and sea swimming
- gain skills to enjoy the beach environment safely
- reduce child drowning around the coast and inland waters.

Children undertook practical and land-based safety activities, reinforcing the behaviours required to successfully meet the project's objectives.

The project looked to increase knowledge specifically around the following areas:

- recognising a lifeguard
- understanding safety flags
- how to get help if they or someone get into trouble in the water
- awareness of the SAFE safety code
 - **S**pot the dangers (tides, waves, rip currents, cliffs and rocks). If it looks dangerous it probably is.
 - **A**lways go with a friend.
 - **F**ind and follow the safety signs and flags.
 - **E**mergency – put your hand up and shout or ring 999/112.

Table 1: Swim Safe logic model

Rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every year nine children drown on the coast of the UK. • RNLI lifeguards attend over 100 serious incidents involving children every year. • The 2013 school swimming census states that 51% of children aged 7–11 years cannot swim 25m unaided.
Objectives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To provide free Swim Safe lessons to up to 3,000 children aged 7–14 years in three locations around the English coast in 2014. • To increase the awareness of the dangers of cold water and swimming in the sea among children and parents. • To reduce child drowning around the coast and inland in open water.
Inputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • £110,000 budget (RNLI and ASA). • Other staff and administration costs (RNLI and ASA). • Local partner contributions. • Volunteer time.
Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lesson development. • Staff and volunteer recruitment. • Communications and marketing. • Staff and volunteer training. • Lesson delivery. • Evaluation.
Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Minimum 1,800 participating children. • Three main lesson sites in 2014.
Outcomes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children learn key safety messages about cold water and sea swimming. • Children learn cold water swimming and survival skills. • Parents are more aware of how to safeguard their children on the beach. • Parents and children make safer swimming decisions. • Participants increase their engagement with the RNLI and the ASA.
Impact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Child fatalities from drowning around the coast and inland in open water are reduced by 2024. • Serious incidents involving children around the coast and inland in open water are reduced by 2024.



Evaluation aim and objectives

The aim of the evaluation of Swim Safe is to assess if the project has developed the understanding of and changed behaviours towards the risks of cold water and sea swimming.

The objectives of the evaluation are to:

- record evidence of the children's learning pre and post Swim Safe
- assess the project's cost
- identify ways in which the project can be improved.



Photo: RNLI/Simon Cullford

Method and approach

The evaluation of Swim Safe took place during the Summer of 2014 with the pre and post evaluations being carried out during July and August 2014. Follow-up evaluations were conducted in September and October 2014.

The most significant source of evidence for the evaluation came from five surveys conducted with children and parents who participated in Swim Safe. These comprised:

- pre and post-session face-to-face surveys with participating children
- follow-up online survey sent to children 2 months after the end of the project
- pre and post-session face-to-face surveys of accompanying parents.

The surveys included whether parents and children:

- **knowledge**
 - have a better understanding of the risks of open water swimming and how to be safe
 - recognising a lifeguard
 - understanding safety flags
 - getting into trouble
 - SAFE safety code
- **behaviour**
 - enjoy open water swimming in a safe way
 - changing behaviour

- **attitude**

- reduce their tolerance of risk

- confidence children have in swimming alone in the sea
 - recognising risks
 - swimming in the sea and indoors.

The face-to-face surveys were carried out by RNLI and ASA volunteers and a market research company. Cloud Chamber was deliberately not involved in the primary fieldwork in order to test the capacity of the project to collect its own evaluation evidence.

The follow-up survey was completed by children at home, although this introduced the potential for them to seek help with its completion.



Photo: RNLI/Nathan Williams

Analysis

Participation by site

Swim Safe took place in four locations:

Table 2

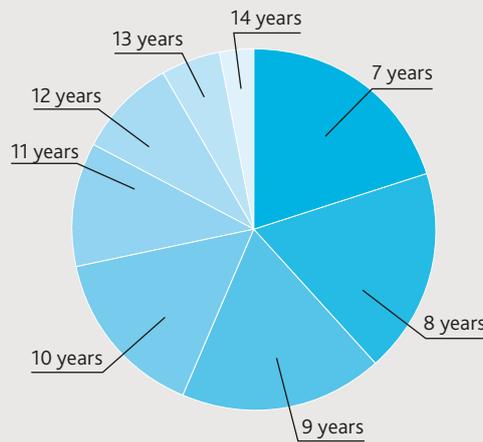
Location	Number
Boscombe	1,071
Bude	1,280
Sandhaven	652
Windermere	284
Total	3,287

The participants' postcodes and the Government's Index of Multiple Deprivation indicated that Sandhaven had a disproportionately high number of participants from deprived areas of England compared with both the national average and the other two coastal sites. In Boscombe and Bude, participants were more likely to live in some of the least deprived areas of the country.

Participation by age

The open water swimming safety lessons were attended by children aged 7–14 years.

Figure 1



Overview of participation

Table 3

Number of delivery days	78
Number of lessons provided	363
Mean number of children per lesson	10
Estimated cost per participant	£37 [†]
Daily participation range per site	2 to 167

[†]The estimated cost per participant does not include the time of the salaried project managers of the ASA and RNLI.

Media coverage

Swim Safe received coverage in newspapers, radio and television local to the delivery sites. Total print and broadcast media reach exceeded 3.4M people, giving an advertising value equivalent of £63,480. Most of the media coverage was strongly favourable and highlighted the RNLI–ASA delivery partnership.

Response rates

The response rates for the surveys are set out in Tables 4 and 5. The largest response rate was for the pre-session children's survey.



Photo: Adrian Don

Table 4: Survey response rates (number) – children

	Boscombe	Bude	Sandhaven	Windermere	Total	Confidence interval for total (at 95%)
Pre-session	140	55	32	–	227	6.28
Post-session	95	38	18	–	151	7.79
Follow-up	9	16	12	8	45	14.51

Table 5: Survey response rates (number) – adults

	Boscombe	Bude	Sandhaven	Total	Confidence interval for total (at 95%)†
Pre-session	100	51	26	177	7.17
Post-session	75	37	17	129	8.46

†based on number of participating children

Within this overall sample, there was a matched pair analysis for 134 children and 104 parents. Overall, the matched pair results were very close to the full sample results.

The tables show confidence intervals for the surveys based on the 3,287 children who participated and a 95% confidence level.

A confidence interval of 5 is normally considered as good, and 10 as fair. Only the follow-up survey has a larger confidence interval than we would ideally like for this sort of analysis, and the results from this survey therefore need to be treated with a degree of caution.

The confidence intervals for sub-groups within the project (for example at the level of individual project sites) are likely to be bigger and therefore the results will be less robust.



Photo: RNLI/David Ferguson



Photo: RNLI/Nathan Williams

Outcomes

Parents said that the main motivation for signing up their children to Swim Safe was to improve their safety and safety awareness on the beach and in the water (cited by more than 80% of respondents). Improving their children's swimming confidence and having fun were the next most important reasons given (cited by more than 50% of respondents).

With the Swim Safe project, children most enjoyed:

- being in the waves
- swimming
- bodysurfing
- learning about how to be safe (for example flags and survival skills).

Feedback has been very positive:

- Children rated Swim Safe 9.3 out of 10 for enjoyment.
- Parents rated Swim Safe 9.6 out of 10 for usefulness.

Table 6: Measuring outcomes

Outcome	Comment	Rating	Strength of evidence
Knowledge	Children improved their ability to recognise a lifeguard and beach safety flags; and increased their knowledge of how to respond appropriately if they, or someone else, get into trouble in the water.	+++	Strong
Attitude	Children were better at recognising the risks of open water swimming after Swim Safe. Their nervousness about swimming in open water decreased after taking part.	+++	Strong
Behaviour	The majority of children who had been swimming since their Swim Safe lesson said that they had changed their behaviour as a result, for example by avoiding swimming near rocks or going into the sea alone. Three-quarters said that they had shared their Swim Safe lessons with others.	+++	Moderate
Engagement	Evidence was not collected for this outcome.	N/A	No evidence

Key to table

Rating	Strength of evidence		
+++	Outcome is being fully achieved.	Very strong	Statistically rigorous experimental research, for example randomised controlled trial.
++	Outcome is being achieved to a great extent	Strong	Baseline and follow-up research – statistically and methodologically strong.
+	Outcome is being partially achieved.	Moderate	Baseline and follow-up research – may lack good response rate and/or comparator.
0	Outcome appears unaffected by the intervention.	Weak	Reasonable volumes of methodically collected retrospective anecdotal evidence.
-	Intervention appears to be driving the opposite outcome.	Very weak	Very limited amounts of evidence from ad-hoc anecdotal sources.

Key findings

The survey evidence indicates that Swim Safe met its objective to increase awareness of the dangers of cold water and swimming in the sea among its participants. It is too early to judge whether Swim Safe will meet its objective to reduce child drowning in open water, but the outcome evidence suggests that the right behavioural change is being made.

Swim Safe participants appear to be changing their behaviour, and making safer decisions, as a result of their improved knowledge and awareness of open water swimming.

Content

Awareness of many of the main safety messages was already high among children before they attended Swim Safe. The session content should be reviewed to ensure its relevance to the target audience.

Targeting

The RNLI might want to consider whether Swim Safe might be more precisely targeted, for example to those at most risk or with least prior knowledge/experience of open water

swimming. This may well have implications for the scheme's marketing, content and site selection. Overall participation numbers might also be lower as a result.

Partnership

More opportunities should be provided for the RNLI and ASA delivery staff to meet each other and plan together, in advance of the Summer sessions, before they have to deliver the sessions. Ensuring a clear, mutual understanding of partner objectives will be important if different Swim Safe delivery/partnership models are considered in future.

Marketing

The RNLI and ASA should promote Swim Safe earlier in the Summer to boost numbers in general, but also to encourage pre-booking, which should help to smooth out variations in participation volumes. However, it is recognised that the weather will remain a major factor in people's decisions to participate.

Inputs and cost

Closer monitoring of inputs, including volunteer time and the contributions of

partners will be important to improve future analysis of the project's cost, and to demonstrate the scheme's value for money to other potential delivery partners.

At present, we have limited data on the resources deployed for Swim Safe in 2014, and no obvious comparators against which we can compare the project in terms of its cost. Our analysis of the cost of the pilot might perhaps be better seen as a benchmark against which the project can be measured over future years.

Surveys

Participant surveys are crucial to understanding the success of the scheme, but some of the questionnaires might be reduced in length to avoid overburdening the delivery team, while encouraging better response rates.

Monitoring data

On-site data entry of registration and survey evidence would improve the efficiency of collecting data for the purpose of monitoring and evaluating the project.

How the RNLI is using the evidence

The RNLI's Community Safety Team is using the evidence to continue to promote key safety messages through running and expanding Swim Safe to existing and new locations in 2015. We are continuing to work in partnership with the ASA to deliver Swim Safe messages to promote safe behaviours and increase safety knowledge among children aged 7–14 years and their parents, enabling them to enjoy open water swimming safely.



Further reading

International Journal of Aquatic Research and Education, 2013, 7, 301–313: Human Kinetics, Inc.

Acknowledgement and thanks

The RNLI would like to thank Cloud Chamber for their work on this evaluation and for their invaluable advice and assistance. Thanks must also go to the team at the ASA as our partners in delivering this project, volunteers who gave up their time for Swim Safe, children and parents that took part in the surveys, and Field and Fab for undertaking the surveys.

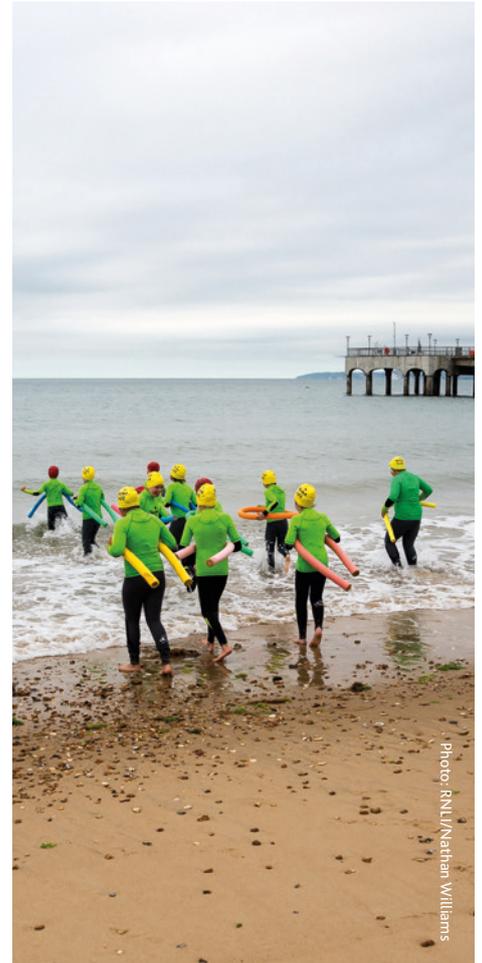


Photo: RNLI/Nathan Williams



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