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Annual Report 2009

The core of the Sri Lanka Women's Swimming Project activities in 2009 has been to continue to support the thriving and firmly established Women Only Swimming at the Lighthouse Community Swimming Pool in Galle, on the south coast of Sri Lanka, where between 35 and 60 women and teenage girls at a time have come for free swimming lessons provided by local female teachers trained and paid for by the Project.



Galle, in the south of Sri Lanka



Speedo-equipped swimming teachers

The Sri Lanka Women's Swimming Project is especially grateful, firstly to the Irish Lifesaving Foundation and, secondly to the Rotary Club of Marlow and individuals for their financial support, which has enabled the women's swimming to continue throughout 2009 and, finally, to Speedo International for their donation of swimwear, sports bags and rucksacks for the Project's local swimming teachers.

The year has been spent advancing and energising the current swimming teachers to greater levels of responsibility and skill. For the first time, the Project has taught male as well as female swimmers. In April, Christina Fonfe presented a report on the Sri Lanka Women's Swimming Project to the Hong Kong Conference of the International Federation of Swimming Teachers Associations, IFSTA. Following the Conference, Chris adopted the new IFSTA 'Can Swim' Standard as the Project swimming qualification goal.



Pilot Group of International 'I Can Swim' Certificate Holders in Sri Lanka



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The Project's pilot scheme to introduce the new IFSTA standard was a great success and began with the development of a set of practical tests to certify swimmers. Male and female non-swimmers were drawn from the staff of local hotels on the south coast which possessed swimming pools the Project could use and these students were taught to the new standard. The full International *I Can Swim* Certificate was awarded to all those who could jump into deep water till completely submerged, come to the surface and float continuously for ten minutes, then swim an unbroken 100 metres without touching the pool sides or floor and complete the session by climbing out of the pool, unassisted, over a ledge 30 cm above the pool water level.



Chris Fonfe gets non-swimming sari-clad school teachers to float in Speedo-donated swimsuits in just one lesson

It was a huge achievement by the IFSTA to get the international community of swimming teachers representing so many countries to agree a universal definition of 'Can Swim'. The Project has always demanded mastery of being able to float and breathe for an extended period as a serious enhancement to survivability in water; it was therefore very gratifying to find that the simple and easily achieved concept of **Float and Breathe** has been incorporated into an international standard to reduce global death by drowning.

The Project was also very grateful to have Philippa, a volunteer Australian swimming teacher, on loan from Adopt Sri Lanka. She helped to recruit and motivate more local women in the local community to come and have swimming lessons. Philippa also helped our local swimming teachers manage the expanded throughput.

Looking ahead, the immediate goal for 2010 is to train new swimming teachers to sustain and expand current swimming operations. The Project aims to qualify swimming teachers to internationally recognised IFSTA standards using the proprietary American Total Immersion method. As in previous years, the Project continues to strive to find swimming pools on the south coast of Sri Lanka, so that free swimming lessons can continue to be given to the rural and coastal poor who live close to water and to make them safe.

The Project's long-term goal is still to seek an inexpensive permanent, residentially-based swimming teaching facility as the optimum solution for the greatest output of swimmers and swimming teachers. The ultimate aim of the Project is to make the teaching of swimming to international standards a universally self-sufficient micro-economic operation within every local community, run by the locals for themselves.

In conclusion, the Trustees and Operatives of the Sri Lanka Women's Swimming Project are grateful to participate in this great leap forward in the advancement of saving lives by teaching swimming so that in every remote village and hamlet, people may say '*I can swim. Can you?*' and reply with '*Yes, I can swim.*'