

‘Learning aquatic skills is an essential part of growing up’

Surf clubs’ teaching role vital

By CAMERON WHITELEY

TEACHING water awareness from a young age is a necessity, according to members of the local lifesaving club.

Tasmanian Water Safety Week starts today.

Parent Michael van der Ploeg has three children involved in the Burnie club and says learning aquatic skills is an essential part of growing up.

“We go to the beach often and living on the coast, it’s so important to understand beach and water safety,” he said.

“Different skills need to be learnt, because swimming in the ocean is a different type of swimming to hopping in the pool.”

Mr van der Ploeg said being members of the club was also beneficial from a social point of view.

“It’s quite an enjoyable experience for us to come along and meet people who can show us new skills,” he said.

Hayden Smith, junior lifesaving coordinator, said it was the club’s aim to teach “water awareness and basic aquatic skills”.

He said there were more than 100 young members on the books, and yesterday’s morning session saw more than 80 kids learning a skill for life.

The club runs programs from under sevens through to under 15s, with Periwinkles being the

intermediate level and the Sharks the most proficient group.

Mr Smith said volunteers were the lifeblood of the club, and he was encouraged by some former members of the program coming back and contributing as mentors.

Mr Smith was asked whether he thought participating in swimming lessons should be compulsory in all schools.

“Personally I think so, yes, and the surf club is also of that view. We live on the coast, after all,” he said.

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STAYING SAFE: Burnie Surf Life Saving Periwinkles members preparing for summer are (from left) Hayden van der Ploeg, Ethan Mott, Georgia Hardstaff, Ryan Cahill and Elki Wiseman. Picture: Cameron Whiteley.