

## COLLABORATION: AN AUSTRALASIAN EXPERIENCE

Royal Life Saving Society Australia & Philippine Life Saving Society

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### ABSTRACT

The Republic of the Philippines is an archipelago of 7107 islands in Southeast Asia with an estimated population of 92,000,000 people. The World Health Organisation estimates child drowning in the region is 6,000 each year.

Australia by contrast has a massive coastline of 37000 kilometres with 11011 beaches and 85% of the population (21M) living within an hours drive of the coastline. Add to this demographics the inland water ways, backyard swimming pools and the effort involved in protecting the relatively small population (compared with the Philippines) from drowning and we have two partners with different challenges, though the goal is the exactly the same – drowning prevention.

The other significant difference is that Australia has a world renowned history in lifesaving, dating back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century with the establishment of the Royal Life Saving Society and the Philippines has a lifesaving organisation that is 4 years young.

Politicians and community leaders are often heard to utter that the solution can be resolved through a collaborative approach, especially when it requires development of funding initiatives with government, private agencies and the wider community.

In many applications it reflects the desire to encourage shared learning, knowledge and problem solving to achieve common goals between organisations. In this particular case there has been no specific grants or funding sponsors to support the work, it has come from the will of the people who represent both organisations and demonstrates what can be achieved through a shared objective.

This presentation will provide an insight to a collaborative approach that has been effectively operating for the last four years at an international level between volunteers of the Royal life Saving Society - Australia and the Philippine Life Saving Society working as equal partners to develop a strategy to address the critical drowning statistics impacting on this nation.

### BACKGROUND

A visit by a small group of Filipinos associated with the Philippine Swimming Association to Australia in 2007 was the start of a venture that would become a collaborative partnership between the Royal Life Saving Society of Australia (RLSSA - the longest serving life saving organisation in Australia) and the fledging Philippine Life Saving Society (PLS).

The desire of the Filipinos was to develop a strategy to counter the drowning dilemma that exists in the Philippines. Official data is not readily available in the country, though *The World Health Organisation estimates child drowning in the*

*region is 6,000 each year.*

It was also recognized that many of the issues that the PLS were concerned about were being addressed through a number of member organisations of the International Life Saving (ILS) and in their view it would be beneficial to draw on the extensive experience and expertise that was available.

## METHODS

Since 2007 there have been two delegations from Australia in 2008 and 2009 at the invitation of the Philippine Life Saving Society with two distinct objectives.

1. Provide initial training and accreditation to the inaugural members of the Philippine Life Saving Society through the RLSSA 'Swim & Survive' program and the Bronze Medallion.
2. Provide re-accreditation of the inaugural Philippine lifesavers, support the PLS trainers in the accreditation of the next generation of lifesavers and the introduction of Lifesaving Sport to the people of the Philippines.

## RESULTS

Since the initial enquiry in 2007 and two missions to the Philippines in 2008 and 2009 the PLS has achieved the:

- Formation of the Philippine Life Saving Society (in affiliation with the Philippine Swimming Association).
- In excess of 1500 people trained to Bronze Medallion level throughout the Philippines.
- Formal links established with Philippine Volunteer Coast Guard, Philippine Swimming and Philippine Olympic Federation.
- Briefings conducted for resort owners on water safety, lifeguard training and drowning prevention.
- Establishment of Regional operations at Luzon, Visayas and Mindanao to coordinate and promote programs within the local community.
- Philippine Life Saving Society accepted as full member of the International Life Saving Federation.

## DISCUSSION

In three short years the Philippine Lifesaving Society has experienced phenomenal growth and impact throughout the Philippines and after two missions by representatives from the RLSSA to support and share resources and expertise it is particularly pleasing to note the achievements and the strong alliances that have been formed.

The patterns of drowning in the Philippines reflect those experienced across the region, with a predominance of children drowning close to home in a variety of water vessels, and children, adults and the elderly drowning during seasonal weather events and flooding.

The PLS and the entire community recognises the need to work collaboratively with allied bodies and other international organisations if it is to address the critical drowning figures throughout the Philippines.

The greatest strength that has been demonstrated in all activities associated with the PLS is the commitment, dedication and discipline demonstrated by the volunteers that have joined the effort. For example on the first visit with the initial 50 participants at Los Banos one individual was so committed to the program that after his employer refused him permission to take leave from work, he quit his job and sold the family pig to pay for his costs to become a lifesaver.

#### CONCLUSION

The Philippine Life Saving Society has adopted an approach to 'drowning prevention' that builds on proven strategies from other ILS member organisations and embraces other allied organisations as partners in their endeavour.

As such, they will continue to experience rapid growth and in a relatively short space of time and make impressive impacts on the drowning toll that claims so many Filipinos.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The President and members of the Philippine Life Saving Society  
<http://www.philippinelifesaving.org/home.php?page=self>