

The Dr Ian Mackie Medical Fellowship – Facilitating Youth Involvement in Lifesaving

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ABSTRACT

Development of youth membership is imperative to the future success and sustainability of the ILS and its member organisations. The ILS Board of Directors addressed this in 2006 with the production of the ILS Youth Statement.

The ILS also established the Dr Ian Mackie Medical Fellowship in 2006, to continue to honour Dr Ian Mackie's work as the inaugural chairman of the ILS Medical Commission and the extensive commitment he made during his life to involve and develop young people at all levels of life saving. This two year programme enables a young, medically-orientated lifesaver to participate in the work of the Medical Commission, fostering input and dissemination of Medical Committee matters at the critical working lifeguard level and also providing a link between youth and the ILS.

With the successful establishment of this major link between the ILS and youth, the Dr Ian Mackie Medical Fellowship has fulfilled the objectives of the ILS Youth Statement. The continuation of this programme will undoubtedly prove fruitful to the organisation as a whole and ensure quality succession planning. The development of further effective programmes targeted specifically at youth must now be considered to ensure the survival of our organisations and the continuity of our work to prevent death by drowning.

INTRODUCTION

Development of youth membership is imperative for both the ILS and its member organisations, big or small. The effective engagement of youth will ensure the ongoing sustainability and success of a lifesaving organisation, as youth are an important recruitment target to expand membership. If appropriate resources are put into developing youth by an organisation they are more likely to be retained within the movement, increasing the collective pool of people dedicated to saving lives in and around water. An investment in youth will clearly lead to ongoing benefits now and in the future.

In addition, youth have much to contribute to ensuring the relevance of ILS-affiliated activities. Youth are creative and dynamic. They have a better understanding of the ever-changing world we live in, and most importantly, they have the tools to work within these changes. With the benefit of their insight, our organisations can remain up-to-date and appealing. We can continue to present relevant education that people can disseminate and we can continue to attract members, extending our reach. Relevance is therefore an important skill that youth can bring to us.

As youth are all too often the victims of drowning, greater and more effective engagement of youth in lifesaving activities may help address the appalling youth drowning rates globally. Generally children that die from drowning are healthy and meet their tragic end during times of pleasure. The World Health Organization has identified drowning as one of the most frequent causes of death amongst 5 to 14 year old children (WHO, 1999). Often in young children this results from a lack of parental supervision which may be due to an inadequate perception of risk. In older children and adolescents, drowning often occurs due to high risk behaviours. Involving youth at all levels of ILS organisations could lead to identification of strategies to address the youth drowning issue, particularly in the areas of education and prevention. Furthermore, greater consultation with youth would address the dramatic

knowledge imbalance that exists, which may also help in the process of solving the youth drowning crisis.

BACKGROUND

The above considerations have been recognised by the ILS. Goal 6 in the 2004-2008 Action Plan is “to create and implement a strategy to increase participation of youth in lifesaving”. This key performance indicator was fulfilled with the development of the ILS Youth Statement by Janet Castro, approved by the Board of Directors in 2006. This article is a commitment to involving young people in decision-making regarding the development of policy, programmes and activities, and is an important benchmark identifying the way forward for the ILS and its member organisations.

Also in 2006 the Dr Ian Mackie Medical Fellowship was initiated. This project was developed by the ILS to ensure the recognition and continuation of the exceptional work of Dr Ian Mackie who was the inaugural chairman of the ILS Medical Commission, serving in this position from 1995 until 1999 (see Figure 1). Dr Mackie’s involvement with the ILS was complemented by 20 years as the National Medical Advisor to Surf Life Saving Australia, work with Royal Life Saving Australia, and long-standing membership of the Australian Resuscitation Council. Dr Mackie was one of the leading medical advisors in all aspects of lifesaving, resuscitation and drowning prevention, publishing academic yet readable lifesaving materials for over four decades. His work was so well-respected throughout the lifesaving community that he was honoured with the ILS Grand Knight award, the Member of the Order of Australia, and Royal Life Saving’s highest Commonwealth award, the King Edward VII Cup.

Not only was Dr Mackie an esteemed leader within lifesaving, he was also a champion person. When asked at a function what one word he would like to be remembered by, he replied spontaneously and without hesitation “gentleman”. Indeed, many people fondly recall this considerate, yet humble gentleman who always went out of his way to help others. Dr Mackie had a charismatic personality that was only rivalled by his enthusiasm for learning, a passion he fed by reading widely. His suggested reading list for his children and grandchildren is extensive and lists many auto-biographies and biographies of renowned leaders and philosophers which he discovered an interest for in his adult life. Dr Mackie also began recording short chapters on important events in his life and his ideals in the last few years of his life, which his children kindly shared with me. These auto-biographical writings paint a picture of a man who loved teaching even more than learning, a characteristic that is portrayed well through one of his many favourite quotes, this one from Babylonian Talmud, “I have learned many things from my teachers; I have learned many things from my friends; and I have learned even more from my students”.

Two of the causes that Dr Mackie campaigned most tirelessly for were the development of young people and the involvement of grassroots lifesavers in decision-making. These ideals form the basis of the fellowship bearing his name that was created in his honour after his early death in 2002. The fellowship ensures this great man’s ongoing legacy to the international lifesaving community.

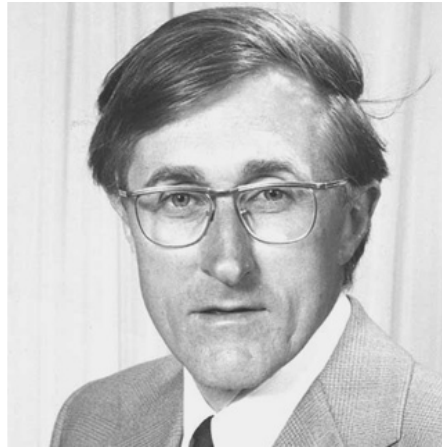


Figure 1. Dr Ian Mackie

METHODS

The Dr Ian Mackie Medical Fellowship brings youth, member organisations and the ILS together in a partnership. Each fellowship is for a two year period. The programme enables a young, medically-orientated lifesaver to participate in the meetings and work of the Medical Commission, fostering input and dissemination of Medical Committee matters at the critical working lifeguard level and providing a link between youth and the ILS.

The Dr Ian Mackie Medical Fellowship is advertised on the ILS website, and all member organisations are also invited to nominate a suitable candidate in good standing who is under 30 years of age, actively involved in lifesaving activities within their member organisation (these activities may include lifesaving, lifeguarding, competition, teaching, researching, developing, or managing), and who has demonstrated academic interest in the medical or health care issues of lifesaving. A committee then has the unenviable task of selecting the most appropriate recipient who meets all the objectives of the programme.

RESULTS

The first tenure of the Dr Ian Mackie Medical Fellowship is nearing completion. As the inaugural recipient, I have participated in ILS meetings in Geelong Australia, and here in Portugal. Through these meetings and additional email communications I have been exposed to the organisational structure and workings of both the ILS and the Medical Committee. These involvements have enabled me to meet some amazing people doing exceptional work which has really inspired me. Furthermore, discovering the processes behind international decision-making has enhanced my passion for leadership and a desire to be involved at all working levels in the future.

My interest in research has also been stimulated, and I was privileged to work with Dr Kevin Moran from the University of Auckland last summer studying parental supervision of children at surf and flat water beaches. The resultant paper is being presented by Dr Moran at this conference as part of a series of studies he has undertaken looking at child drowning. My commitments within Surf Life Saving New Zealand have also increased, with involvement on the Lifeguard Advisory Council and the Framework Review Committee. Currently we are in the process of establishing a national medical committee.

Looking back on my tenure of the inaugural fellowship, I must admit that the most valuable experience that I have gained has been the mentorship of Dr Mackie. The conversations that I have had with many ILS members as they have recounted their special memories have helped to build a picture of a true gentleman. Dr Mackie's writings that his family graciously permitted me access to have painted the details of an incredibly intelligent, passionate man with an eye for human character. These writings have been of tremendous value to me, and I

will always look to Dr Mackie as my mentor, as his words of wisdom have guided me whenever I have needed them.

The recipient of the next Dr Ian Mackie Medical Fellowship will be announced shortly. I look forward to following the progress of my successor and watching the fellowship evolve with each recipient. This is a fantastic resource that has been developed, and those who have put time and energy into making it happen should be very proud of their achievements. I have been humbled to be a part of Dr Mackie's legacy and honoured to meet many exceptional leaders. I am sure Dr Mackie would be delighted to see his ideals continued through such an outstanding project.

DISCUSSION

The ILS Youth Statement is an excellent resource which is testament to the tireless campaigning of Janet Castro and her colleagues. Over time it will continue to inspire meaningful projects that facilitate youth involvement in life saving activities, such as the Dr Ian Mackie Medical Fellowship. With the successful establishment of this major link between the ILS and youth, the Dr Ian Mackie Medical Fellowship has fulfilled the objectives of the ILS Youth Statement. The continuation of this programme will undoubtedly prove fruitful to the organisation as a whole, ensuring some quality succession planning, especially for the medical committee.

But one successful project does not mean the work is done. To ensure the survival of our organisations and the continuity of our work to prevent death by drowning, we must continue to look at ways to facilitate the engagement of young people. In a world with ever-increasing distractions and focus on the individual, we need to make the self-sacrificing ideals of lifesaving relevant to future generations. Some of our organisations do this very well already, with a number of ILS member organisations running youth-specific sporting programmes. But there is still a large gap in many of our organisations, including the ILS itself. The development of further programmes targeted specifically at youth must be of paramount importance at all levels.

Though we can increase our membership bases through effective engagement of youth, it is even more pertinent that we also improve access to mentoring to allow pathways for knowledge to pass down and to encourage and develop leadership amongst those who will fill the shoes of our current leaders. Again, some of our organisations do this very well, for example both Surf Life Saving New Zealand and Australia have extensive leadership programmes to develop their young members, which I have been very fortunate to benefit from. But this focus is not yet across the board. Making youth feel valued and inspired does not have to rely on expensive resources and projects, it is something that all the organisations, rich and poor can do by simply making mentors available for youth. Even the most elaborate youth project will not achieve anything if youth do not feel comfortable to discuss their concerns with more experienced seniors. Dr Ian Mackie emphasised that "the most important gift you can give a young person is time". Let us ensure his legacy (and our own) remain, with each of us taking on the task of developing the wisdom and capabilities of a young person within our own organisations.

TAKE HOME MESSAGES

- The Dr Ian Mackie Medical Fellowship has been established in honour of the inaugural chairman of the ILS Medical Commission to foster involvement of a young medically-orientated lifesaver in ILS activities for a period of two years
- Increasing youth involvement is critical to future ILS sustainability and success
- Young people need specific programmes to attract them to lifesaving programmes and mentoring to develop their abilities once they are involved

REFERENCES

Castro, Janet (2006) ILS Youth Statement

ILS (2004) 2004-2008 Action Plan

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