

# Swimmers take a frigid dip to raise awareness of domestic violence

By Annalise Sheppard Feb 15, 2024



Braving the frigid waters of Seal Harbor Beach, a group of cold water swimmers took the plunge on Sunday to raise awareness about domestic violence.  
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## **SEAL HARBOR** — How cold is too cold?

With ocean temperatures hovering around 37 degrees, a group of swimmers made their way into the frigid waters at Seal Harbor Beach on Sunday to raise money and awareness for survivors of domestic abuse in an event organized by Finding Our Voices.

Wearing the organization's sunny yellow hues, groups in waterways throughout the state joined the effort, raising more than \$8,000. The event was hosted locally for the first time by Cold Tits Warm Hearts, a cohort of swimmers founded in 2020 by Gail Gladstone, Alison Richardson and Puranjot Kaur.

What started as a personal pastime during the pandemic has turned into a lively community of like-minded women who find joy, healing and friendship through cold water swimming. "There was a very small group of us pre-COVID who swam together," said Gladstone, "but we decided we needed to get in year round because we felt the benefits immediately."

A growing body of research suggests that cold water swimming can help with recovery from trauma and manage symptoms of depression. Finding Our Voices founder Patrisha McLean likens cold water swimming to escaping from an abusive relationship — initial shock and panic followed by a release of cortisol propelling the body through its fight-or-flight response, empowering it to act and then, finally, a release of endorphins to ease the comedown.



A group of cold water swimmers pauses before running into the waters of Seal Harbor Beach on Sunday.

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Founded in 2019 by McLean, Finding Our Voices provides a spectrum of support for survivors of domestic abuse. Money raised from this weekend's cold water dips will support the nonprofit's Get Out/Stay Out Fund, which empowers women escaping abusive situations. According to McLean, \$88,000 was disbursed to 168 women in 2023, providing rent, dental, health, food, utility and other payments in pursuit of independence.

Swimmer Liz Cutler said that while she knew McLean for many years, their relationship changed after McLean spoke out about her abusive marriage. "Our kids played together, and we never spoke to each other," said Cutler, who added that once she heard McLean's story, she knew she had to reach out.

"Everyone knows someone who's been affected," she said, "and it can be this really nebulous thing." For Cutler, getting together with Cold Tits Warm Hearts is about connecting with other women — the fundraiser is a natural collaboration.

Cold Tits Warm Hearts meets regularly and welcomes new swimmers. "It's open to everyone, but we have a lot of women. Not sure why, it could be the name," joked founding member Gladstone.

Organizers hope to continue the annual event, with next year's date set for February 9, 2025.

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