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Program Profile

# FAST Program Giving Students Essential Lifesaving Skills

The **FAST** Program (First Aid Swim Training) is a young lifeguard education program run through the West Vancouver School District program offered exclusively out of the West Vancouver Aquatic Centre.

This program allows students to develop the essential skills to be successful and confident lifeguards during the course of their regular school day. This program consists of aquatic components, physical training, and classroom sessions. As part of the program, students also have facility passes to the West Van Aquatic Centre and gym, which allows them to train on their own outside of classroom time.

At the completion of the **FAST** Program students have obtained all of the required certification prerequisites necessary to enroll in the National Lifeguard course as well as a practical foundation in resistance and cardiovascular training, swimming, stroke development and leadership.

During the course of the school year, students obtain certification in Bronze Medallion, Bronze Cross, CPR-C, and Standard First Aid.

Students earn 10 credits:

4 credits for Physical Education

4 credits for Emergency Response Leadership 11

2 external credits upon the completion of Bronze Cross



The **FAST** Program was developed by Dave Dickinson (pictured above with his students), a teacher from the West Vancouver School District and a Lifesaving Society First Aid Instructor and Lifesaving Instructor. We spoke to him recently about this innovative program.

### ***What initiated the development of the FAST Program?***

The West Vancouver School District has been really supportive of teachers developing programs of choice for students in our school district that focus on an area of passion shared by both the educator and the student.

I grew up in Lions Bay, a seaside community where swimming was always a part of my life. I learned to swim at the beach in Lions Bay and the backyard pool program. When I was old enough I taught the program (and did so for 10 years). During this time I also began offering Bronze Medallion and Bronze Cross courses at Lions Bay Beach. I found these courses to be incredibly fun and exciting, as did my students. When I became a teacher and observed the sports academy model in my district providing students the ability to focus on an area of passion such as soccer, tennis or hockey within class time it was obvious to me that there would be interest from students wanting to hone their swimming and fitness and learn a tangible skillset.

### ***What skills do you think students gain from the FAST program that they wouldn't***

### ***from other high school courses?***

The FAST program provides a strong foundation for learning by providing an environment that synthesizes all course work together. This program is unique to many courses offered in high school as the learning is heavily experiential (the student learns by doing, rather than watching and memorizing) and that learning is primarily demonstrated through performance rather than written output. I think this course stands out because students can clearly see the practicality of what they are learning. At no time during the past year was I asked, "When am I going to use this?" or "Why are we doing this?" they could already see it. A large number of students in the previous cohort are now moving on to work as lifeguards.

### ***Why do you think Lifesaving Society courses are valuable for teenagers?***

The Lifesaving Society courses provide students the opportunity to learn tangible leadership skills through the lens of aquatic rescue and emergency scene management.

It was amazing to watch the growth of my own students over the past year as their maturity, confidence, public speaking, and leadership during challenging situations all developed. The Lifesaving Society has always done a great job of designing programs that are fun, engaging and useful and then providing the support both in resources and people to make sure students are successful.



### ***What do you enjoy most about teaching this program?***

The ability to work with students as they begin their journey into the world of lifesaving and knowing that when they exit the **FAST** Program they will have a rock solid foundation upon which to build further skills.

Working in partnership with the West Vancouver Aquatic Center has been fantastic. Melissa Goddard the Aquatic Program Coordinator at the WVAC has been incredibly helpful by providing advice and assistance to strengthen the program. Similarly, sharing the teaching responsibilities with Karley Mathieson has ensured students benefit from a diversity of instructional styles.

This community partnership enables the **FAST** Program to serve both the school district's and the aquatic center's needs. The school district is able to provide innovative programming that student's desire and the WVAC benefits from developing lifesaving candidates who will one day be employees and knowledgeable, supportive members of the community.





*Is there an exciting lifesaving program or initiative happening at your facility or community? If so, we would love to feature it in an upcoming edition of the Lifeline. Contact Krystyna at [krystynad@lifesaving.bc.ca](mailto:krystynad@lifesaving.bc.ca) for more information.*

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Professional Development

# Ripple Effects

