

Petrina's smiling after swim award

Chatswood instructor teaches adults how to swim

✦ Ali Lowe

SHE helps adults take the plunge daily, and now swimming teacher Petrina Liyanage has been recognised for her efforts.

The instructor, and owner of swimming school Swim With A Smile, has been awarded the 2018 Austswim Award of Excellence for teaching adults.

Ms Liyanage, 37, who lives in Chatswood with her husband Tomas Cottanie, left the corporate world five years ago to start up her own business. She started out teaching all ages, but it soon became apparent there was an overwhelming number of adults who wanted to learn to swim.

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Petrina Liyanage

"I've helped a broad mix of people of different ages, and from different walks of life, but the message I'm keen to convey is that it's never too late to make the decision to learn to swim," she said.

"I've had 80 year-olds learning to swim for the first

time, and a lot of retirees have swimming on their bucket list.

"The majority of people I teach aren't looking to gain triathlete status. They want basic aquatic skills and to learn water safety."

Ms Liyanage moved to Australia from the UK in 2012 and worked in the corporate world until deciding to make her long-term love of swimming in to a full-time career. She embarked on a course with Austswim where she built up pool hours and was assessed for a license to teach swimming and water safety.

After working at two public swimming schools to get experience — where she realised how frustrating



Picture: Julian Andrews

Petrina Liyanage uses private pools to teach adults how to swim.

adults could find learning in a public pool — she took the plunge and enrolled on a specialist course to become a qualified teacher of adults, finding private pools to lease. She eventually found a home for Swim With A

Smile at private pools in Lane Cove and Artarmon.

Ms Liyanage said the Austswim award was a tremendous boost.

"It's a fantastic thing to have achieved — to have that credibility and endorse-

ment from Austswim. It has really given me confidence," she told the *Times*.

"I left the rat race to combine my passion for swimming with the ambition to empower others with such an important life skill."