

SwimJamaica instructors get youth in the water

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Students in SwimJamaica class at the University of the West Indies. - Photo by Pete Moore

Where can you mix business with pleasure? How many of us can actually say we have great job satisfaction? How many of us have jobs that make us want to jump out of bed in the morning and rush to work? I am willing to bet not many. Except, that is, for the 15 instructors and staff at SwimJamaica.

For these guys, going to work is not a chore, it is a passion. It is a dedication to helping children and adults learn the discipline of swimming.

It is by no means an easy task. With an estimated 90 per cent of Jamaicans not being able to swim, SwimJamaica sets itself the massive challenge of getting the nation swimming. Not an easy task. But with sponsorship and Government backing, SwimJamaica is slowly but surely making positive progress.

Pete and Cath Moore, who run the SwimJamaica scheme, believe that investing in their instructors and training are going to make the programme succeed. The idea is to raise and develop support across the island for the programme. With the careful planning and structure of the scheme, the Moores have made the courses very user-friendly and easy to follow.

"It is easy for the staff to see where they can go in their career as an instructor and what the next step for them is," the couple told **Lifestyle**.

"From joining the scheme as assistants, the recruits can climb their way along the career ladder. First by passing their lifeguard qualification and becoming a trainee instructor. By doing this and gaining experience they soon become fully qualified instructors and then assessors whereby they can test the learners on their new skills to determine whether they receive a pass for that level or not. There is great progression for staff here who can eventually go on to owning their own franchise of SwimJamaica," Pete said.

HOPE

The hope is that when Cath and Pete's contract here in Jamaica came to an end in 2006, they leave safe in the knowledge that they have given the staff the training and the expertise to continue the success of SwimJamaica and keep it going to achieve the same great results that it has already. They have begun the hand-over process by giving the local staff more responsibility and the tools in which to run parts of the scheme as a team.

There is a strong feeling of team spirit with the instructors looking out for each other and pulling together. This has probably been helped by the team-building days out and workshops that the staff have attended. Other workshops include leadership and motivation.

Newest Recruit

Mark Stewart, 24, from Deanery Road, Kingston, is one of SwimJamaica's newest recruits. The former driving instructor gave up the road in search of a new, 'wetter' challenge. Mark was introduced to the SwimJamaica programme late last year and has not looked back since.

The SwimJamaica programme is helping locals in many ways. The main purpose of it is helping children and adults learn how to swim. A big project for the scheme is helping children from the inner city, who would not normally be able to afford the lessons. With this being the main focus, it is all too easy to forget what a fantastic career path this is for the instructors and staff that work at SwimJamaica.

"I taught myself to swim as a youth by watching others in the sea and in the rivers. Eventually, last year I joined a swimming school to perfect my technique. Since then, I have achieved so much in such a short space of time. Once I learned the skills required, I joined the SwimJamaica team who teach mainly at the National Stadium and trained as an assistant," Mark said. Although at this stage he was not responsible for the swimmers in the lessons, he helped the instructor out. This spurred him to progress through the SwimJamaica career pathway and pass his lifeguard course, which now takes him up to trainee instructor, teaching levels one and two of the scheme, which includes children as young as four years old.

Determined and Dedicated

It is obvious that Mark has determination and is dedicated to his role.

"Even in January when the water is cold in the early morning, and everyone is shivering, I still love what I do," said Mark. "When you see the children pass each level and get a certificate and T-shirt, it makes me so proud to think that I helped them to achieve this. They are so happy; you know it has all been worth it."

SwimJamaica has helped Mark to develop as an individual in many ways. "I have no second thoughts; I am a much more confident person. It has made me better at dealing with people. It has certainly helped me to grow. The programme is well structured and with the guidance and support of the Moores, I now have some direction in my life."

In his spare time, Mark likes to watch movies and pursue his second passion, music. "I love music, that is my second life!"

Mark is not going to stop here. His self-motivation will certainly push him to achieve his main goal of some day owning his own SwimJamaica franchise. He hopes that in November he will be able to qualify as an instructor and come that much closer to his dream.