

# 'Swim to EMPOWER'



BSF taking swim initiative into the Family Islands



■ **SWIMMING IN THE ISLANDS:** BOA President Wellington Miller (far left) looks on as Rebecca Knowles teaches students of the 'Swim to Empower' program in South Eleuthera about the environment.

All Photos: THEA RUTHERFORD

## SWIMMING

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At least 100 people learned to swim this summer in South Eleuthera, thanks to the non-profit program 'Swim to Empower' and a new partnership with the Bahamas Swimming Federation (BSF).

A handful of young Bahamian and American swim instructors swapped the usual summer jobs for hours in the sea teaching people of all ages from seven settlements how to swim. By the end of a week of one-on-one sessions, students who had once been afraid to put their faces in the water could swim any number of strokes with confidence.

"At the end of the week it's really rewarding," said Rebecca Knowles, 21, an instructor from New Providence.

Established in Deep Creek six years ago by American student Brenna Hughes, 'Swim to Empower' has taught hundreds of South Eleutherans how to swim, free of cost, in a one-on-one program facilitated by volunteers. The partnership with the BSF signals a change of hands in the operation of the learn-to-swim arm of the non-profit organization.

"The Bahamas Swimming Federation is committed to the development of aquatics throughout The Bahamas," said BSF President Algernon Cargill of the program. "'Swim To Empower' has allowed the BSF the unique opportunity to develop and promote swimming as a physical activity on a national basis, and specifically in the Family Islands where there are limited, and in some cases no opportunity, for communities to participate in organized summer learn-to-swim programs."

The program was sponsored by funds from the International Olympic Committee via the Bahamas Olympic Association this year. Impressed by what he saw during a visit to the program in July, BOA



■ **TEACHING THE KIDS:** American volunteer Nell Gluckman teaches three-year-old Shavana Basden how to swim.



■ **THIS IS HOW YOU DO IT:** American Sean Anderson (far left) and Bahamian swim champion Jonathan Bain teach boys how to swim in Eleuthera.

President Wellington Miller expressed the organization's commitment to provide financial support for the program as long as it continues.

"I'm sure that as time goes on we will duplicate

the sport throughout The Bahamas," Miller said, echoing the plan of the BSF to expand the program throughout the country. "[The program] will be one of our staple programs," he said.

This year's program, which ran for five weeks from July to early August, served as a pilot program for the federation. Swim instructors recruited by the BSF taught participants to swim using beaches in two South Eleutheran settlements. The self-sustaining program also includes a component where past students are trained as teacher aides.

Five teacher aides assisted the instructors this year. The BSF hopes to use a model of giving back in which champion swimmers return home to lend their talents to the learn-to-swim program.

"The BSF and 'Swim To Empower' also recognize the importance of athletes giving back to the community, and therefore made it a priority to identify and involve swimmers who had previously represented The Bahamas on national teams to coordinate and instruct in the program," said Kathryn Dilletta, BSF Secretary General, 'Swim To Empower' / BSF Liaison and Assistant Secretary General of the BOA, who was responsible for developing the partnership between the BSF and the founder of 'Swim To Empower', Brenna Hughes.

"This program is about much more than learning to swim and water safety. 'Swim To Empower' promotes physical activity throughout the nation and at all levels of society. It is important not just as a physical activity but also promotes water safety and healthy lifestyles with an increased understanding and awareness of the importance of protection of the marine environment.

"Bahamians of all ages participated in the 'Swim To Empower' program and hopefully will continue to develop the skills learned while enjoying a physical activity with their friends and family on a regular basis."

BSF President Cargill promised further development of the program on more islands next summer.

"This summer, the program was based in South Eleuthera and the BSF hopes for further development and promotion of summer learn-to-swim and water safety programs on more Family Islands next summer," he said.