

# THRIVE AND SURVIVE!



When it comes to survival, teaching and lifesaving skills, the aptly-named Survive and Save Club at Harrow offers the complete package. **Roger Guttridge** paid them a visit

It was the night of Jade Goody's eviction but at Harrow Leisure Centre in Middlesex more than 200 people had found a better way to spend a Friday evening. Like 18-year-old Viraj Mithani. 'If I wasn't here, I'd be at home watching Big Brother like most of my friends!' he said. While allegations of bullying and racism in the Celebrity Big Brother house had prompted demonstrations in India and questions in the House, at Harrow there was not the faintest hint of racial tension. Here, Asian, black, white and Chinese worked happily and harmoniously in the common cause of swimming and lifesaving.

For three hours every Friday, Harrow's learner and main pools come alive as the Survive and Save Club takes over. With no less than eight teaching groups and two or three lifesaving groups going on at any one time, there is a real buzz about the place. What is also striking is the number of teenagers among the teachers and helpers – and that's not something that happened by chance. The club's entire structure is designed with continuity in mind. A growing number of young people who

learnt to swim in club sessions are progressing through the stroke improvement and lifesaving groups to become teachers and/or lifeguards and club officials. The club is an approved ASA teacher education centre, IoS training provider and Royal Life Saving Society (RLSS) pool lifeguard training centre. It also has ASA Swim 21 silver accreditation for teaching and the Sport England Clubmark. The programme of training courses, organised by Ray Lau, the club's education development officer and driving force, is comprehensive and open to non-members as well as members. It includes the ASA helper certificate, which is open to youngsters aged 14 and over, first aid, ASA levels 1 and 2 teaching, ASA/UKCC levels 1 and 2 coaching, RLSS assistant teacher, trainer-assessor and rescue award for teachers and coaches, and CPD seminars in a range of topics including child protection, equality, disability coaching, National Plan for Teaching Swimming, IoS National Plan, standardising ASA awards, converting swimmers to lifeguards and Sports Coach UK accreditation. The club has even made its own DVD to help with training.

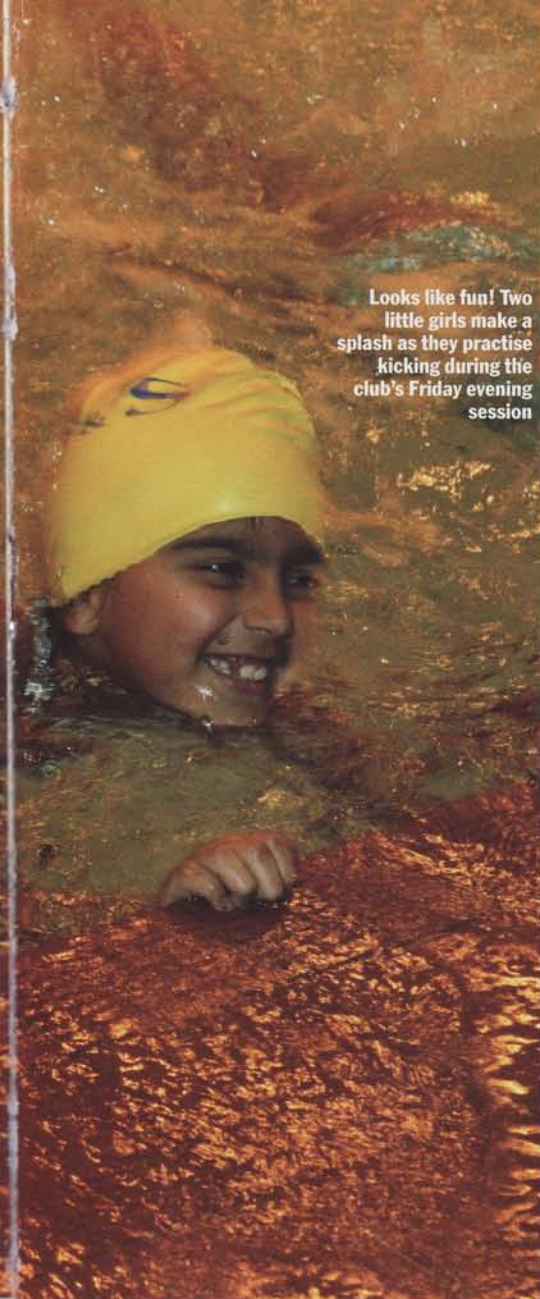
Leisure Connections, who run the leisure centre

for the London Borough of Harrow and run their own learn-to-swim scheme, are 'very supportive' of Survive and Save. 'In London, we don't have many courses and we are fulfilling a real need,' says Ray Lau, who is also an ASA senior tutor. 'When I am running courses, I find that sometimes swimmers get burnt out and quit swimming. They may not be aware of courses on how to become a swimming teacher.'

For members of Survive and Save, a built-in 'grant-back' system offers a huge incentive to sign up for a course. 'They pay the course fee up front and are then tied to the club for a year,' says treasurer Manhar Shah. 'The club will then give back whatever they spent on getting the qualifications. It's a way of encouraging the children to pass on their skills to the next generation.'

His wife Rita, the membership secretary, adds: 'It doesn't stop at one qualification. We encourage them to do extra courses so they are fully qualified. They have to maintain their skills.'

When Ray Lau joined the club two years ago, it had only seven or eight teachers while only he and chairman Sally Baldwin were qualified to run ►



Looks like fun! Two little girls make a splash as they practise kicking during the club's Friday evening session



SVLIVE GUTTRIDGE



Above: **Jineeta Patel** practices her lifesaving techniques on **Arjun Shah**

Far left: Kickboards are at the ready as **Survive and Save youngsters** prepare for some leg work



Near left: **Ray Lau**, education and development officer and a driving force of the **Survive and Save Club**

◀courses. Since then, the team of voluntary teachers has grown to 27, while 13 other volunteers help in other capacities. Membership is over 260. 'Twenty-seven teachers is excessive but a lot of them are youngsters who have come on board,' says Ray, who is also a music teacher and an Ofsted inspector. 'The problem we find is that when they get to 18, they go to university, so every year we have to recruit people to replace them.'

Sally, who has been with the club for 25 years, says it has always attracted minority groups but until the last five years they rarely if ever got involved in the teaching. 'Once we managed to get one or two involved, others started to come forward and now they are part of the club structure,' she says.

By training more people than it can use, the club is effectively contributing more than its share to the nation's stock of qualified swimming teachers and lifeguards. Viraj Mithani is among seven or eight who will be heading for university later this year – but he, like most of the others, intends to make use of the many skills he has acquired. 'I learnt to swim here when I was five – I was afraid of water until then,' he said. 'I've been here ever since and have made so many friends here. I'm in my school water polo team. I'm a qualified ASA teacher and assistant teacher and a qualified lifeguard. I hope to go to university later this year but I intend to keep it up. With all the qualifications, I could get a job as a lifeguard and help out with teaching.'

Asanka Wijendra, also 18, added: 'In lifeguard-

ing, it's all about training to save the person so you have to put your all into training to save lives. That means learning about all the first aid so you can maximise their chances of life and get your fitness up so you can recover a person. That gives you a real incentive to learn so that if anything happens you are able to deal with it.'

The Survive and Save Club was launched in 1970 at the Porchester Baths and moved to Harrow Leisure Centre when it opened in 1975. 'The main focus from the outset was to get people learning to swim and then into lifesaving,' says Ray, who is also an RLSS national trainer and assessor and the society's Middlesex development officer. 'That is still the case. It is not a competitive club and I think that's one of the reasons why we are successful in terms of diversity. But although it appears non-competitive, our members tend to be very competitive among themselves.'

Committee member Tim Smith, whose son and daughter are also members, agrees. 'This is basically a club that teaches people to swim, survive and save other people,' he says. 'To us, that was one of the attractions. We didn't feel we wanted a competitive swimming club.'

For those who *are* competitively-inclined, links are currently being established with Northolt Phoenix SC and Harrow Kingfisher disability club. 'If anyone looks good competitively or has a disability, we can pass them on,' says Ray. 'Kingfisher have already sent some people to our courses.' ■

• The club's website is at: [www.surviveandsave.org](http://www.surviveandsave.org).

One of Survive and Save's young pupils is clearly enjoying her evening at Harrow Leisure Centre





Far left: **Akhil Raithatha** checks **Judy Smith's** breathing during lifesaving training

Near left: **Snehal Shah** of the rookie star grade 1 lifesaving group throws a rope to a friend during a practice rescue

Near right: The session includes **breaststroke training** for this member of a more advanced swimming group

Far right (top): Twenty-two of the club's army of teachers and volunteers line up for a group picture

Far right (bottom): Three girls present a **study in concentration** as they hang on their teacher's every word

