

Learn to Swim ambassadors inspire next wave on world stage

Decorated athletes return from Commonwealth Games

Triumphant swimmers returning to Scotland after a successful Commonwealth Games hope that recent achievements will inspire the next generation of swimmers.

Learn to Swim programme ambassadors, Duncan Scott and Toni Shaw, are using their profile to encourage youngsters across the country take to the water and learn to swim.

The National Learn to Swim Programme – a partnership between Scottish Swimming and Scottish Water – is delivered by Local Authorities, Leisure Trusts and swimming lesson providers throughout Scotland.

The programme, which is promoted by ambassadors Duncan and Toni, aims to help children of all ages and abilities become confident, safer and competent swimmers.

Duncan, who comes home as Scotland's most successful Commonwealth Games athlete of all time, returns with six fresh medals, including two golds. He has tallied up 13 Commonwealth medals since 2014. It comes after he became Team GB's most successful athlete ever from a single Olympic Games with his 2021 Tokyo haul.

He said: "After competing in world-wide events, it's so nice to be able to come back to the grassroots and motivate those at the beginning of their swimming journey."

“Whether youngsters simply become regulars at the pool or if this involvement inspires the next generation of competitive swimmers – only good things can come from encouraging more children into the water.”

Duncan started his swimming journey in South Ayrshire where he learned to swim at Troon swimming pool alongside his sister and he often states that competitive sibling rivalry spurred him on to achieve his best at swimming from a young age. From swimming regularly with his family Duncan went on to join the local swimming club under coach Mike Boles and quickly showed talent, entering competitions at the age of 8.

Duncan continued his swimming journey in Alloa at the Alloa Leisure Bowl. He joined FIRST, a composite club where Steven Tigg became his coach. He then won a scholarship to Strathallan School as a result of his swimming ability with coach Elaine Johnston and started to compete, still under FIRST, in national and international competitions. Duncan still trains under coach Steven Tigg and is based at the University of Stirling where he graduated with a Degree in Business and Sports Studies in 2021.

Toni secured a bronze medal at the Commonwealth Games in Birmingham in the Women’s 100m Freestyle S9 Para Swimming event and placed fourth in the individual medley. At just 14-years-old, Toni Shaw first competed at the Commonwealth Games in 2018 in the Gold Coast.

She said: “It’s fantastic to play important role in the promotion of swimming across the country.

“Learning to swim is a vital skill as it keeps us safe around water while providing a range of health and wellbeing benefits. It also is a fun way to keep active and socialise.”

Toni learned to swim in Aberdeen in a learn to swim programme at Northfield Pool. She has always been a strong advocate of children with disabilities being integrated into mainstream

lessons, spearheading Scottish Swimming's 'SeeMyAbility' campaign as she felt she benefitted from a mainstream programme rather than one-to-one lessons.

She joined Cults Otters – one of the local swimming clubs where it soon became apparent, she had a strong talent for swimming, particularly freestyle.

At the age of 14 she moved to the Aberdeen University Performance programme, training at Aberdeen Aquatics centre under coach Gregor McMillan. She began to compete at a national and international level winning 6 medals at the World Para Swimming Championships in London 2019, and in 2022, became world champion over 400m freestyle. Like Duncan, Toni recently started life as a student at the University of Stirling where she trains under coach Josh Williamson.

The next chapter of Learn to Swim is to build a real legacy for Scotland – improving water safety, and, through working with schools and local authorities, giving all children a real platform for success and to achieve their full potential in the pool and out.

Brian Lironi, Director of Corporate Affairs with Scottish Water, said: "In Scotland, we're surrounded by so much water making it essential to learn to swim from a young age.

"Duncan and Toni are both inspirational and play an important role in inspiring the next generation involved in the programme. Through involvement directly helps youngsters understand that this is a vital life skill that one day could ultimately save their life.

The Learn to Swim programme is being delivered across Scotland by 36 Leisure Trusts and Aquatic Providers in more than 160 pools and is aimed at youngsters from birth up to 11-years-old.

So far, more than 100,000 young Scots have taken part in the

programme and we are targeting another 100,000 by 2025 in a bid to create a new generation of safer and confident swimmers.

Euan Lowe, Chief Executive Officer at Scottish Swimming, said: “Duncan and Toni are prime examples of the incredible pathways swimming can take you down. It’s a real benefit to have such fantastic role models inspiring our next generation and promoting water safety.”

<https://learntoswim.scot/>

