

RESGATE Junior Lifeguard Educational Program – “Creating a water safety culture”: 10-year perspective of program implementation in Portugal

The Junior Lifeguard Program (JLP) was born in 2005, during the bathing season, when the directors of the association “RESGATE – A.N.S.L.A.” (Portugal) decided to make a targeted program for young people in order to convey a culture of safety, prevention and rescue at sea, based on the following pillars: teamwork, strength, endurance, experience, courage, discipline and loyalty.

The strategy to achieve the intended goals, saving resources and ensuring greater visibility in the community, was seeking to develop partnerships with local institutions connected to the aquatic environment, safety and health. Since then, numerous local and regional organizations have collaborated in several editions of JLP. The collaboration of these institutions is through lectures and "workshops" with junior lifeguards, enriching the JLP curriculum and increasing partners' visibility and recognition.

The 1st JLP had the participation of 87 young people aged from 8 to 17 years. Participants were divided in two groups and separated by two levels: Dolphins, from 8 to 13 years-old and the Sharks, from 14 to 17 years old. We kept the program running with this structure for 4 years. The JLP takes place in a period of two weeks, 4 hours a day, with various activities that include, among others:

- Health and physical condition of junior lifeguards;
- History of I.S.N. and RESGATE;
- First Aid (with emphasis to the Basic Life Support)
- rescue techniques;
- Environmental Assessment and adaptation to the environment;
- Contact with rescue equipment;

The program has been growing gradually and in 2008 the total number of participants was 149. The applications for registration were so many that in 2009 there was a need to restructure the program and create new levels, thus giving opportunity to all young people between 7 and 17 to participate in actions aimed at their age group (5 groups in total). Parents were also gradually involved with the Association. On the last day of the program, which we call “RESGATE” Family, parents participate with their children in activities related to drowning prevention. More than 100 parents participate in a very active way.

By 2009 the program had two instructors with certified training from ISN, but considering the progression of the program we decided to choose a group of 10 young cadets with the profile to become instructors and designed a specific training to prepare them to be JLP instructors. We currently have 25 instructors who are the living testimony of how this program has influenced their lives.

In 2014 we celebrated 10 years of JLP, and 390 young people enrolled, almost 4 times more than in 2005. Currently we conduct two programs a year, one in Sines and another in Beja. The high demand shows that we can pass the program message, that parents trust our work and recognize the importance of the message that RESGATE has passed over this decade.

Over the 10 JLP editions we reached 2116 young people. We received their testimony and how their behaviour changed in relation to security in the aquatic environment.

Of the 2116 participants, about 22 have become professional lifeguards and performed their roles with great distinction. Some of them keep being lifeguards and are collaborating with the JLP. Currently, two former junior lifeguards hold positions in the governing bodies of our Association.

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