

Testimonial From The Family Service League For Riverhead Children That Participated In The Butterfly Strokes Program

Imagine the possibilities for a group of children ages 7-14 challenged with serious emotional disturbances and limited financial resources when they were asked if they would like to take free swimming lessons! You guessed it – all the kids said they would **love** to take swimming lessons – although most said that they ‘already knew’ how to swim!!! If you are thinking that perhaps they did not all know how to swim, you are absolutely correct. This is what occurred when Marlyn Garcia, the Supervisor of RECESS Riverhead spoke to the 20 enrolled children in the program about swimming lessons at Saf-T-Swim in Riverhead. (Although all wanted to take the lessons, only 16 were able to participate due to planned summer family trips.)

There is more to the story, of course. Although the children knew they were getting swimming lessons, with parental permission, these children were also participating in the Butterfly Strokes Program which uses swimming instruction to foster the program’s mission, *“To keep children safe in and around water, to build self confidence and trust, increase nutritional awareness and physical strength, and to heal from within.”* The Marcie Mazzola Foundation partners with Saf-T-Swim to improve the lives of children who have suffered emotional, physical or sexual abuse, and Family Service League is grateful to them for partnering with us to bring this wonderful experience to our RECESS program. As you will read, the program was a resounding success:

Although the RECESS children who attend this Saturday therapeutic recreational program (which helps them develop social skills and better impulse control) verbalized that they were eager to take swimming lessons, most eventually confided to each other and to the Supervisor that they were a little afraid of being in the water! The staff reassured them that they were going to be instructed by professionals and would be very safe. Understanding that some of the children were self-conscious about body image, the program allowed them to wear tee shirts and shorts if they desired, which helped them to feel more comfortable with themselves and better able to focus on their swimming.

In just six weeks, all 16 children made remarkable progress in their ability to swim, learning several strokes and how to dive safely. More important, they verbalized knowledge and appreciation of water safety that they lacked at the outset. Some of the children were afraid to get their faces wet in the beginning; by the end of the program, they acquired the skill and confidence to swim as professional swimmers do! The RECESS Supervisor reports, *“The children emerged with a new self-confidence that was noticeable. Some of them had to overcome visual perception challenges. Thanks to these lessons, they even learned to be instant problem solvers and decision makers.”*

What better testimony to the successful mission of the Butterfly Strokes Program. Our sincere gratitude is extended to the Marcie Mazzola Foundation and Saf-T-Swim.