

MEDIA RELEASE

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BELOVED SWIM TEACHER TO HANG UP HER TOGS

A FAMILY tragedy inspired Speed's Trish Torpey to become a water safety instructor, and now, after 30 years of teaching babies and children across the Mallee Track the most important of water safety skills, she is ready to hang up her togs and float into retirement.

"There was a near-miss in the pool with my daughter when she was three and I think that was really the catalyst for me to head into this career," Trish said.

"I remember telling her later that if she's ever in trouble in the water again, she had to kick her legs," he said.

"Then I stopped and thought 'maybe I could teach kids to kick their legs and help save themselves'."

Trish estimated she's taught a "couple of thousand" infants and children water safety skills and techniques in her 30-year career, having spent 14 of those working for Mallee Track Health and Community Service.

"There's always something so rewarding about teaching young ones the skills they need to be able to save their own life in the water," she said.

"Water is such a huge part of the lifestyle in this area, and a mishap can happen in a split second, so it's absolutely vital for kids not only to have the ability, but also the confidence, to swim.

"There's been plenty of kids I've taught over the years who have had a pretty strong fear of the water, but they've all gotten past it and I get to watch their abilities and confidence soar – that's the most rewarding part for me.

"The parents are always in awe of what their babies and children are capable of – often the first week the baby will cry, the second week the baby will cry, and by the third week the baby is quite happy and content in the water."

Trish said by the time they get to school, the children she has taught have around 95 per cent knowledge of all the swimming strokes.

"Kids are like little sponges, they soak up so much of what you teach them and tell them," she said.

"There was an instance where a little boy I taught got into some trouble in the river, but luckily he remembered to put his hand up as high as he could and yell for help, to attract the attention of others."

Trish said she's "sad" to be winding up her career, but proud of what she's achieved.

"I can honestly say there hasn't been a single day where I haven't loved what I do," she said.

Trish will finish in her role at the end of the year and MTHCS will be looking for someone to join the team to continue this important program.

Pictures: Trish Torpey is retiring after 30 years of teaching Mallee kids to swim

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