



HELPING OLDER ADULTS TO BECOME EVERYDAY LIFESAVERS

A social inclusion and health project for over 60's

2014

Suggested citation

Birch, R., and Matthews, B. (2014). *Helping Older Adults to Become Everyday Lifesavers: A social inclusion and health project for over 60's*. Life Saving Victoria: Melbourne.

Program Partners



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Background

Life Saving Victoria's (LSV) *Helping Older Adults to Become Everyday Lifesavers* project is a pilot aquatics and health promotion program targeted at seniors, and the first of its kind in Victoria. Delivered from April to June 2014, and supported by the Lord Mayor's Charitable Foundation, the program is an example of a programmatic response to the issue of drowning deaths in adults aged over 60. Alarming, adults over 60 years have the highest age-specific drowning rate in Victoria, with this age group seeing a 65% increase in the drowning rate in 2012/13, compared to the 10 year average (2002-2012) (Life Saving Victoria, 2013). Furthermore, a staggering 54% of drowning victims aged over 60 did not intend to enter the water; rather they slipped or fell in. The most common factor contributing to drowning incidents in older adults is unintentional entry into the water as a result of slips, trips and falls (Harrison, Kreisfeld & Henley 2009). Another contributing factor is underlying medical conditions (Life Saving Victoria, 2010). Other factors may include: a reliance on water safety skills gained earlier in life, an overestimation of current abilities, reduced fitness levels, increased exposure to water through aquatic activities and time spent near water (due to both increased leisure time and living near the water) (Franklin, Scarr & Pearn, 2010).

Providing water safety education to older Australians is recognised as a nationwide issue. A study of drowning deaths in Australia from 2002-2007 by Franklin et al (2010) revealed that people aged 55 years and over represented 29% of all drowning deaths in Australia in this period. Furthermore, with the population in this age group predicted to grow by 38% by 2020, drowning deaths are likely to increase without immediate intervention. There is therefore a need for a greater focus on re-skilling older Australians, installing improved safety systems in a diverse range of locations and undertaking further research into drowning prevention.

Urgent work is required to address the growing trend in drowning through preventable aquatic incidents among older Victorians. In response to the above-mentioned findings, LSV developed the *Helping Older Adults to Become Everyday Lifesavers* program as a pilot water safety education program. The program incorporated the Royal Life Saving Society's (RLSSA) successful Grey Medallion program; a water safety and lifesaving skills program, with the aim to reduce drowning deaths whilst encouraging a healthy, independent and active lifestyle. The program teaches participants a range of personal survival techniques, provides them with skills to deal with an emergency and develops confidence and competence to enjoy aquatic exercise and other aquatic activities safely. The Victorian model also incorporated sessions on health and well-being, aquatic education and physical aquatic recreation.

This report summarises the evaluation of the pilot Grey Medallion program, to determine the extent to which it may contribute to educating older Victorian's in water safety and preventing aquatic related death and injury to adults over 60 years.

Aims and Objectives

The Grey Medallion Program aimed to teach participants a range of personal survival techniques, provide them with skills to deal with an emergency and develop confidence and competence to enjoy aquatic exercise and other water-based activities safely.

The overall aim of the project was to address the increasing rate of aquatic related drowning deaths of people aged 60 years and over and empower them to recreate safely and confidently within the community. This was measured in terms of the level of achievement of the following Performance Measures:

Increased water safety awareness and knowledge for older adults.

1. Increased awareness of the impact of ageing on water safety.
2. Increased participation in aquatic activities and programs within participants' local communities
3. Increased social inclusion, general health and well-being.
4. Ultimately a reduction in preventable death by drowning rates in Victoria.

Successful completion of this pilot will allow for Victoria's first aquatic participation program aimed at seniors to be implemented across the State for all to access.

Methodology

Program methodology

Pilot facilities

The two pilot facilities selected were in Councils located in the Greater Melbourne region, in which at least 20% of the population is aged 60 and over. The chosen facilities were:

- WaterMarc (Belgravia Leisure), Banyule City, Greensborough
- Ascot Vale Leisure Centre (YMCA Victoria), City of Moonee Valley, Ascot Vale

Program structure

The ten week program was open to all male and female participants aged 60 and over, regardless of cultural background and socio-economic status. LSV and each facility was required to ensure that at least 20 participants were enrolled at each venue. These targets were initially met; however a number of cancellations at Ascot Vale left them with 18. This was offset by WaterMarc allowing additional participants in their pilot.

Four key modules were covered in the ten weekly sessions, modelled on the RLSSA Grey Medallion (see the Appendix 1.1 for details):

1. **Water Safety Knowledge:** Provided each participant with a sound knowledge of the principles of water safety and the ability to apply simple common-sense water safety measures in a range of aquatic locations.
2. **Resuscitation and Emergency Care:** Provided participants with the knowledge and skills of basic resuscitation and emergency care.
3. **Aquatic Exercise:** Provided participants with an understanding of the benefits of regular exercise and to encourage active participation in aquatic exercise appropriate to their ability level.
4. **Personal Survival and Lifesaving Skills:** Provided participants with a range of personal survival and basic lifesaving skills to equip them to deal with an aquatic emergency scenario.

In Victoria, the program also incorporated the following content:

- **Health and well-being:** understanding personal medical conditions and how to recreate safety in the aquatic environment.
- **Aquatic education:** understanding the aquatic environment and safe practices to avoid falls and injury out of the water.
- **Physical aquatic recreation:** increase physical aquatic recreation/fitness within the community as it is a low impact and healthy recreational outlet for seniors.

Evaluation methodology

The LSV Aquatic Risk & Research team evaluated the program by conducting pre- and post-program surveys with participants, and surveys (n=6) and interviews (n=3) of program staff from both facilities.

For participants, four surveys were developed:

- The Grey Medallion pre-program survey collected demographic information, measured existing experience with, and frequency of, aquatic activity and assessed self-reported swimming ability and water safety knowledge and awareness. The Grey Medallion post-program survey evaluated the main elements of the program and measured changes in participants' self-reported water safety knowledge, aquatic skills and knowledge, resuscitation skills and knowledge and whether the program encouraged them to engage in further aquatic activity and/or courses.
- The Health, Wellbeing and Falls pre-program survey contained standardised measures of the health, wellbeing and falls risk of participants. This included the Assessment of Quality of Life (AQoL) Instrument, which measures health-related quality of life (e.g. Illness, independent living, social relationships, physical senses and psychological wellbeing); a modified SF-36 Health Survey with tick-box questions on recent health; and a Modified Falls Efficacy Scale (MFES) section, which asked respondents how confident they were to perform specific activities without falling. The Health, Wellbeing and Falls post-program survey asked the exact same questions as the pre-program survey to allow for a comparison of participants' health, wellbeing and falls risk at the programs' conclusion.

The two pre-program surveys were completed at the beginning of session 1 and the two post-program surveys were answered at the conclusion of the tenth (final) session.

Program staff were surveyed and a selection were interviewed to gain detailed feedback on elements of the program, such as whether the program increased participants' social inclusion, awareness of the effects of ageing on water safety and whether participants have continued visiting their facilities. They were also asked to rate the main elements of the program and suggest any improvements.

Program Evaluation

Participant characteristics

The 41 Grey Medallion participants were aged 61 to 86 years, 74% were female and 88% were retired. Over half (58%) cared for children, and of these carers 71% took care of children under 5 years of age. Participants ranged in their experiences, skill and ability levels, and the program was designed to cater for this variety. One third (31%) had little or no swimming ability, and several even had fears of the water. To address this, WaterMarc offered swimming lessons prior to the program each week and nine participants took up this offer, including one woman who had her first ever swimming lesson at age 78. They came from mixed backgrounds in terms of their aquatic activity levels over the 6 months leading up to the program. One quarter (25%) reportedly went swimming or wading at least weekly, whereas 17% never went, and a further 23.5% attended aqua aerobics classes at least weekly. The main reasons for attending were to learn about resuscitation (84%), to obtain personal survival skills (79%) and to learn basic rescue techniques (77%).

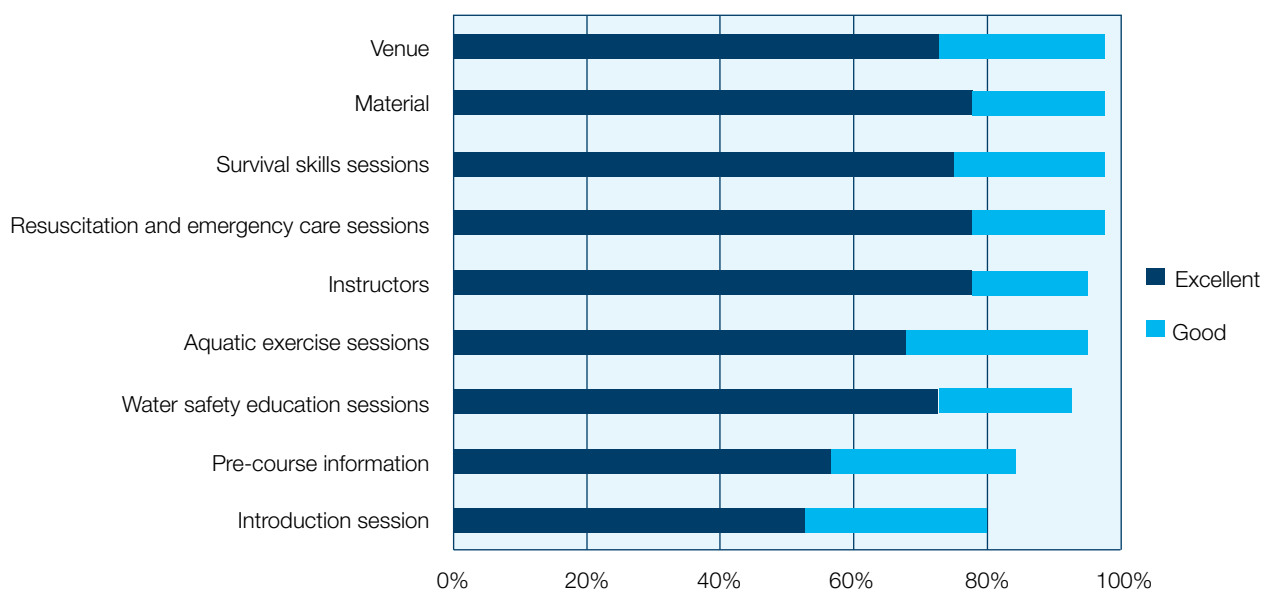
Most people learned about the program through the newspaper (39.5%), their local pool (32.5%) or via friends and family (28%). Five (11.7%) participants had performed CPR on someone before and 16.3% had performed an aquatic rescue.

Program review

Overall, the participants thoroughly enjoyed being involved in the Grey Medallion program. They mentioned how valuable it was in terms of increasing one's water safety knowledge and skills, and their confidence both around the water and in being able to assist others in difficulty. Others mentioned that the program was "well worthwhile for my age group" and especially valuable "for those [who were] afraid of the water or unable to swim". They valued the patience, kindness, understanding, encouragement and organisation shown by program staff as contributing to the program's success.

Many aspects of the program were highly rated, with 98% of participants rating the venues,

Figure 1: Respondent ratings of the Grey Medallion program (%)



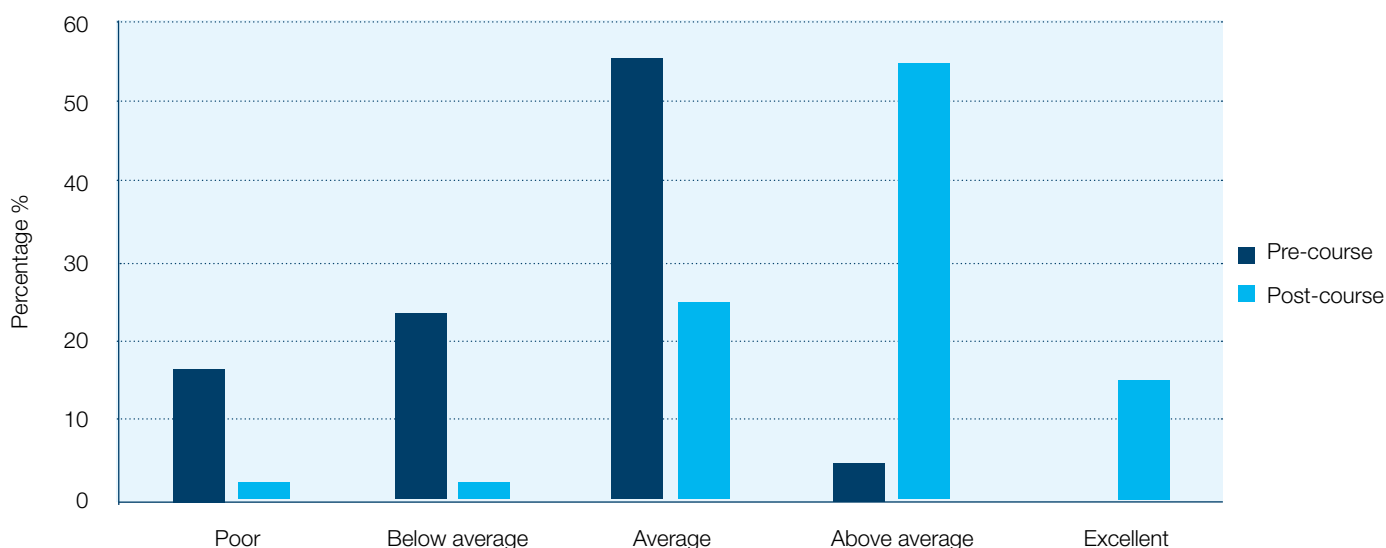


Figure 2: Self-reported water safety knowledge pre and post course

course material, instructors, personal survival skills sessions and resuscitation and emergency care sessions as either good or excellent (Figure 1). Furthermore, most participants rated the instructors (95%), aquatic exercise sessions (95%) and water safety education sessions (93%) as good or excellent.

Suggested improvements for the program focussed largely on more practical activities and less theory, including more time spent on swimming skills and a formal CPR qualification. A number of participants and program staff suggested that swimming lessons should be offered prior to any future course; a suggestion implemented by WaterMarc staff during the pilot. The number of sessions generally seemed appropriate for the course.

The following results are reported against the five performance measures listed in the Aims and Objectives and are based on feedback provided by participants and program staff at WaterMarc and Ascot Vale Leisure Centre. In overview, the Grey Medallion program was considered a great success by the trial participants and program staff. All participants reported that they would recommend the

program to their peers. All program staff surveyed and interviewed would also recommend the program to other facilities, because of the positive changes they observed occurring in the participants.

Water safety awareness and knowledge for older adults

Participants were asked the same questions before and after the program to measure any changes in their water safety skills and knowledge, with considerable improvements observed in all areas. The results below highlight the effectiveness of the Grey Medallion program in providing the over 60 age group with valuable water safety knowledge and lifelong skills that may one day save their life, or that of another person.

Before the first session, 40% of participants self-reported their water safety knowledge as either below average or poor and 5% reported it as above average. After the final session 70% rated their knowledge as above average or excellent (Figure 2). Similarly, the proportion who thought they possessed sufficient knowledge of water safety issues to avoid getting into hazardous situations in and around

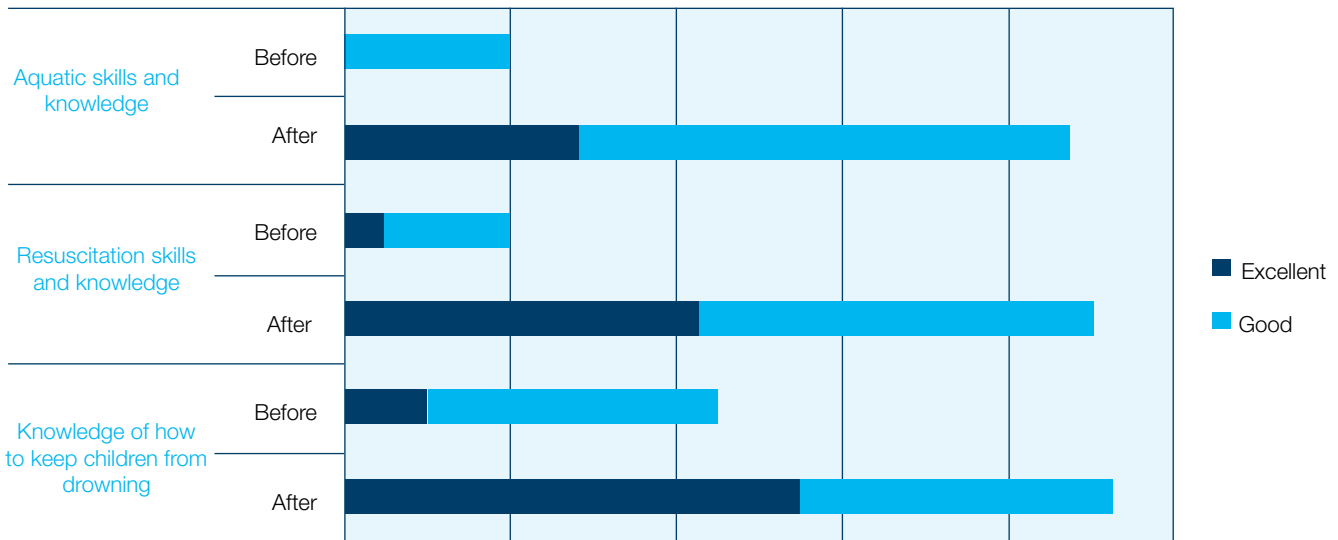


Figure 3: Self-reported changes in specific skills and knowledge (%)

water increased from 47% to 95%. All program staff agreed that participants left with sufficient water safety knowledge.

Vast improvements were also reported for specific skills and knowledge (Figure 3). There was a 70% increase in the proportion of participants who self-reported their resuscitation skills and knowledge as good or excellent, a 67% increase in terms of aquatic skills and knowledge and a 48% increase in self-reported knowledge of how to keep children in their care safe from drowning. All program staff observed an overall increase in the skills and knowledge of participants, indicating the effectiveness of the program in providing important skills to older adults.

Program staff felt the course made participants realise how much they did not know about being safe in and around water. For many, they had never experienced anything like the Grey Medallion and were exposed to many concepts that they had never heard before, but which could significantly improve their ability to cope with an accidental fall into water, to assist someone else in need, to remain calm in an emergency and understand the effects of

ageing (including the side effects of medication), as discussed below. Many were not familiar with being immersed in water, had never had swimming and water safety lessons or never worn a lifejacket and so on. The program exposed them to these new experiences whilst teaching valuable survival skills.

Participants also described an increased confidence around water after completing the course, with many reporting they felt a lot more confident engaging in aquatic exercise (74%), supervising children in their care (63%) and using personal survival skills (including entry and exits into water) (55%). Two thirds (66%) did not see significant improvement in their confidence when undertaking resuscitation; which aligns with common feedback by participants that there needed to be a greater focus on practical activities and the interest shown in participating in further CPR and First Aid courses.

Awareness of the impact of ageing on water safety

The impacts of ageing on water safety were addressed in the course material. This included how medical conditions, medications, reduced fitness and an increased falls risk can impede ones' health and physical capabilities in and around water. Whilst a directly measurable increase in this understanding was not available, the overwhelming improvement in participants' overall understanding of safe behaviour in and around water, relevant to their lifestyles, suggests this knowledge also improved. After completion of the course 95% of participants correctly identified multiple medications and 90% identified low levels of fitness as factors that can increase the risk of drowning. Furthermore, the proportion of participants that thought drowning in people aged over 55 years of age is totally preventable increased from 21% at the program's start to 48% by the final session. A program staff member mentioned that these new experiences were thoroughly enjoyed by participants and that they responded positively to the challenges they faced.

Participation in aquatic activities and programs

As a result of the Grey Medallion program, three quarters (76%) of participants were reportedly considering participating in more aquatic activities and programs in future. The most popular activities considered were aqua aerobics (45% of participants), recreational swimming (40%) and lap swimming (30%). Fifteen per cent were also considering enrolling in formal swimming lessons. Program staff have observed this directly since their programs ended, with a number returning regularly to their centres to do activities such as group aqua aerobics, swim lessons and socialising. One participant mentioned how they "experienced the joy in the water, which I felt when I was many years younger. This makes me feel keen to start aquatic exercise ... again and continue doing it." Furthermore, almost half (45%) were interested in gaining a formal First Aid certificate since being given an introduction to these skills.

Health and well-being

The survey results suggest the Grey Medallion program has made some positive improvements to participants' health and wellbeing. Of note is the fact that the program motivated 90% of participants to increase their efforts to improve their health and wellbeing following the program.

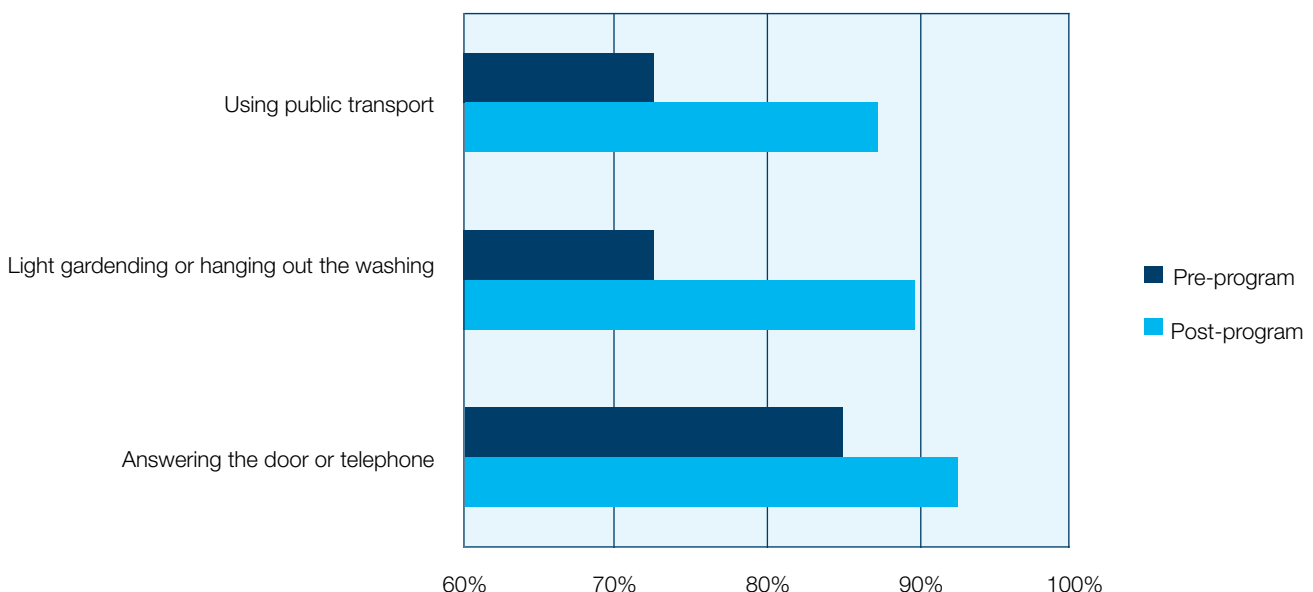
The Health, Wellbeing and Falls survey highlighted statistically significant changes in participant's health over the 4 weeks prior to taking the survey pre- and post-program, with the proportion reporting their health as excellent increasing from 26% pre-course to 74% post-course, and the proportion who said they were "not limited at all" by their health when lifting or carrying groceries increasing from 82.5% to 87.2%.

The Modified Falls Efficacy Scale (MFES) rated the level of confidence a respondent has to perform specific activities without falling. Following the program, there were significant increases in the proportion of participants who felt 'completely confident' to answer the door or telephone, do light gardening or hanging out the washing, and use public transport (Figure 4).

There were no significant changes in any other aspects of the Health, Wellbeing and Falls survey in regards to illness, independent living, social relationships, physical services and psychological wellbeing. This is not overly surprising given the short-term nature of the program. Long-term changes may be observed with continued participation in aquatic activities.

Several participants highlighted the social and wellbeing benefits the program brought, with a number mentioning how much fun they had together as a group, alongside other positive comments such as "the socialisation was fantastic, [I am] sorry the course has ended!" and that, "we have certainly proved that 'you are never too old to learn something new'". One participant creatively summarised the key learnings and positive experiences of the Grey Medallion program in a poem, which demonstrates the immense value and enjoyment the program provided to some (see Appendix 1.2). Program staff observed these increases in social inclusion and health and wellbeing of participants both during and after their programs. At WaterMarc, participants "were supportive and encouraging

Figure 4: Changes in self-reported confidence to perform specific activities without falling (%)



of each other” and after the program ended, staff were told that the Grey Medallion program was “the best thing they’ve ever done”. Program staff have since seen a number of participants attend their facilities to engage in physical activity and to catch up with friends, including other Grey Medallion program participants, which indicates ongoing improvements in terms of wellbeing and social inclusion.

A reduction in preventable death by drowning rates in Victoria

While a short-term program for just 41 participants will not have direct or immediate impact on reducing drowning rates in Victoria, the results of this program has shown that not only did participants learn to understand the risks associated with being in and around water, how to keep themselves safe, they also learnt to be vigilant of others in their care, to perform simple rescues and the principles of CPR. The impact this program has reportedly had on those involved could be replicated if it was expanded to a greater number of over 60’s in Victoria. This could certainly be an effective method of addressing the alarming increase in drowning deaths in this age group whilst educating older Victorian’s on important information that many otherwise would not know.

Participants were asked what they would be willing to pay per session to attend a Grey Medallion program, with 66% saying they would pay \$4 to \$5. A further 24% would pay \$6 to \$10 and 5% would pay over \$10 per session. For future programs to be independently run, it is likely that cost would become a limiting factor for many if it were \$6 or more per session (for a total of ten sessions). However, LSV established that if the funding did not exist, the cost per participant (excluding LSV full time staff costs and the LSV evaluation) would have been approximately \$127 per participant. A charge of \$6 per session (that is, \$60 for the full 10 session program) would result in a funding gap of \$67

per person. Successful completion of this pilot can now provide the impetus for Victoria’s first aquatic participation program aimed at seniors to be implemented across the state for all to access. Sustainability and longevity of programs such as the Grey Medallion will rely on LSV and key individuals willing to champion the program, while continuing to explore opportunities to develop sustainable cost models that are realistic to the target demographic.

Conclusions

The *Helping Older Adults to Become Everyday Lifesavers* program was a great success for participants and program staff alike and has demonstrated improvements in water safety knowledge and general wellbeing, from a water safety and lifesaving skills program for older adults. Everyone involved rated the majority of program elements as either good or excellent and everyone would recommend the program to other senior Victorians or aquatic facilities.

Feedback from the participants and program staff suggests that the pilot's aims were met. All involved reported growth in participants' water safety awareness and knowledge, including resuscitation skills and knowledge and understanding how to keep children in their care safe from drowning. They also demonstrated an increased awareness of the impact of ageing on water safety, including the effects of medical conditions, medications, reduced fitness and falls risk. Furthermore, many would consider participating in more aquatic activities following the course (e.g. aqua aerobics and recreational swimming) and there was interest in completing

a first aid qualification and/or resuscitation certificate. Program staff observed increased participation in aquatic activities within their facilities and it is anticipated that this has made a positive step to improving the social inclusion, general health and well-being of those involved.

It is intended that successful completion of this pilot will lead to the rollout Victoria's first aquatic participation program aimed at seniors across the state. Sustainability and longevity of programs such as the Grey Medallion relies on key individuals willing to champion the program and the development of further strategies for its' promotion, development and sustainability. The *Helping Older Adults Become Everyday Lifesavers* program has the potential to meet the final aim of reducing drowning deaths of people aged 60 years and over in Victoria, whilst empowering them to recreate safely and confidently within their community.

References

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Appendices

1.1 Program schedule

Week	Module	Session	Duration
1	Introduction	Welcome Program Overview Pre- Program Survey (establish prior knowledge) Morning Tea	1.5 hours
2	Module 1: Water Safety Knowledge (theory)	Personal Water Safety Keep Watch Morning Tea	1.5 hours
3	Module 1: Water Safety Knowledge (theory) Module 2: Resuscitation & Emergency Care (theory)	Aquatic Environments Aquatic Activities Guest Presenter – LSV Lifeguard Introduction to Resuscitation Morning Tea	1.5 hours
4	Module 2: Resuscitation & Emergency Care (theory/practical)	Resuscitation Morning Tea	1.5 hours
5	Module 3: Aquatic Exercise (theory/practical)	Introduction to the Pool and tour of the facility Aquatic Exercise for Health and Wellbeing Guest Presenter – Facility Manager Morning Tea	1.5 hours
6	Module 3: Aquatic Exercise (theory/practical)	Water Familiarisation Guest Presenter - Aqua Aerobics Instructor Morning Tea	1.5 hours
7	Module 3: Aquatic Exercise (theory/practical)	Introduction to Swimming Strokes Morning Tea	1.5 hours
8	Module 4: Personal Survival and Lifesaving Skills (theory/practical)	Entries and Exits Survival Techniques and Strategies Morning Tea	1.5 hours
9	Module 4: Personal Survival and Lifesaving Skills (theory/practical)	Rescue Principles Non-Swimming Rescues (reach & throw) Morning Tea	1.5 hours
10	Conclusion Graduation Ceremony	Revision What next? Pathways and Future Opportunities Post- Program Survey / Program Evaluation Morning Tea Presentation to Participants Media and Photos	2 hours

1.2 Poem by Grey Medallion participant

GREY MEDALLION

Never too young to learn Never too old to start



Thoughts on the Grey Medallion
By Paul Drinkwater, "Everyday Lifesaver"
June 2014



We saw the notice in the local "Leader"
Calling for us folk, grey, but keen and eager
To undertake a course quite new all around
To help to keep us safe and sound
When water should, us surround

But do we need this you might ask?
We surely are equal to the task
For we are wise and can fish and sail
This course is surely to no avail

You are wise and you can sail,
But at times your bodies can you fail
Wisely says our teacher Gail," and whilst I
don't want to put you down
You are over represented in those who
drown"

With water water everywhere, whatever
can we do?
Read the signs and read them well, a little
common sense helps too
At the beach between the flags as has been
told
And remember lakes and rivers can be cold

And on the domestic front pools and ponds
should have fencing
To keep those little ones from water so, so
tempting

When you fish or swim or boat
The wise man takes something that stays
afloat

Mae West says PFD's are best
But there is plenty that can be done with
the rest
Kickboards, Eskies are all just fine
Even the bladder from a cask of wine

If someone in the water needs our help
It is most important to protect our pelt
Things that float or rope or twine
Should be the things that we use first line

If in the water cold, when needing help
First of all do not yelp,
Try to keep warm with HELP
Better still form a huddle
Us oldies still love a cuddle

Resuscitation in a thing most unamusing
With terms like CPR and AED most
confusing
Remember in this situation, to not panic is
like gold
And DRSABCD Favours the bold

What fun, what fun we all had
We learned that boogie boards with fins
are not so bad
How to tow and how to leap
And even rescue from the deep

We thank you Gail, we thank you Sam
We thank you, thank you Gail and Sam
For you have taught us what we oughta
Know about safety in the water

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