

**2025
2026**

BLACK SWIMMING ASSOCIATION

***SAVING LIVES THROUGH WATER SAFETY
AND DROWNING PREVENTION***



IMPACT REPORT

WORDS FROM OUR CHAIR

Squeezing five years of life-changing work into our very first impact report was always going to be a challenge. But the more time we took to reflect on our journey and the results of our work, the more we appreciated this concept: a document available for everyone; whether you're a funder, partner or supporter, highlighting the best work of the Black Swimming Association (BSA). What a privilege it's been to curate.



The BSA was founded from lived experience and built in response to a visible gap: communities missing from aquatic spaces, overlooked in data, underrepresented in policy, and unsupported in delivery. What began as a response to disparity has evolved into a national blueprint for inclusive transformation.

Five years since its inception, the BSA has become a nationally recognised, award-winning charity with a clear mission: to save lives through water safety and drowning prevention. We've grown from four cofounders to a team of nine, complemented by a board of trustees and a pool of qualified swim teachers – and together we've created something exciting and impactful for our communities.

As a result, our impact report offers more than a retrospective. It is a strategic overview of where we began, what we set out to achieve, and how we are reshaping the aquatic sector from the inside out. For communities, it offers clarity and recognition. For partners and policymakers, it offers evidence and direction. For all of us, it offers a roadmap for what comes next.

We have proven that interest is not the barrier. Access, relevance, and invitation are.

We are no longer making the case for equity. We are setting the standard.

We're proud to be the first organisation in the U.K. dedicated to saving lives through water safety and drowning prevention in particular for African, Caribbean, and Asian communities. If you've taken the time to read our report, welcome to our story and to our fight. Thank you for your time and interest, and we hope you'll join us on our journey to making sure our friends, families, neighbours and loved ones are able to safely enjoy these wonderful bodies of water that this wonderful world has to offer.



Yours Sincerely,

Danielle Obe
BSA Chair and Co-Founder



WHY THE BSA EXISTS

Drowning is one of the leading causes of accidental death in the UK, yet millions of people – particularly from ethnically diverse communities – are excluded from water safety education. The BSA was founded to ensure that everyone, regardless of their background, race, or ethnicity has the opportunity to learn essential aquatic and water safety skills.

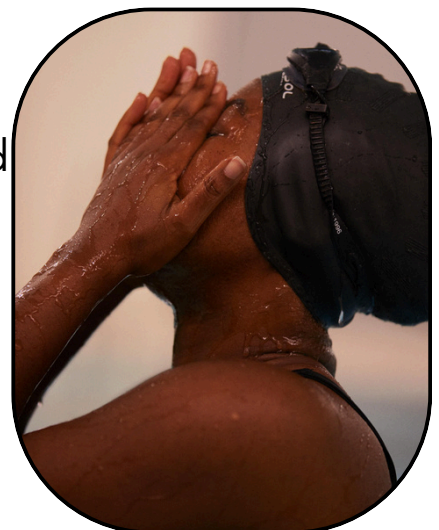


THE ORIGIN OF THE PROBLEM: A SYSTEMIC DISPARITY IN AQUATICS

The BSA's primary focus is water safety and drowning prevention. However, to understand the starting point, we need to first understand the national landscape of swimming.

Swimming is more than a sport, it is a vital life skill. However, access to swimming and other aquatic activities in the U.K. is deeply unequal, and in many cases, inaccessible for Black and Brown communities, making them more susceptible to water related fatalities.

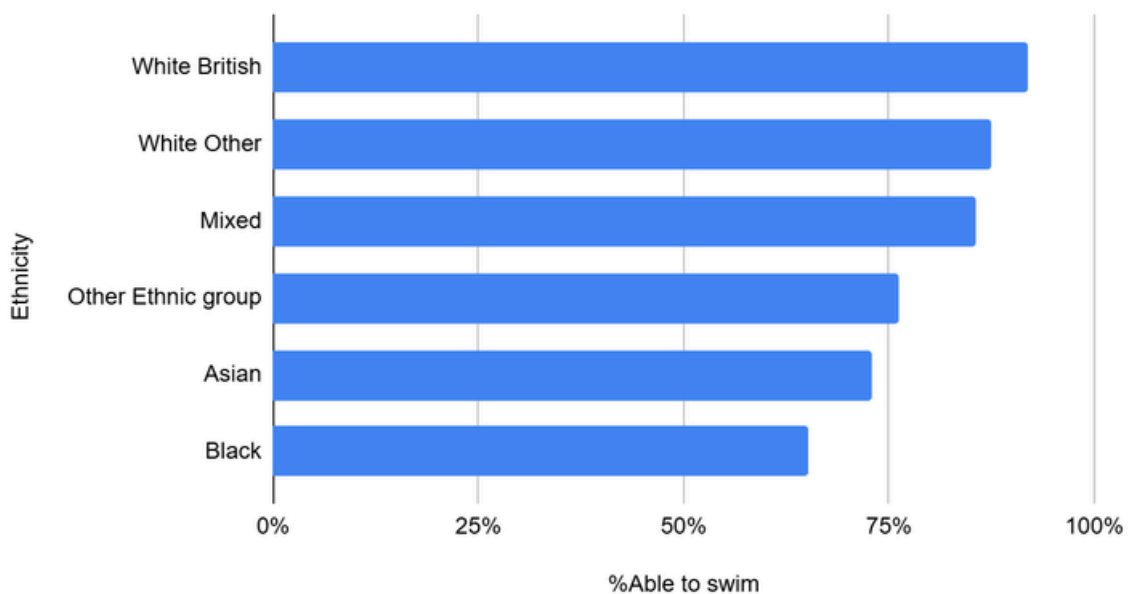
- **96% of Black adults and 95% of Asian adults** don't swim regularly, compared to **90% of White British adults**.
- **85% of Black adults and 84% of Asian adults** did not swim at all in the past year, compared to **72% of White British adults**.
- Only **44% of Black children and 46% of Asian children** can swim 25 metres unaided, compared to **65% of White British children**.



Among children and young people, inequalities involving swimming have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic. While pupils at primary school level have somewhat recovered and are doing well, those in secondary school and beyond are struggling for a similar recovery. For example (the statistics below are for the years 2023-24):

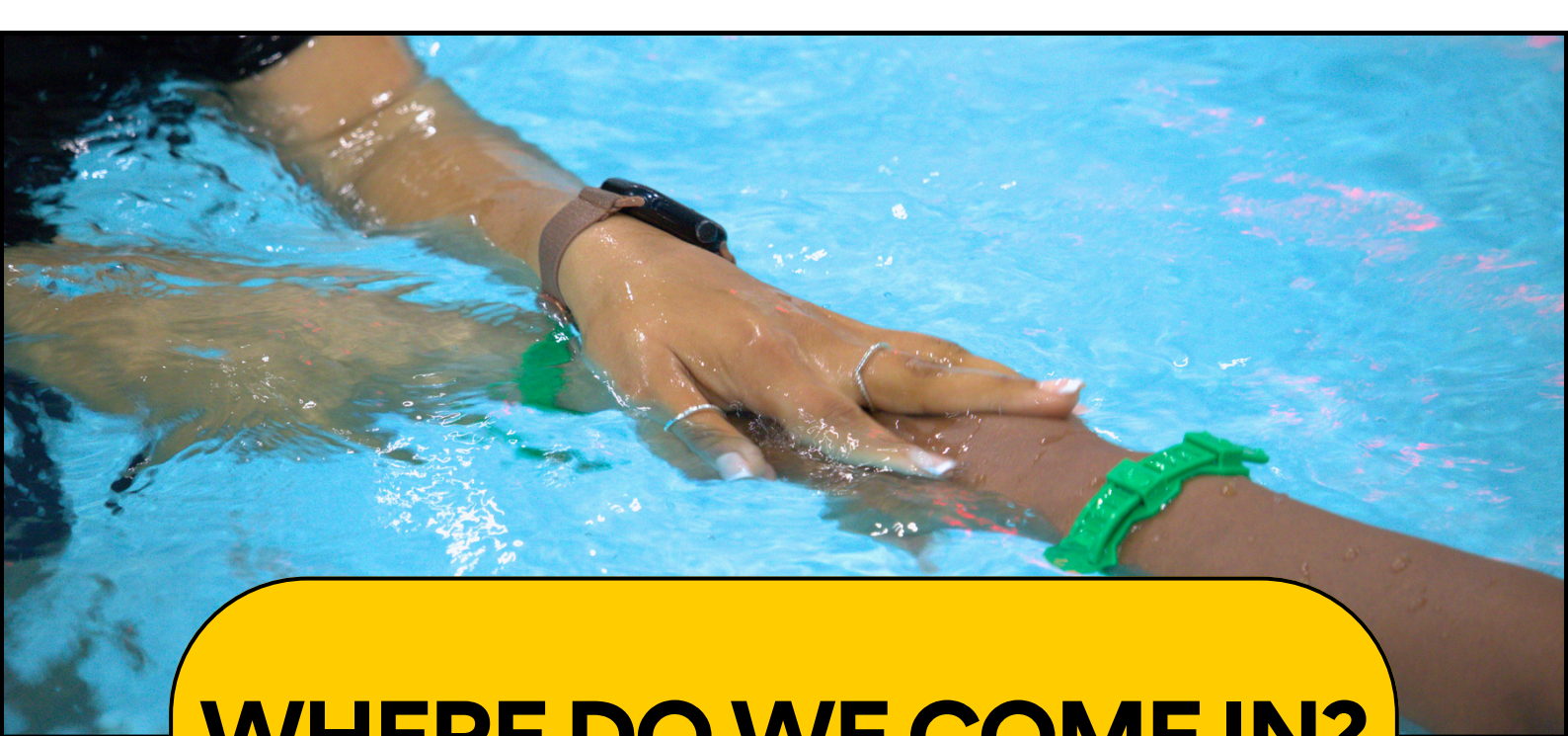
- **65% of Black and 73% Asian pupils** are able to swim compared to **92% of White British pupils** in years 9-11.

% Of children who can swim (2023-24)



- **80% of White British pupils** are able to tread water compared to **68% of Asian pupils and 69% of Black pupils.**
- Additionally, children of Black heritage in England have a **3.5x higher** risk of drowning, compared to White and White British children.

Through our research, we are able to accurately quantify the inequality throughout the sector. These findings give our team the resources to combat the issue of inequality head on, knowing that we are backed by real data and statistics. Thanks to our research department, we are well equipped to make real strides in changing policy and creating a more inclusive aquatic sector.



WHERE DO WE COME IN?

When this is the current national landscape of swimming participation and ability, it's no surprise that the disparities extend to water safety knowledge. According to our findings from our **Water Safety Index** and **#OurSwimStory** research projects:

48%

of respondents in BSA's #OurSwimStory research said they did not know how to stay safe in the water.

We did over 1000 surveys

that showed that children from ethnically diverse communities are less likely to know vital water safety skills than their White peers.

75%

of ALL children surveyed had never heard of the Water Safety Code, leaving them vulnerable in emergency water based situations.

These statistics highlight one important, yet uncomfortable, truth:

People from ethnically diverse communities living in the U.K. face a higher risk of drowning.



THE -3

Thanks to our Programmes and Research departments, we have created a bespoke Inclusivity Framework to better understand the communities we work with. Instead of measuring from 1-10, we start the measurement from -3 to +2.

Those classed in the -3 are not aware of the knowledge and skills needed to be safe in the water, and are thus the most vulnerable in and around the water.

THE -3

The initial BSA Journey from -3 to +1 is now proving to be extended from -3 to +2

We know that our communities are still reticent to move into the sector for various reasons: work still needs to be done to build the bridge

The BSA needs to work across all aquatic sports & activities to ensure that there is an understanding of the needs of underserved communities

This will entail working in partnership to look at access, language, promotion, coach education and the entry point to activities which at present are pitched at those that are confident & competent, and therefore in most cases white and affluent

The BSA looks to create some form of accreditation that will show that these considerations have been made to allow equitable access and a safe and friendly experience for all

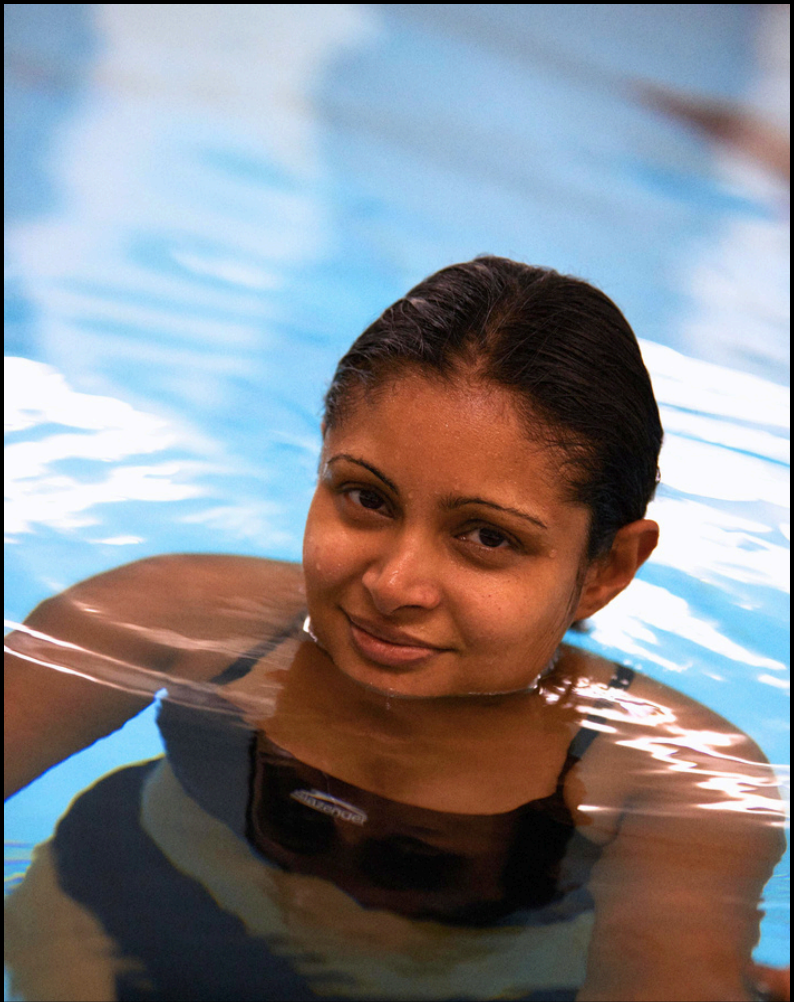


Our Inclusivity Framework (shown above) highlights the gap between the communities we serve and those most represented and accounted for in the wider aquatic sector.

The -3 is a space occupied by people of all ages, who have:

1. No water safety knowledge
2. Little to no confidence in the water
3. Considered themselves afraid of the water or 'Aquaphobic'.

The -3 is the demographic we are continuously fighting for.



WHY OUR APPROACH IS DIFFERENT

Over the last five years, we've built an inclusive aquatic culture that is based on our core beliefs to encourage, educate and empower the communities we serve. To put these beliefs into action, we focus on four key areas:

- Programmes
- Research
- Education
- Advocacy

PROGRAMMES



BSA programmes are centred around one thing: **Delivering water safety education for those who need it the most.** The goal is to provide proper water safety education that will build each participant's confidence and competence when in and around the water, whether that be in the classroom or in the pool. We're proud to have provided the programmes below:

- **Together We Can™ (TWC)** is our award-winning flagship water familiarisation and orientation programme. TWC is for those who are aquaphobic and/or completely unfamiliar with the water. This programme has been scaled and distributed across London, South Wales and the Midlands.



- **Together We Can™: Explore the Water** is a programme that is aimed to introduce women and girls from low-income areas and diverse communities to the joys of aquatic sports, while fostering a sense of community and empowerment.

PROGRAMMES



- **Together We Can™: Empowered** is a spin off from the original TWC™, which focuses on empowering young girls with knowledge about their bodies to help overcome major barriers that impact female participation in aquatics. This programme offers them the opportunity to try a variety of water activities in an exclusive, safe space.



- **The Medway Project** is a 12 week project for young boys aimed to expand their understanding of aquatics and water safety education. We also provide a careers day focusing on career pathways in the aquatics sector.

PROGRAMME SPOTLIGHT: TOGETHER WE CAN™

Together We Can™ (TWC™) is a familiarisation and orientation programme aimed at individuals who do not know how to swim or how to be safe in or around water. The programme is a trauma informed initiative, designed for beginners of all aged 18+ who may not have had prior access to swimming lessons or water safety training. It also provides a starting point for those who may be unfamiliar, scared or even traumatised by the thought of going into water.

Over 50% of participants in 2022-24 were 40+ years old, with 87% female and 99% from ethnically diverse communities. The initiative provides structured sessions that introduce participants to the pool environment where they gradually build their skills, and learn essential water safety practices.


Our Approach

Our holistic approach helps us build trust. Our TWC™ sessions proudly encompass the following:

Community Engagement: Small-group settings and partnerships with local organisations to foster community support, making the learning process both inclusive and socially engaging.

Orientation Sessions: Participants are introduced to the aquatic environment in a controlled, supportive setting that allows them to explore and become comfortable in water.

Familiarisation Activities: The programme employs progressive exercises that begin with safe entry and exit techniques and steadily introduces basic swimming movements and water maneuvers.



Safety Skills Training: Critical water safety topics are covered, including recognising drowning risks, identifying safe zones, and learning basic self-rescue and rescue techniques.

Confidence Building: Emphasis is placed on reducing fear and anxiety, helping participants build their confidence so they feel capable and secure in the water.



Our Impact

Improved Water Safety Awareness: Participants have shown a marked increase in water safety knowledge. From 2022-24, TWC™ participants demonstrated a significant improvement in understanding drowning risks and applying basic self-rescue techniques post-programme, with **99% deemed water safety aware.**

Increased Swimming Capabilities: The programme effectively boosts confidence and capability in the water. Data reveals that **95% of participants** were swimming and safe standing prone and supine in water. Many participants refer to their newfound willingness to learn more and progress to further swimming instruction, overcoming their initial hesitations and fears.

With these improvements, it enables us to use our bespoke Water Safety Index™ measure (WSI™), which factors in both water safety knowledge and aquatic skill. Using the WSI™, we see the proportion of participants deemed 'high risk' in and around open water drop from **96% at the start of the programme to 54% by the end.**

Onward Journey.

For many of our participants, the TWC™ flagship programme is the gateway into aquatics. Participants who have completed our five week course have gone on to safely explore other water-based activities through the BSA, including kayaking and canoeing.

We also collect data on our participants' onward journeys, with early indications showing that **67% have continued to enjoy being active in water or started learning to swim at their local leisure centre.**

We like to think that Together We Can™ is just the first step in each participant's water journey.

Here what our participants have to say:

"I've been meaning to do this for years but was always too scared to try, but the teachers being in the water gave me the confidence to give it a go."

"I always felt safe, as safety was established and reinforced in every lesson."

"the reduced number of people in the pool made a world of difference. It created an environment that was much more conducive to my learning and participation. With fewer distractions and a greater focus on individual needs, I felt more empowered to overcome my challenges and embrace the joy of swimming."



PROJECT FLOAT

RESEARCH

Although we are a small organisation, our research department has made major strides in the aquatics sector, bringing quantifiable data to the forefront of the conversation around Black and Brown communities in the water. Over the last five years, we have commissioned and developed groundbreaking projects, including:

- **Water Safety Index**: An assessment of children's aquatic knowledge and skills to inform targeted interventions.
- **#OurSwimStory**: A project that unpicks complex social barriers, attitudes and behaviors that exist for adults within ethnically diverse communities when it comes to engaging in aquatic activity.
- **Float**: A pioneering physiological research project aimed to debunk preexisting myths around floating ability and bone density in Black and Asian communities. Ironically, Float's aim was to sink the myth that "Black people can't float because they have heavy bones."

RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT: FLOAT

In 2024, after three years of development, the BSA joined forces with the University of Portsmouth and the RNLI to conduct a groundbreaking study with the aim of dispelling a detrimental, generational myth: *"Black people can't float because they have heavy bones"* Stereotypes and myths like this have kept generations of Black and Asian people out of the water, due to the fear that they do not have the right body type to stay afloat. Although on the surface this appears to be a physiological issue, it's also very much a psychological one.

What is Floating?

Floating is a vital life saving skill where one's mouth and/or nose stays out of the water with minimal effort. Our communities' lack of involvement in the water is also aided by outdated teachings from the aquatic sector.



The "Starfish" technique has been used as the textbook floating method for decades. However, our work and research has proven there are many ways to float, and that how you float greatly depends on your unique body composition and learned technique. This is not a matter of *'one float fits all'*.

The Method

Our team of researchers, swim teachers and programme heads came together to help more than 100 participants from African, Caribbean, and Asian backgrounds find their unique style of floating for their bodies.

Participants' measurements, including BMI, buoyancy, and their ability to float in two metres of water unassisted for two minutes, were recorded to give a full view of each participant's ability or lack of ability to float. Most participants came in unable to or struggling to float, but left filled with confidence after finding the style of floating that worked for them.

Consequently, we named this part of the process #FindYourFloat.

The research is currently in its final stages and we are anticipating our findings to be a beacon of hope for people of ethnically diverse backgrounds in the U.K. who have felt restricted by this myth. We look forward to showcasing the results that we feel will revolutionise the aquatic sector towards a safer, more inclusive future.



Here's what our participants had to say about their Float research experience:

"I couldn't float but now I can. What a great feeling!"

"Everyone made me feel really comfortable and I surprised myself on how much I can float!"

"I had such an amazing and enlightening experience. I am going to seek water activities and experiences a lot more now."

"I learned so much about the art of floating that I am still talking about it now. It gave me the enthusiasm to learn how to successfully float comfortably."






EDUCATION

As our most recent branch of community outreach, our focus on education has allowed us to interact with our most vulnerable demographic: teenagers and young people.

PLA Workshops: We have had the privilege of working with schools in 2024-2025, delivering workshops aimed to help pupils learn about the importance of water safety and drowning prevention. The PLA (Port of London Authority) Workshops are helping pupils develop their critical thinking, public speaking, and researching skills as they present what they have learned to their peers inside and outside of school.



EDUCATION SPOTLIGHT: PLA WORKSHOPS

We are currently running a project in conjunction with Port of Authority London (PLA) and schools in the capital centred around water safety education and drowning prevention. At this point, water safety education is in the curriculum for primary schools, but in the vast majority of cases not at the secondary school level.

Statistically 15 – 19 year olds are most at risk of drowning, therefore we want to devise an intervention to try and prevent needless deaths through relevant and high quality education.

We believe that Young People (YP) should be the architects and custodians of these messages. We provide workshops to assist, support and guide the students to create resources, collateral, campaigns and events that will resonate with their peers.




Measuring the Scale of the Problem

We start with a full school Water Safety Index™ (WSI™) survey to create a benchmark of the "risk rating" of the pupils. After all the project components are delivered, the WSI™ survey will be repeated to see how the intervention of dry-side or classroom learning has altered the scores of the pupils from the first iteration.

The Data

Our data gives an indication of the importance of our work with schools as part of the PLA project. The following data from the one of the schools seen below, showcases some of the findings from the very first survey of 684 pupils:

- Only **65%** of YP said they 'can swim' with only **52%** saying they 'can tread water'
 - Only **46%** could swim 25 metres or more
 - **41%** were quite/very confident in open water – significantly lower for ethnically diverse pupils (**29%**) than their white peers
 - **78%** had received water safety information, but only **7%** were aware of and knew the Water Safety Code
 - Only **42%** of pupils answered three water safety scenario questions correctly, with knowledge lower for ethnically diverse pupils and female students
 - For the WSI, **44%** of pupils were deemed 'higher risk' in and around open water. This was even higher for **Years 7 (58%), Years 11-13 (55%) and ethnically diverse pupils (53%)**.
- 



ADVOCACY

Our work extends far beyond what we do in the water. We also work to give a voice to the voiceless in rooms where their stories can often times be overlooked. Through policy influence and national advocacy, the BSA has become a trusted force in shaping the future of water safety and aquatic equity in the UK.

These efforts lay the foundation for future integration of inclusive aquatic policy within national, local and sectoral infrastructure. From influencing strategic delivery frameworks to speaking within Parliament, our work has helped reposition swimming as a public health and equity issue.

ADVOCACY

- **10 Downing Street:** A table talk hosted by the BSA at Downing Street on World Drowning Prevention Day, to discuss inclusivity and diversity in aquatics following our recent report, #OurSwimStory, which highlights the barriers to participation for ethnically diverse communities.
- **Parliamentary Engagement:** The BSA was invited to contribute to the All-Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on swimming and water safety, providing testimony and research insights on disparities around aquatic access and drowning risk.
- **The Inclusive Headwear Project:** A tailored BSA response to the World Aquatics' (formerly known as FINA) ban of inclusive headwear in 2021. The ban was later lifted by the federation in 2022.
- **Swimming Alliance: Strategic Sector Leadership:** We are championing a sector-wide shift from fragmented delivery of programmes to unified strategy, with drowning prevention now recognised as a shared, cross-sector responsibility. We are steering the creation of a national school swimming taskforce, informed by BSA-led insights.
- **Mayor of London: Clean and Healthy Waterways Plan:** The BSA is a part of the Mayor of London's Access Working Group. This initiative is part of the 10-year Clean and Healthy Waterways Plan, aimed at creating inclusive, safe, and ecologically sustainable blue spaces across the capital.

ADVOCACY SPOTLIGHT: 10 DOWNING STREET

A World First, Led from the UK: Convening Global Action on Drowning Prevention

Organised by the BSA and by invitation of the UK Prime Minister's office, this meeting at the heart of the UK government was a defining moment for global aquatic equality. The BSA brought together the world's first Head of State roundtable to discuss drowning prevention on World Drowning Prevention Day with some of the foremost leaders in water safety and health equity.

The Roundtable brought together a cross-sectoral delegation of international leaders, government officials, health bodies, safety organisations, and diplomatic representatives from across the Commonwealth and beyond.

In attendance:

- World Health Organisation (WHO)
- Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO)
- Ambassadors and High Commissioners from Nigeria, India, Jamaica, Bangladesh, Ireland
- Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI)
- Royal Lifesaving Society (RLSS UK)
- His Majesty's Coastguard
- National Water Safety Forum (NWSF)
- RoSPA, UNICEF, and representatives from the Department for Education (DfE), Department of Health (DoH), and Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS)
- Senior Ministers and Members of the UK Parliament and House of Lords



From Westminster to West Africa: Making the Conversation Global

Building on the success of the Downing Street event, the BSA convened an exclusive follow up roundtable in Lagos, Nigeria, in partnership with UK and Nigerian agencies. The Lagos event marked the first strategic gathering on drowning prevention held in Africa, tailored to the continent's unique challenges and opportunities. This second roundtable launched a new phase of Pan-African engagement, knowledge exchange, and policy groundwork toward a transcontinental water safety agenda.

“Do One Thing. Improve One Thing. Add One Thing.”

Inspired by the WHO's global call to action, each attendee was invited to commit to one practical and measurable action that they or their organisation would take to reduce drowning. These pledges have since informed new policy discussions, investment proposals, and collaborative frameworks. This small activity encouraged accountability amongst these world organisations and placed drowning prevention, equity, and inclusive access to water firmly on the global health and development agenda.

Legacy and Leadership

This series of meetings reflects the BSA's deepening influence on national and global policy—not as participants, but as strategic leaders spearheading and redefining what is possible in water safety reform. From community voices to corridors of power, the BSA continues to lead with vision, convene with credibility, and activate change across borders.



TESTIMONIES

Lee Bailey, BSA Community Engagement Officer

Lee Bailey is the BSA's Community Engagement Officer. She is responsible for the recruitment of our programmes and as a L2 qualified swim instructor, she also helps assist and lead the delivery of our water safety initiatives.

"My journey with the BSA started April 2023 when my sister, who was living in Tanzania at the time, saw a BSA Instagram post, advertising for volunteers to help people feel comfortable in the water. I love swimming, I swim every day for my physical and mental health - it just makes me feel amazing and I want other people to enjoy water as much as I do. I went along to the volunteer day, met the BSA team and got invited along to one of their Together We Can (TWC) water safety sessions.

I remember sitting on the side and I was absolutely blown away. I remember thinking, "Oh my God, this is amazing!" Seeing the teachers in the water with the participants and they're all smiling and hearing everyone's laughter, I thought "I need to be part of this." I literally signed up straight away. They asked when I was free and I said next week!



The next week I was in the water as a volunteer activator, and that was it, I never looked back. I've been doing TWC for a year now and that feeling you get when you get out of the water after doing a session, it hasn't gone away. It's amazing. It's healing for me and it's healing for everybody.

TESTIMONIES

I then started doing some ad hoc administration on a voluntary basis where I was working in recruitment. I was helping participants to sign up to our programmes and making sure they're happy, their concerns are dealt with and they understand the programme procedures.

By July 2023, I became a full-time employee of the BSA in my current role. I assisted with additional water safety projects, ensuring that participants signing up were well informed, comfortable and had someone they can trust to answer any questions they might have.

I recently worked on the 'What Next?' project, which saw participants from TWC introduced to other aquatic activities. Our programme focused on outdoor rowing sessions.

I've learnt that what we do is so much more than water. I thought I was helping people to swim and be safer but the participants I've engaged with have gone on to accomplish other things; whether it's riding bikes, taking up different classes, or making new friendships via the programmes. The feedback I've received is that our programmes help people to gain confidence in life generally.

This is aquatic healing and it's for everyone. This is my dream job that I didn't know I wanted until I started. It's a lot of work but I love every part of it."



TESTIMONIES

Megha Kashyap, 2024 TWC™ Participant

Megha signed up to join one of the TWC™ cohorts in Hackney in 2024. As a 35 year old woman of Indian heritage, Megha made it very clear that water safety and swimming was not considered a priority to her working class parents from the north-eastern Indian state of Assam.

"The part of the country where I'm from, swimming is not very popular. I'm from a region which has more mountains and hills, so swimming is not a regular thing. I was always forced to be good in academics and everything else will fall in place. So swimming was not a very important part of growing up.

Drowning incidents are very common in the part of India I'm from. A lot of people don't know how to swim, but that wouldn't stop them during New Year's [celebrations] or festival seasons. We have two ponds in my city that offered weekly swim classes with coaches. When I was 11, two of my friends, who I used to share a bench in class with, signed up for the swim classes and they drowned two months apart.

The fact that they drowned, it stayed in my psyche and the fear of water really seeped in. So later in my life when I would go on vacations I would get scared of the water. That fear was very deep inside me. I work in the third sector and I started traveling in 2012 when I first had my job. And I realised that every time I traveled and stayed in a hotel, there would be a swimming pool. I wanted to get in, but I didn't know how to swim and I was still scared. I was scared until I joined BSA."



TESTIMONIES

Megha's TWC™ Experience

"When I first signed up Together We Can™, it said: 'water safety course', so I was expecting it to be about how to feel confident in water. I initially thought I won't be able to float because like how would you float without a floating device? Now I understand you just float with your body. It was something that was very powerful. I think that really helped me gain my confidence, knowing that I don't need a floating device. I can float on my own with my lungs. So that was something which was very interesting.

Towards the end of the first class I was like, 'okay, I can be in the swimming pool and not die'. But after I finished the entire course, I came out learning swimming skills too. I recently when I went on vacation and I could swim – I could do the backstroke and I could do freestyle. In the last class I finally became comfortable in deep water.



I would not have imagined myself getting into the pool and enjoying water before the BSA. It was a big achievement for me. I won't say I can do Olympic level swimming – it's not gonna happen! But I'm very confident in water. I know I can survive in water if I'm left on my own."



THE FUTURE

What Needs To Change?

The BSA is leading the charge for a more inclusive and representative aquatics sector, but long-term change requires collective action. To ensure everyone has the opportunity to be safe in and around water, we need:

- Increased funding for targeted swimming and water safety initiatives in schools.
- Stronger commitments from national governing bodies to improve diversity in the aquatic workforce.
- More research and data to understand current inequities and barriers to adopting positive aquatic and water safety behaviours, enabling BSA and partners to develop interventions that specifically address the barriers faced by ethnically diverse communities.

The work of the BSA is about saving lives, breaking barriers, and creating a future where every child, regardless of background, has access to the water safety education and the aquatic lifestyle they deserve.



THE FUTURE

What's next for the BSA?

We are in an exciting time at the BSA. Internally our team is expanding to meet the growing demand for our bespoke programmes, and our work to make real change in the aquatics sector is being well received and felt.

For 2025-2026, our focus is on the release of the Float Research findings and the implementation of our TWC™: 'Find Your Float' programme. We will continue to offer frequent and consistent TWC™ sessions, providing our free water safety courses to our growing base of individuals and communities who are looking to participate in our water safety and drowning prevention courses.

We are also looking to establish more regular Family Water Sports days to encourage entire families to safely engage and participate in water based activities, with the aim to reshape the narrative around demographics who participate in water sports.



THE FUTURE

What Can You Do?

The BSA's work is made possible with the help of our partners, donors and members of the public. Whether you'd like to work with us, for us, or simply donate you can find out more by visiting our website: www.thebsa.co.uk.

From all of us at the BSA...

THANK YOU!!