
Give Us A Swimming Pool We Can Afford

Mayfield Pool has opened its gates for the summer season. Sadly, Newcastle City Council has not listened to the voice of at least 100 residents who petitioned or phoned the council last season to complain about the high price of entry.

Nor did the council listen to the community action group, Save Mayfield Pool, which has been liaising with council on ways to keep the pool open and has strongly advocated for free entry.

To the dismay of many, the council has again raised entry prices. Although the rise is incremental compared with last year the high prices still mean many people can't afford to swim there.

On Saturday a group of about nine young men stood outside Mayfield pool considering whether they had enough money to go for a swim. They had \$10. This would have covered the entry for two of them (\$9.60).

What a tragic situation.

The fact that these young men were excluded from a community pool offends any sense of social or moral responsibility.

In the past decade, New York City Council has built three recreation facilities - all free for under 18-year-olds and very affordable for adults.

These facilities include pools, tennis, basketball or volleyball courts, and include free computer access (including lessons) as well as free drama, hip hop or art classes.

The indoor pools run by Toronto City Council in Canada charge \$2 for adults and \$1 for children. The council asks residents what they want.

In the United Kingdom, the Labour Government has funded local councils to make pools free for young people and the elderly, but it is hoping that councils will soon make swimming pools free for all.

The government has recognised that 50 per cent of UK citizens take part in no sporting activity at all. It believes that swimming is one of the most accessible ways for people, and particularly the elderly, to get fit. Their government also recognises swimming as an ideal way for families to do an activity together.

However, we don't have to look abroad for examples of responsible local governments promoting citizens' social and physical well-being by making swimming pools free.

The Hay Shire Council in south west NSW has renovated its pool and made it freely available to the people of the Hay Shire.

In Victoria, the Northern Grampian Shire Council decided, half way through last summer, to make its St Arnaud outdoor pool free. The council sacrificed \$27,000 in revenue to encourage more people to use the pool.

If only our local council would follow its community plan from 2010 - a plan that said facilities must be affordable and access must be equitable for the whole community - then we would have a healthier and happier community.

We would also have a local government we could be proud of.

*Donna Manning
September 2012*

*Donna organised a petition last summer
appealing for a reduction in pool fees by Newcastle City Council*



Save Mayfield Swimming Pool Campaign
A Community Group Supporting Community Resources
www.mayfieldpool.com