

Top lifeguard to use award to share knowledge with others

Luke Smith is Canterbury's lifeguard of the year. **Matt Slaughter** caught up with the 21-year-old about working full-time as a lifeguard at Taylors Mistake Surf Life Saving Club and his goals to inspire future generations of surf lifesavers

How long have you been surf lifesaving and why did you start in the first place?

I'm kind of like a second-generation clubby. My dad [Chris Smith] was involved when he was growing up and I kind of followed in his footsteps. Then it's obviously [been] years of giving back volunteer time to our local community, then gaining qualifications to pass on to lifeguards I work with.

How old were you when you started surf lifesaving and why is it important for people to learn water safety at a young age?

Probably four-years-old. I think it's really important especially in Christchurch, where everyone lives so close to the beach. For the juniors, it's a lot better with water safety and how to be safe around the water and those lessons on rules to kind of follow when you're at the beach.

Tell me more about your family's involvement in surf lifesaving and how they inspired you to start?

My dad's been involved since he was a youth and then mum [Lynn Smith] has coached since my sister [Maia Smith] started and then my sister's still involved now.

They're all members of Waimairi Surf Lifesaving Club. Dad was involved when he was growing up throughout. Then, when my sister started to show interest, they got back involved.

Dad ran the juniors at the club for around 12 years and is now a life member of the club. So his give-back to the club and the region has been huge and he's definitely still involved today.

What have been some of your most memorable days or rescues as a lifeguard?

There's probably one three summers ago. We had a day where we just were faced with lots of rescues in a short span of time.

What stuck out, really, was the teamwork of everyone around us, not only the lifeguards on the beach but the other lifeguards that were just at the beach enjoying the day also helped and got involved. You don't really



COMMITTED: Luke Smith from Taylors Mistake Surf Life Saving Club is Canterbury's lifeguard of the year.

PHOTO: GEOFF SLOAN

stop. Everybody's got that one thing in mind and they push towards that.

It was pretty non-stop for a bit but it was awesome to be a part of and help out our community.

Explain to me the feeling of carrying out a rescue?

Obviously you've got the adrenaline going into it, so you feel quite good, but that's why we do our training and that's why we're at the beach doing that every night – so when we're faced with those situations we can treat them as well as we can.

How do people usually react after being rescued?

It's different for each person and obviously the severity of each rescue on how they react to it. Most people are really thankful and that's why we train and do what we do, is to make sure people are safe when those situations occur.

If we've got that time with the patient afterwards [it's] just educating them on, potentially, what caused them to get in that trouble. So if they're faced with situations in the future [they know] how to deal with them.

What does it mean to be named Canterbury's lifeguard of the year?

It's great to be recognised in an organisation where all the lifeguards around are volunteering their own time. It's obviously a great honour but I don't want it to take away from all the work everybody else is doing.



What sort of work did you put in to win the award?

For me, it was last season. I definitely participated in lots of courses and gained new awards, but the big thing with that is [it's] not only for my benefit, but to pass on to the lifeguards that I work with too.

What opportunities could winning the award lead to for you?

I guess it's showing new members coming through what's available and then assisting them down those pathways to reach their best.

There are so many opportunities and I think that's the great part particularly about Surf Lifesaving New Zealand. There are so many different avenues depending on what your skill set is and what your interests are.

What do you enjoy about being a member of Taylors Mistake Surf Life Saving Club?

It's such an awesome office and you've got so many environments around you that you've got to deal

with. So, for us as lifeguards, it's really good to use our skills and find those best swimming areas that ensure public safety.

It's just such a nice place to go, so not a bad place to spend your summer.

It's such a nice, close-knit community over there, so to be able to give back to that community is really cool.

What are your hobbies outside of surf lifesaving?

I've played water polo for plenty of years and then, obviously, surfing and just being around the water is what I like to do.

I represented the Canterbury men's [water polo] team and the New Zealand schoolboys [team].

How has playing water polo helped you in your role as a lifeguard?

They kind of go hand in hand quite well because, with the water polo season being over the winter, it's a great way to keep your fitness up. Being in the water and having to use different skills really adapts to the two sports really well.

What are your favourite beaches in New Zealand?

In terms of Christchurch, it's pretty cool to be able to surf at Taylors. We go to Gore Bay quite a bit too.

What are your goals for the future in terms of surf lifesaving?

It's continuing to empower those volunteers and provide and show the pathways of what's available for them.

It's so cool to see those younger ones coming through and kind of finding their feet and assisting them in areas where they're able to gain extra skills or extra knowledge through Surf Lifesaving New Zealand.

Not only is it myself winning this award but it's developing younger guards and even experienced guards coming through. Working with them and instructing them on how they can get better.

Have you had experience as a lifeguard overseas and do you plan on doing this again in the future?

Over the summer, I spent a month in Maroochydore on the Sunshine Coast. I earned my lifeguard award over there, but I'm really happy in my position in Christchurch at the moment. So, for now, I'm happy to help out the local community as much as I can.

What are some of the perks that come with being a young lifeguard?

That's probably one of the awesome parts about surf lifesaving is that you look at our office and we all get to operate through the summer and it's not a bad spot being right on the beach.

There are certainly no complaints on the place of work.

What tips do you have for keeping safe at the beach?

When patrols are on, the main thing [is] swim between the flags. Us as lifeguards, we know the place pretty well, so, obviously, when we go and set up our patrols we put the flags in the best area of the beach possible and they're there for a reason.

For any kids swimming, particularly, it's making sure that they've got someone with them.

It's just that never swim or surf alone mentality of always having someone with you, so if something does occur, at least you've got someone out there.

Have you watched Baywatch before and were you inspired by the show?

Not really. It was before I probably even watched TV, so it didn't have too much of an impact.