

Press release

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Thousands more pupils learn about cold water shock

“It was scary but in a good way because it was a warning to be careful. It was really good that Cameron’s mam was able to talk to us about this.”

Those were the words of King James I Academy student Charli Elliott, one of almost 5,000 County Durham schoolchildren to have learnt about the dangers of jumping into rivers this summer through assemblies featuring Fiona Gosling, whose son Cameron died of cold water shock.

The sessions, led by Durham County Council, have been delivered to nearly 15,000 pupils over the last three years, contributing to a reduction in water related fatalities over this period.

The assemblies are part of the Safe Durham Partnership’s (SDP) Dying to be Cool campaign, which sees the council work with Cameron’s family and friends to raise awareness among ten to sixteen year olds.

The 14 year old from Crook, a student at Parkside Academy, jumped into the River Wear at Witton Park, near Bishop Auckland, without acclimatising in July 2015. The shock of the cold water caused his heart to stop.

The assemblies, which also feature displays of equipment by County Durham and Darlington Fire and Rescue Service, were this year delivered by the council’s One Point service in a record 14 schools.

A total 4,805 pupils were present, taking the number the assemblies have been delivered to over the three years to 14,805.

There has been a reduction in water related fatalities in County Durham in that time, according to SDP figures.

In 2014/15, there were seven deaths with this falling to two in 2015/16, one in 2016/17 and none in 2017/18.

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Cllr Lucy Hovvels MBE, the council's Cabinet member for community safety, said: "We are very pleased that we have been able to put on these assemblies for a third year and that they have been making a difference as the figures show.

"When Fiona speaks about Cameron in the sessions you can hear a pin drop – there really is no better way to get the message about cold water shock to our young people.

"To have delivered this message to almost 5,000 children this year and nearly 15,000 over the three years is a source of pride and we just hope it stays with them in years to come."

Mrs Gosling said: "We lost Cameron three years ago and life without him doesn't get any easier.

"But it is comforting that by speaking about him in the assemblies, he is able to act as a teacher to so many young people.

"We know they will be playing by rivers over these warm summer months and we just hope they remember what we said to them in the assemblies - ease yourself into the water if you want to go in and make sure your parents know where you are."

The fire service has also been delivering the assemblies in the Darlington area.

Its community safety manager Craig Farrage said: "The exceptional hot weather this year makes the possibility of jumping into an area of open water very tempting.

"It must be remembered that as well as the dangers posed by cold water shock, there is the additional danger presented by underwater obstacles which could result in a serious physical injury if it comes into contact with anyone entering the water at speed.

"Please don't jump or dive into any body of unsupervised open water, the only truly safe place for that is a swimming pool."

Another of the schools to receive the assemblies this year was Bishop Barrington School. Ben Johnson, assistant headteacher, said: "The assemblies were really powerful. Delivered perfectly to match the audience, the students were engaged and listening throughout. It was a difficult subject matter but it was pitched perfectly to allow pupils to consider their actions and respond accordingly. To hear it straight from a parent who has lost a child is heart breaking but powerful and hopefully it really hit home with the pupils. I know it did for me."

To find out more about cold water shock and to see a video of Cyle Gosling talking about life without his brother, visit www.durham.gov.uk/dyingtobecool

Ends

Further student and staff feedback from Bishop Barrington School, Teesdale School, King James I Academy and Shotton Hall Academy is available on request.