



## Case study for the prevention of drownings in children

### "BE WATER WISE – SUPERVISE"

**Reference:** Katherine van Weerdenburg, The Illawarra Child Drowning Prevention Campaign: Final report 2000. Illawarra Safe Communities.

**Available at :**

[http://www.healthycitiesill.org.au/hci/reports/drowning%20campaign%20report\\_internet%20copy.pdf#search=%22%22Illawarra%20Child%20Drowning%20Prevention%20Campaign%22%22](http://www.healthycitiesill.org.au/hci/reports/drowning%20campaign%20report_internet%20copy.pdf#search=%22%22Illawarra%20Child%20Drowning%20Prevention%20Campaign%22%22)

This working paper presents a description of a single country case study on drowning prevention, intended for customisation for pan-European use under the auspices of the EU APOLLO project. The intention is that a suitable case study will be assessed for customisation by a panel of EU experts on drowning injury prevention. When a suitable study has been selected, it will be customised by the APOLLO team, and then the same panel of EU experts will be brought in to assess and effectively quality assure the customised plans.

#### **Background**

In the 1980s Australia had possibly the worst record in the world for accidental child drowning, largely seen as associated with the excellent climate, the outdoor lifestyle, the importance of water activity in the national culture, and the concomitant large number of private swimming pools. However, in the last two decades, the nation has rigorously addressed the problem of accidental drowning with well organised, planned and carefully implemented programmes covering the gamut from improved legislation to a mass of local initiatives. The Illawarra "Be Water Wise - Supervise" can thus be seen as an element in a successful series of national and local initiatives.

The Illawarra "Be Water Wise - Supervise" campaign was carried out under the WHO's Healthy cities programme, which aims at putting health high on the political and social agenda of cities with a concomitant movement for public health at the local level. The four key elements for action of the healthy cities programme are:

1. Explicit political commitment at the highest level to the principles and strategies of the Healthy Cities project
2. Establishment of new organizational structures to manage change
3. Commitment to developing a shared vision for the city, with a health development plan and work on specific themes
4. Investment in formal and informal networking and cooperation

A healthy city is not one, which has achieved a particular health status, but it is one that is continually creating and improving the physical and social environments and expanding the community resources that enable people to mutually support each other in performing all the

functions of life and in developing to their maximum potential. WHO/Europe recommends a basic model for a healthy city that is described under their various publications of the Healthy Cities approach.

### **Introduction to the Illawarra Health Cities Campaign**

The “Illawarra Child Drowning Prevention Campaign” of October 1999 - February 2000, also known as “Be Water-Wise – Supervise” campaign, was one of many community projects carried out under the auspices of the Illawarra Healthy Cities Campaign.

#### **Goals/Objectives:**

The main goal of the campaign was to reduce drownings among 0 to 5 year old children in Illawarra. The target issues identified by working party members as relevant to this campaign focused on public information and education and also included: poor consumer awareness of legislative requirements, allocation of Council resources and priority given to ensuring community compliance with legislation (including information provided).

#### **Design/Setting:**

A Task Force was set up with a remit to develop and implement an Illawarra -wide child drowning prevention campaign focusing on the 0-5 year old age group during the higher risk summer months. Before commencing the campaign, statistics on drowning deaths and the latest literature available on child drowning issues and countermeasures were reviewed by working parties of the Task Force. All the information was given detailed scrutiny and consideration and became the basis for planning the priorities and activities of the Illawarra campaign.

Targets were addressed through quality management structures within a formal governance framework. This aspect was crucial to the success of the initiative. Overarching responsibility for governance was provided by a Council of Reference, below this, management responsibility was assigned to Management Committees which ran a variety of Task Forces. Each Task Force was responsible for setting up and running a specific project. Many of the myriad of projects were themselves quite small – i.e. Decontamination of a swimming pool, improved lighting, a better bus shelter etc. The Healthy Cities Illawarra Campaign went beyond drowning issues and took a broad holistic overview of safety matters. More specifically it involved several target issues that addressed the following:

1. Rise community awareness regarding preschooler drowning via a number of presentations, press releases etc
2. Development and enforcement of a pool fencing legislation via several different strategies (i.e. development and distribution of a checklist to a number of pool owners, inspection programs ect).
3. Rise awareness regarding the risks of inflatable pools
4. Rise awareness regarding the risks of bathtub drowning
5. Promote learn to swim programs and Cardio-Pulmonary Resuscitation courses
6. Translation and promotion of all above programs to different ethnic backgrounds

## 7. Development of swim programs for populations with special needs

### **Involved units:**

The Illawarra Health Cities Campaign followed the WHO guidelines extant at the time. It was initiated by the Illawarra Child Injuries Prevention Taskforce (CIP) getting together Representatives from a number of key local organisations to participate in a working party. The bodies involved were the NSW Health Department, the four local government councils covering Illawarra, State and Federal Members of Parliament, the Commonwealth Department of Health and Family Services, the Road and Traffic Authority, the WHO, local businesses including service providers and sponsors, and the Illawarra Area Health Service (IAHS). In the case of the IAHS there was involvement from three critical departments: the Health Promotion Unit, the Public Health Unit, and Community Health Services. A particularly important component was the full support of the Board of the IAHS together with further enthusiasm from management and staff. The Illawarra project was initiated by the Australian Community Health Association, which was itself funded and sponsored by the Commonwealth Department of Community Services and Health. They decided on the idea of the Illawarra initiative in response to the Healthy City movement, which had itself emerged from the 1986 Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion.

### **Results:**

In terms of the overall impact of the campaign, it appears that there were no drownings in the Illawarra region in the 0-5 year age group during the period of the campaign. However, there are numerous possible factors, besides the present campaign, which may have influenced this outcome. During the campaign period, several different water safety advertisements were appearing on commercial television. Advertising campaigns, no doubt, play a powerful role in raising community awareness of the issues, however, for maximum impact, they should be co-ordinated with local drowning prevention programs and be supported by community members. The success of the Illawarra "Be Water Wise - Supervise" project, was that local activities coincided with these statewide advertising campaigns.

### **Resources:**

Not itemised in the campaign report

### **Evaluation:**

The number of people that were reached through the campaign was not estimated. Subsequent evidence from the ongoing evaluations of the Illawarra Healthy Cities Campaign suggests that the 1999-2000 "Be Water Wise - Supervise" campaign has had an enduring impact. A characteristic of the Illawarra Health Cities Campaign was regular formal evaluation, covering needs assessment and needs fulfilment, audit of all processes including outputs and outcomes, case sampling and monitoring public health statistics, including accident and injury surveillance statistics. These evaluations were carried out by a variety of bodies, including universities, specialist consultants, in-house experts from participating bodies. There were other surveys and research carried out by participants and external bodies. Whilst the evaluation process has covered the range of Illawarra Healthy City projects, of which "Be Water Wise - Supervise" is only one, and the

holistic quality of the programme is a key feature, nonetheless the "Be Water Wise – Supervise" Campaign also appears to be viewable as a freestanding initiative.

**KEY COMPONENTS:**

1. Formation of steering group & taskforce, installation of sound management structure including command & communication protocols from outset.
2. Working party met regularly before, during & after the campaign, reporting back to the taskforce regularly and at the campaign's conclusion.
3. Before commencing the campaign, statistics on drowning deaths and the latest literature available on child drowning issues and countermeasures were reviewed as basis for action plan.
4. Information collected, analysed & reviewed; used as the basis for planning priorities and activities of the campaign.
5. Different target issues identified and priorities set by working party.
6. Specific issues addressed: statistics, consumer awareness, allocation of resources, compliance with legislation.
7. Sound follow-up and evaluation: campaign written up for future reference & use by 3rd parties.
8. Long term follow through.

**Contact:**

**The "Be Water Wise - Supervise" Campaign  
Illawarra, Australia 1999-2000**

Healthy Cities Illawarra Child Injury Prevention Task Force (in collaboration with Wollongong City Council, Shellharbour City Council, Kiama Municipal Council, the Illawarra Area Health Service and the Royal Lifesaving Society - Illawarra Branch)

Manager: Katherine van Weerdenburg

Contact: [manager@healthycitiesill.org.au](mailto:manager@healthycitiesill.org.au), [www.healthycitiesill.org.au](http://www.healthycitiesill.org.au)

Healthy Cities Illawarra Inc. PO Box 864, DAPTO 2530

**Drafted by:  
Malcolm Barrow, Consumer Safety UK, UK**