

HISTORY OF SINGLE GENDER SWIMMING – Seattle Parks and Recreation

Pre-requisites:

For women only - all female staff, covered windows, no program overlap before or after the women only swim times

For men only – all male staff, covered windows, no program overlap before or after the women only swim times

Timeline:

- 2002 - Began at Meadowbrook – Muslim women looking for a place to swim in privacy
 - 1.5 hour rentals were scheduled on Saturdays
 - Funded by the North Seattle Family Center
 - Continue until December 2012 when funds ran out
- 2006 – Began at Rainier Beach Pool - Pediatrician Eva Moore, MD, with the Children and Teens Clinic at Harborview became aware that there was a high rate of obesity in the Muslim families for which she cared. Almost all Muslim adolescent girls she treated were at risk for overweight or obese. Dr. Moore worked with Dr. Ellie Graham to establish a list of resources for Muslim women and girls to exercise in settings that provide adequate privacy for their religious beliefs.
 - Dr. Eva Moore saw the excitement, popularity, and publicity about the women only swim rentals at Meadowbrook Pool and wanted to arrange the same in South Seattle
 - She worked with Harborview to provide grant funding to sponsor 3 swims for women and girls at Rainier Beach pool after hearing about the success of Meadowbrook.
 - The swims at Rainier Beach Pool were so popular that Dr. Moore pursued other funding ideas (a DON grant)
 - Meanwhile, a few more swim rentals were funded by Atlantic Street Center through a United Way grant
 - Muslim women continued to want access to swimming, but could not afford to pay high monthly fees for women only private fitness centers
- 2006-2007 – Continued at Rainier Beach Pool - With the help of Dr. Moore, the women went to the Rainier Beach Advisory Council to request funding to continue the swim rentals
 - Funding was obtained through a grant from the Department of Neighborhoods Small and Simple Project. The Somali Women’s Organization was the grant recipients and the organizers of the swim. The fiscal agent was Parents for Student Success.
 - This grant required collaboration from multiple agencies and provided funding for 26 swim rentals over a 6 month period, the majority at Rainier Beach Pool, a some at Southwest Pool.
 - Partners – Harborview Medical Center, Seattle Children’s Hospital, Washington State Drowning Prevention Network, Seattle Parks and Recreation, Department of Neighborhoods, Somali Women Organization, Atlantic Street Family Center New Holly and the Puget Sound Neighborhood Health Center

- The swim rentals in the spring and summer of 2007 were so popular that the number of participants exceeded the ability of the organizing team to meet the demand and the swims were stopped until parameters were established to manage the swims more safely.
- In August of 2007, Parks staff, community leaders and participants met to establish clear expectations and a security plan. It was decided that the primary focus should be for adult women. Program parameters were put in place, and the rentals were resumed in the fall of 2007. 50-75 swimmers attended on a regular basis until funding ran out. Over 800 women were served, and participants represented Muslim women from Ethiopian and Somali communities, Sudanese, Cambodian, Russian and Middle Eastern countries.
- 2008 – In January of 2008 there was enough DON money remaining to schedule 4 more women only swims and some funding by the Health Dept./Children’s Health Initiative for a 5th swim rental – 4 scheduled at Rainier Beach and 1 at Southwest Pool.
- When the grant money ran out, the Muslim women went to Sue Siegenthaler and the Atlantic Street Center for support. Atlantic Street Center supported the swim rentals until their funding ran out.
- 2009 – Neighborcare Health stepped in and sponsored two swims to try to keep the program afloat.
- 2010 – Spring – Neighborcare Health received a grant from the Susan G. Komen Foundation to financially support 10 swim rentals – 5 at Southwest Pool and 5 at Rainier Beach Pool, May - July
- The Atlantic Street Center, acting as the fiscal agent for the swim rentals, applied to Seattle Parks for a reduced fee waiver for the rental costs. They were approved. Atlantic Street Center collected fees from the participants and paid the rental fees. Swim lessons were incorporated and 65 women and teens participated on a quarterly basis. The program ran successfully for the next two years until Rainier Beach Pool closed.
- 2010 – Present - Medgar Evers Pool – the program was relocated to Medgar Evers Pool. With support from Atlantic Street Center acting as the fiscal agent, the swim program continued for the next 2.5 years on a rental basis until the Mayor gave his approval to run public programming for gender specific programs.
 - Medgar Evers currently offers a women only Public/Lap swim on Saturday evenings from 5:30-6:30 pm followed by 2 half hour swim lessons from 6:30-7:30 pm.
- 2006 – Diane Jones at Southwest Pool was contacted by Children’s Hospital and connected with Dr. Eva Moore to partner with efforts to gain funding for Women only swimming, initially in SE Seattle. She was also interested in including Southwest Pool in the Dept. of Neighborhoods grant she was applying for, for women only swimming at Rainier Beach Pool.
 - Diane connected Eva Moore with Puget Sound Neighborhood Health Clinic (now Neighborcare Health Clinic) Roxbury-Highline Health Clinic in White Center as possible partners.
 - Several discussions took place in between November 2006 and March 2007 regarding programming ideas such as swim lessons, water exercise, water safety and recreational swimming.
 - The swim rentals began in April of 2007, with two rentals at Southwest Pool and the remaining rentals scheduled at Rainier Beach, every Saturday through the end of September 2007.
 - As stated earlier, the swims were postponed in early July due to unruly, out of control crowds that caused unsafe conditions.

- 2007 – Southwest Pool - After the women only swimming was put on hold at Rainier Beach Pool, Dr. Eva Moore and Tizzie Bennett from Children’s requested the use of Southwest Pool to hold swim lessons and recreational swimming rentals for men only. Three rentals were held in the summer of 2007
 - Mohammed Ali, a grad student with the UW school of Public Health and Community Medicine worked on this project.
 - Funds from the Dept. of Neighborhood for the women only rentals (because the women’s rentals are on hold) were used to pay for these 3 rentals
 - The rentals were successful – 140 men and boys – 60 in swim lessons and 80 in the open swim time. Participants were ages 2 – 60 years
- 2008-2009 – a few rentals were scheduled here and there when funding became available.
- 2010 – Spring – Neighborcare Health received a grant from the Susan G. Komen Foundation to financially support 10 swim rentals – 5 at Southwest Pool and 5 at Rainier Beach Pool, May – July.
- 2010 – Fall – Discussion began in earnest with Neighborcare Health on how to continue women only swim opportunities. Many meetings and discussions regarding wanting it as a public program. In October, Lena Scott from Neighborcare Health connected with Neighborhood House, who agreed to act as the fiscal agent for women only swim rentals
- 2011 – present – Neighborhood House, began scheduling rentals for women only on Saturdays. The program varied from rental session to rental session depending on what the group wanted. Most rentals were 1.5 hr-2 hr in length, sometimes having up to 50 women for open swim time and 32 for swim lessons. Neighborhood House funded the rentals using National Institute of Health grant money for a Be Active Together project. The women also paid a small stipend. Their grant program ended in 2012.

*Another very important project that contributed to single gender swimming becoming a reality in Seattle Parks and Recreation:

In 2010 Seattle/ King County Public Health became the recipient of a federal grant totaling \$25.5 million over a two year period - Communities Putting Prevention to Work – CPPW. The grant was intended to address obesity and tobacco use through policy change. Seattle Parks became a partner in a project called Everyone Swims. This project’s goals were to increase access to swimming through policy change, with 4 objectives:

1. Simplify scholarship policies, processes and low income eligibility for swim lesson programs
2. Promote a policy change to accept single gender swims in public programming
3. Change policies in health and communities clinics to allow for screening for swimming ability and establish a referral system
4. Identify and prioritize known barriers and opportunities, best practices

Through this grant work, the Everyone Swims partners became a strong voice and advocated for public programs for single gender swims. They reached the attention of the Superintendent’s office and the Mayor’s office in advocating for single gender swimming to increase access to our pools for many who could not attend mixed gender programs. The Mayor supported their efforts and made a decision in 2013 that it would not be against the city’s anti-discrimination laws to offer single gender swimming in our public pools.