

Charity offering live-saving lessons

READY, SET, SWIM! PULLS IN \$70K AT LAUNCH EVENT, FIRST LESSONS BEGIN IN APRIL

By: Danielle Da Silva

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As winter begins to melt away, a group of 50 newcomer and low-income kids will be getting set for summer by taking their first strokes under the watchful eye of trained swim instructors.

Rishona Hyman is the founder of Ready, Set, Swim!, a new charitable foundation that offers free water safety education and swimming lessons to young people between six and 18 years old, with the purpose of preventing drownings in Manitoba's rivers, lakes and pools.

Hyman, a certified lifeguard and swim instructor, said too often over the course of her career she's seen kids — whether a part of a swim group or school class — who are out of their depth in the water and overestimate their abilities.

"There's always kids within groups who don't know how to swim and it's heartbreaking to watch," the River Heights local said. "Drowning is 100 per cent preventable and I just thought that something more had to be done to educate people and keep them safe in and around our water."



There are a number of barriers keeping kids out of lessons, and Ready, Set, Swim! has been set up to lower some of those hurdles, Hyman explained. To serve families whose first language isn't English, Hyman said they will be hiring translators or bilingual instructors, and will take into account cultural and religious sensitivities, so all kids can participate.

In addition to the eight weeks of free lessons, participants will also receive a bathing suit, towel, swim bag, shampoo and conditioner from Tiber River Naturals, and a snack sponsored by Sobeys Grant Park.

"Participants in our program will stay in our program until they can complete the Lifesaving Society's Swim to Survive standard without a life-jacket," Hyman said.

"We want to make sure that parents and guardians have two to three sessions where we talk about water safety and how to enjoy Manitoba's summers," she added.

In late February, Ready, Set, Swim! hosted its official launch at the Hilton Garden Inn. The Kaila family, which owns the Tuxedo-area hotel, sponsored the event which raised about \$70,000 for the charity. With that cash on hand, the first class of swimmers is expected to be in the water this April.

"I feel great and look forward to next year and doing more," Moni Kaila said. "I thank Rishona a lot for getting us involved in this and allowing us the opportunity to speak up, and to be part of a voice that should be heard."

For Kaila and his family, supporting Ready, Set, Swim! has personal significance.

Last July, while their extended family was gathered in Winnipeg for a wedding, Kaila's cousins Pawan Brar, 20, and Arvinder Brar, 19, tragically drowned on a day trip to Kenora with friends. The two had recently immigrated to Canada and had no formal swimming lessons, Kaila said.

Other family members had intended to make the trip with the pair, Kaila said, but opted to stay in the city.

"There was quite a lot of guilt associated... should we have been there, had we been



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there, would it have necessarily changed the outcome?" Kaila said. "It's been tough, but through trying to do more and trying to reach out, it does help.

"Out of something bad, we're trying to nurture something good and necessary, and that so many people would benefit from," he added. "It's a purposeful call to action."

Currently, participants in Ready, Set, Swim! have to be referred to the program by a school, teacher, agency, religious group, club, or other organization. It is not exclusive to newcomers, Hyman added.

"We're not looking at people's financial statements," she said. "As long as somebody in touch with that family recognizes that they could benefit or there is a need, they'll be accepted."

For more information go to readysetswim.ca

Danielle Da Silva

Reporter

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