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One Baby at a Time

CrossFit's partnership with Infant Swimming Resource gives very young children the skills to avoid drowning.

By Andréa Maria Cecil

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All photos: Dave Re/CrossFit Journal

It was one of his first calls as a police officer: a female child underwater.

When first responders arrived, they determined it was too late. They couldn't save her. So the officer, who later became the chief of the Miami Police Department, reached down into the water and held the baby's lifeless hand until her little body was pulled out.

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Sharing the story reduced the man to tears.

When Greg Glassman retold it, it wasn't much different. Watery eyes. Red face. Broken voice.

"It's the worst thing that can happen to people," Glassman said.

The Founder and CEO of CrossFit Inc. is the father of six.

Not One More Child Drowns

Via a partnership with [Infant Swimming Resource \(ISR\)](#), CrossFit Inc. hopes to prevent such tragedies. The 47-year-old ISR program, which was founded in Florida by [Dr. Harvey Barnett](#), aims to prevent pediatric drowning through instruction to children as young as 6 months.

On the night of Sept. 20, Glassman and CrossFit HQ employees were among those at Hotel Paradox in Santa Cruz, Calif., to witness one woman's efforts in teaching local children how to save themselves when they fall in water.

One by one, children as young as 7 months to about 5 years entered the shallow end of the hotel pool. Some went in on their own, and others were handed off by mothers or fathers. JoAnn Barnett was waiting in the water. The ISR president and CEO held them, softly spoke into their ears and released them into the water to demonstrate their life-saving skills.

Little Estella Eve Maynard, 8 months, cried as she floated. The child had spent four weeks in the Santa Cruz ISR program.

The beginning of Estella's time with Barnett was the most difficult for her father to watch.

"Obviously it's your kid, and they're in there, and they're trying as hard as they can, and they're struggling," said Gray "The Bully" Maynard, Estella's father and a lightweight UFC fighter.

As time went on, he continued, he could see the situation was under control. And despite Estella's tears, he watched her progress.

"My kid's 8 months old and she can float," Maynard explained. "Anything good takes a little bit of pain and suffering, I guess."

He added: "I feel confident. I do. It just kind of alleviates a worry."

The ISR program is based on calculated and carefully supervised exposure to water, which can cause some tears



A few tears during training are a small price to pay for a child who can save herself from drowning.

at first. In classes, students are taught to hold their breath underwater, float on their backs, return to the back float from other positions, make their way to the edge of the pool and flip over to grab the edge—safety. They are also taught to do this in clothing to mimic common accident conditions.

But while Maynard and his wife were quick to put their child into the ISR program, Patrick Dimick wasn't so sure about things. A sergeant with the Santa Cruz County Sheriff's Office, he had seen a child no older than 3 dead from drowning.

"That's the only one I had to go to, and it was one too many," Dimick said.

When he watched ISR videos showing how children learn to swim and float, he envisioned his two boys in that process, and it made him uncomfortable. Still, he sent them through the program.

"The first week was ... hard," he said. "You want to jump in and comfort them."

Now, however, Dimick feels "fantastic" about how much his sons—4-year-old Mason and 2-year-old Ethan—have learned.

"I feel much better about (them) being around a pool," he explained. "It really reduces the anxiety."

There's no more worrying about the boys when they go over to a friend's house with a pool, Dimick added.

"We can rest a bit easier knowing they have these skills."



JoAnn Barnett of ISR poses with Santa Cruz children whose parents can rest easy when the kids are around water.

A Simple Goal

CrossFit's relationship with ISR started in 2010, when Glassman proposed a partnership. He had already seen the program's effects on his own children, though it wasn't an enjoyable experience.

"I kept wanting to quit. It was horrific. There's nothing fun about it," he said of watching his children thrash about in the water. "But after five weeks, your kid floats."

His children would beg him not to make them go. When he didn't oblige, they wailed during the car ride to the pool.

At the first session, he witnessed what it would be like to watch one of his children drown as she sank with all her clothes on before the instructor elevated her to the pool's surface. Today, he's more than comfortable when his 6- and 7-year-old are in the backyard pool.

"Three-fourths of the Earth is covered by water, and we're about functional capacity," Glassman explained. "The standing on land is floating in water."

Three children die every day as a result of drowning, according to the Centers for Disease Control. Those who are 1 to 4 years old have the highest drowning rates, according to the CDC. Drowning is the second leading cause of death as well as the leading cause of injury death among children in that age group.

"If drowning were a virus or a disease, we would subsume (it in) the federal budget to fix the fuckin' thing," Glassman said. "It dwarfs everything."

The goal is not only to have a formal CrossFit ISR program in CrossFit's birthplace of Santa Cruz, but also to bring the program to Fort Hood, where there was a recent drowning, said Greg Amundson, director of the ISR Initiative and owner of CrossFit Amundson in Santa Cruz.

For JoAnn Barnett, the partnership with CrossFit represents "the highlight" of her career.

"The support of the CrossFit community, the kindness, the assistance in getting the message out," she said, "there's no way to quantify it."

Through scholarships that began in 2010, CrossFit has helped ISR reach more than 4,000 children who otherwise would not have been taught these life-saving skills.

"It's huge," said Barnett, who lives in Florida. "I really did come just to thank the CrossFit community."

For his part, Glassman said "nothing will deter" him from supporting ISR and its mission.

"It's one little baby at a time that won't sink," he said, "that's it."



Additional reading

ISRCrossFit.com

About the Author

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