



For Immediate Release

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## **Stay Safe: Every Day is Drowning Prevention Day at the Y! YMCA of Niagara's Water Safety Education Initiatives**

Niagara, Ontario - In the battle against drowning accidents that claim far too many lives each year, the YMCA of Niagara has emerged as a leader in aquatics programming and water safety education. A staggering 555 drowning incidents in Ontario demand medical attention at emergency departments annually, with a heartbreaking 152 of these cases resulting in fatalities. Today, the YMCA is not only raising awareness about this sad reality but also empowering the community with life-saving initiatives that are turning the tide on water-related tragedies.

### **Safeguarding Lives from the Start**

Tragically, children and youth under the age of 20 face the highest number of drowning incidents every year. Astonishingly, 35% of drowning cases in Ontario occur among non-swimmers or weak swimmers, emphasizing the urgency of enrolling children in a comprehensive swim training program like the YMCA's [Learn to Swim Program](#). Through this transformative initiative, young participants gain vital water safety skills and master technical swimming techniques, dramatically increasing their chances of survival when in the water.

Since the beginning of the school year in September 2022, the YMCA of Niagara's Learn to Swim Program has seen an overwhelming response, with over 2,200 children and youth taking part. These young learners not only acquire invaluable aquatic skills but also embrace the YMCA's core values of Caring, Honesty, Respect, and Responsibility, making them not only stronger swimmers but better individuals.

### **Swim to Survive: A Crucial Lifeline**

To further enhance drowning prevention efforts, the YMCA of Niagara has teamed up with the [District School Board of Niagara](#) and the [Education Foundation of Niagara](#) to be one of the providers of the [Swim to Survive program](#). During the 2022-2023 school year, 700 Grade 3 students benefited from this critical initiative at our YMCA, aimed at equipping every participant with essential survival skills in case of an unexpected fall into water. Ben McDermott, General Manager of Health, Fitness, and Aquatics expressed his delight at the program's success, "which has seen a triumphant return to pre-pandemic participation levels."

### **Lifeguards: The Watchful Guardians**

One of the most effective ways to reduce drowning incidents is by swimming in the presence of qualified lifeguards. The YMCA of Niagara, recognizing the pivotal role lifeguards play in water safety –



statistically, swimming under lifeguard supervision reduces the chances of drowning by an astonishing 99% – has provided training to 41 lifeguards in the past 10 months. “This achievement has in part been made possible through the generous support of donors and the [Making Waves Swimming & Leadership Bursary](#), an initiative that removes financial barriers for aspiring lifeguards and swim instructors.” McDermott adds.

### **Water Safety: Everyone's Responsibility**

The YMCA of Niagara emphasizes that water safety is a collective responsibility. Drowning can be fast, silent, and difficult to detect, making it crucial for everyone, from new swimmers to the seasoned pro, to adhere to essential water safety guidelines. Among these, staying within arm's reach of children under five stands out as a crucial preventive measure, considering that 96% of drownings in this age group occur due to absent or distracted supervision.

### **Protecting through Proactivity**

Please join the YMCA of Niagara in its mission to promote aquatic skills and water safety education for all community members. Together, we create a safer environment, preventing drowning accidents, and ensuring everyone's ability to thrive in and around the water.

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### **About YMCA of Niagara**

The YMCA of Niagara is a charitable organization dedicated to building healthy communities by nurturing the potential of children, youth, and families, promoting healthy living, and fostering social responsibility. With a focus on inclusivity, the YMCA offers a wide range of programs and services to empower individuals and create a positive impact on the Niagara region. To learn more, visit [www.ymcaniagara.org](http://www.ymcaniagara.org).