A brief description of a deadly problem, drowning:

- Nationally, fatal unintentional drowning rates for 5-14 year old African Americans has been found to be more than 3 times higher than for White peers.

- Drowning is one of the most common causes of death and disability for all ages world-wide, but particularly for children (<15 years).

- Recent Tennessee data indicate that African American child death rate by drowning was 1.96 (per 100,000) while the rate for White counterparts was 1.08, a highly significant difference.

- Drowning is the second leading cause of injury death in Memphis.

Knowing how to swim can protect against drowning:

- Research has confirmed that swimming skill is a preventative mediator from drowning.

- According to a national study commissioned by USA Swimming and conducted by the University of Memphis, approximately 69% of African American youth and 58% Hispanic/Latino children reported a “no or low” swimming ability (unable to swim or were comfortable in shallow end only) as compared to 42% of White peers.

- Memphis data from this study showed youth swimming ability lower than national data with a 78.8% “no or low” rate for African American subjects and Hispanic/Latino children reported a 60% rate, compared to a much lower 37.7% for White respondents.

- Income is a strong predictor for “no or low” ability. Closely repeating the race/ethnicity results, both US and Memphis data show similar lack of swimming ability results for children on free or reduced lunch program status (US=65.6%; Memphis=67.5%) compared to “no lunch program status” children (US=50.2%; Memphis=46.2%).
• This lack of water competence hinders minority youth from being on competitive teams, which can lead to job/life opportunities (i.e., lifeguarding, teaching, US Navy/Coast Guard) as well as college scholarships.

• Racial membership of all men’s and women’s collegiate swim programs: only 1.6% reported being African American and 3.5% noted being Hispanic/Latino.

• Race/ethnicity breakdown of all USA Swimming competitive swim team members: 1.7% African American and 4.2% Hispanic/Latino.

• Major predictor variable, or reason, that explains why African American populations do not learn how to swim is fear of drowning or injury due to drowning.

• Other variables include: Lack of parental encouragement, how water and chemicals in the water negatively affect personal appearance issues (hair, skin, & eyes), as well as limited pool access, and financial constraints.

• Historically, minority populations, primarily poor females of color, have been banned from municipal pools.

• Focus group solutions revealed during the USA Swimming/UofM study:
  o Educate parent/caregivers about the problem;
  o Ask health clinics/pediatricians to endorse swim lessons for children, and;
  o **Offer community-based free/low cost swim lesson programs.**

**Splash Mid-South: A public/private partnership for swimming in Memphis**

• From February 2009 to present, the Splash Mid-South (SMS) program, formerly known as Make a Splash Mid-South, has taught over 5,000 Memphis area children to swim.

• The SMS program has brought together several community-based organizations toward the goal of teaching aquatic skills and saving lives (i.e., American Red Cross, City of Memphis, YMCA of Memphis & the Mid-South, Methodist Le Bonheur Healthcare and Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital, the University of Memphis, the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, the Memphis Tigers Swim Club, & Safe Kids Mid-South).

• In the past, several small and large businesses have donated time and money to Splash Mid-South: Memphis Pool Supply, Methodist/Le Bonheur, Lehman Brothers, Baker Donelson Law Firm, Association of Pool & Spa Professionals Mid-South Chapter, Le Bonheur Children’s Hospital, Safe Kids Mid-South, Safe Kids Worldwide, Johnson & Johnson, plus an anonymous local foundation.

• Grants have been awarded to Splash Mid-South by the Benjamin L. Hooks Institute for Social Change, USA Swimming Foundation Make a Splash Initiative, City of Memphis, and Collierville Community Fund.

• Numerous private individuals have donated time and money to Splash Mid-South.
Past program evaluation data have shown that approximately 100% of all children gain at least one level of swimming competence (using American Red Cross or YMCA program checklists). These data also illustrate that about 76% increase two or more levels.

Using a pre/post test design (before lessons/after lessons), attitudes/perceptions concerning swimming have been measured, and most improve from more negative to more positive with “fear of drowning/injury” being the most improved.

For Summer 2014, 175 Memphis area children registered for swimming lessons at four sites (Omni Fitness in Collierville, Davis YMCA in Whitehaven, Bickford Community Center in North Memphis, & Hickory Hill Community Center in South Memphis).

**Preliminary data show:**

- Nearly 100% of all completers improved at least one level of swimming skill (Red Cross/YMCA).
- Approximately 75% improved two or more levels of swimming skill.
- Using a 4-point scale, “fear of drowning” decreased from pre-test (Mean=3.27) to post-test (Mean=2.40) at a highly significant level \( (p=.001) \).
- Using a 10-point scale below, swimming ability improved pre-test (Mean=3.20) to post-test (Mean=6.13) at a highly significant level \( (p=.001) \).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Cannot swim at all</th>
<th>Can splash around- shallow end</th>
<th>Can put face in water- blow bubbles</th>
<th>Can hold head under water- 5- 10 secs</th>
<th>Can glide a little- face in water- shallow end only</th>
<th>Can swim a little in the deep end- face in water- can float a little</th>
<th>Can swim with a true front crawl stroke- 1 pool length - no stopping</th>
<th>Can swim 4 or more pool lengths- no stopping- know 3 or 4 different strokes</th>
<th>Can swim many lengths without stopping- on a swim team</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tbody>
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Information updated on August 14, 2014