

Sun, sand and safety - Working together to promote beach safety

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International students arrive in Australia keen to experience local culture, including summer days at the beach. However many students have never been swimming in the ocean and some do not know how to swim, or whether or not they can swim. Most are unfamiliar with Australian beach conditions.

Since 2010 some Victorian education providers have partnered with Life Saving Victoria (LSV), the Rootvij Kadakia Foundation (RKF) and local life saving clubs to provide beach safety programs for international students.

The RKF, established by the family of Rootvij Kadakia who tragically drowned while trying to help a friend in trouble at a Victorian beach, supports the beach programs in memory of Rootvij's passion for helping others. The story of the Foundation resonates with students and is a powerful part of the program.

LSV's introduction to beach safety includes information about rips, how to identify them, and what to do if you are caught in a rip. Local life saving clubs provide space for the introductory activities and make their facilities available to participants during the program.

After the introductions students participate in activities led by LSV staff in the water and on the beach. The programs deliver water safety information in a fun, active and informative way. They also provide opportunities for students make new friends and engage with staff from LSV and University student support and with volunteers from the RKF and local life saving club.

Some providers include the beach program in their orientation and transition programs at the start of the year. While the beach program is constant, providers structure the day to suit their individual requirements.

Monash University students can travel to their 'Sun, Swim and Safety at the Beach' afternoon by charter bus or meet the group at the beach. Students spend time in a LSV clubhouse where lunch is arranged before the beach program commences

Victoria University students travel by public transport to a beachside park where the 'Big Beach Day Out' starts with icebreakers and a barbecue lunch before walking to the LSV clubhouse at the nearby beach.

Commencing students receive a lot of information during orientation and early in the semester, but the following student feedback indicates that the beach programs provide valuable relevant information in a meaningful way.

'It's a very fun and educational event for students (especially international students) to learn about safety in the sea. I've learnt the basics on how to keep myself safe in the sea from these sessions.'

Student from Malaysia

'It was a very nice Saturday. Thank you very much for the support. I regard it is very necessary to teach international students how to behave in the sea. Like me, many students are not used to go for a swim to the open sea.'

Student from Germany