

Public Pools are Vital for Water Safety Literacy
ALJ330 Assignment 2

In the cooler months, it is the regular lap lane swimmers that are the first to arrive at the local pool, diving into the water to start their day. For many, a council recreation facility is more than just a place to swim, it is a community hub.

GESAC, Glen Eira Sports and Aquatic Centre, services a plethora of patrons in the southeastern suburbs of Melbourne, from Murrumbeena to Moorabbin.

From early morning swimmers to infant and parent classes, GESAC welcomes users of all abilities through its doors.

Centre Supervisor Team Leader, Samara Keifer spends much of the year preparing for the summer holidays.

“That’s the time of year where safety becomes a greater issue”. She said.

At public centres like GESAC there is a colossal emphasis on the safety of patrons in and around water.

“It’s the job of pool management to assess the risks that may be associated with recreational swimmers and mitigate those risks”.

Keifer suggested that since COVID there has been a decline in participation in swimming lessons during the wintertime. “Many children are lacking basic water safety literacy.”

It’s a greater issue for regional swimming facilities that may only be open seasonally.

While it’s a priority for all levels of government, federal, state and local to encourage water safety and general swimming competency, Keifer believes that it is difficult to keep the abilities of swimmers at a high level when the facility is not open all year.

“Something that is really hard for them is there’s not year-round consistency. It makes it hard for them (students) to learn the standards and repeat expectations.” She said.

Keifer believes such skills are declining in many children across Grade 5 and Grade 6. “We see it in our swimming carnivals, they used to be able to compete in a 50-metre race, but some are now unable to complete a full 50 metres.”

The Victorian Water Safety Certificate states the competencies that students should be able to achieve by the time they leave primary school. This includes, diving, swimming 50 metres and a basic understanding of water safety.

To ensure government expectations are met, it is a priority for Samara Keifer and her colleagues to keep children enrolled in swimming lessons and continue to encourage recreational attendance with family and friends during the cooler season.

“Pool lifeguards and duty managers encourage parent awareness and enthusiasm at the centre. If a child sees their parents excited about swimming, or a parent sees their child having fun, they will probably be more inclined to keep coming back.” Keifer said.

Glen Eira Council set and influence the affordability of swimming lessons within their public pools, including GESAC. Lesson and single usage fees are kept as low and accessible as possible.

The regular lap swimmers will continue to utilise GESAC, likely for most of the year and so too, hopefully, will the younger patrons. This will keep children aligned with the State Government’s benchmark, and able to participate fully in swimming carnivals and summer fun.