

The Royal Lesotho Lifesaving Association



The Lifesaving Foundation has been providing The Royal Lesotho Lifesaving Association with grants for over 10 years. The grants are primarily used to fund schools based water safety classes.

In September 2010 a youth drowned while taking part in a lifesaving training session. He was attempting to rescue two other students in difficulty when he submerged and drowned. The other students were assisted unharmed from the water by instructors. All classes were cancelled and an investigation initiated. The investigation established that Lesotho has no formal water safety or lifesaving award schemes of its own. Consequently a request was received from The Royal Lesotho Lifesaving Association for assistance to carry out a lifesaving skills audit and advice on the establishment of national award schemes suitable for local needs and conditions.

South African lifesaver Pat Wilcox travelled to Lesotho in April 2011 at the Foundation's request, spending 5 days there advising the RLLA. Classes have now been re-started and a new Lesotho award scheme created.



Report On The Visit By Pat Wilcox To Lesotho

Pat Wilcox visited Lesotho, arriving on 29th April and leaving on 3rd May. She met with Stephen Mabula, Director of Lesotho Durham Link, with the commanders of the Army and Police diving units, with Herbert Mabula, supervisor of the pool at Lekahoe Club and with other leaders of RLLA. It was agreed that she would concentrate on the young people in school on the Saturday and Sunday, and assess the Police, Army and LDL on Monday. It transpired in the discussions that the Police and Army personnel had trained as divers, not lifesavers and were not fully familiar with lifesaving skills. It was agreed that for them, Monday would be a training session rather than an assessment.

As soon as we arrived at Lekahoe Club on Saturday morning, we found it closed due to a water problem. The water problem affected the whole of that area of the town and took two days to fix. Herbert sorted things out at the pool and opened it for us. It proved a blessing in disguise, as we had the place to ourselves. Even on the Monday, when the club had originally told us that we could not have the use of the pool, there were so few members around that we were allowed to stay for the whole day.

There were 23 young people there who had passed their LDL Level 1 certificate, 10 of whom had been working with me as instructors in 2010 and 2011. There were also 22 others who had done some training under my young instructors. Some of these had been assessed as competent and told that they would qualify once we had certificates to give them. There were also 8 members of the national swimming team, who had not done lifesaving.

Pat first assessed the CPR and found all the 23 to be competent. In the afternoon, she had the young instructors and others who had passed Level 1 act as assessors for the rest, both at CPR and in the water. She observed their assessment and 11 of the trainees were agreed to have passed. On the Sunday afternoon she assessed the instructors for Bronze Medallion. On Monday she assessed the professional people, that is Army, Police, LDL instructors and a few others who were available on that day, though as stated above, it was a training session not an assessment for the Army and Police.

Pat met with RLLA executive on Monday evening to report on the events of the week-end. Pat and I had a meeting on Tuesday morning at which we discussed in more detail the question of awards, examiners and instructors. We agreed that we should follow the Commonwealth Levels 1 to 4, as published in the book "Starting Lifesaving". We agreed that there could be a "Basic Certificate" after Level 3, which would be equivalent to the LDL Level 1, then an "Intermediate Certificate" after Level 4. There would be a "Lesotho Bronze Medallion" which would follow the UK syllabus approximately, though there could be some amendments to take account of Lesotho's conditions. Lesotho's conditions include the fact that few swimmers have received formal training, so insistence on particular strokes might not be appropriate, and times should be looked at carefully to make sure they are realistically attainable. It was her recommendation that if the assessment is done in a pool there should also be an open water component such as a 200 or 400m swim to be done in a dam. We discussed the safety aspects of assessing this, and agreed that where possible swimmers should be accompanied by a boat or rescue board, failing which they should wear life jackets and swim parallel to the shore just out of standing depth. Another situation common in Lesotho is drowning in fast flowing streams when in flood after heavy rain. We would like to include something relevant to this, though we accept that it is almost impossible to teach and assess under realistic conditions, and official guidelines are difficult to find. It might have to be taught in theory only. If you have anything relevant in the way of instructions or rescue methods for this situation it would be very helpful.

She also recommended that we establish a higher level award which would be recognised for employment purposes, either for employment as lifeguards or as part of a course such as Diploma in P.E. As Lesotho has no legal requirement that any person should employ lifeguards, there are at present few opportunities, though there are two internationally owned hotels which might do so. We shall examine the Lifeguard syllabuses from Commonwealth, South Africa and ILS, and hold discussions with any institutions offering Diplomas in P.E.

I am happy to report that the visit was a great success. It featured on Lesotho TV news on Sunday evening, and was reported in two weekly newspapers. I believe it has given us the start we need to set up our own system of awards. The Durham Link instructors have been assessed and we have the examiners, in particular Herbert Mabula, who can coach them. They also have a qualified swimming coach from UK, wife of one of the instructors, who can help them, though she does not profess to have lifesaving qualifications.

Thank you very much for your help.

COLIN G. MACDONALD, President, RLLA

Although the visit of Pat Wilcox to Lesotho took place after the time period covered by this report I believe it desirable to include the following as her visit was planned and financially supported during the 2010 financial year. - John Connolly.