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Dual Passions: Mixing a love for the Sea with a Desire to Help Kids in Need

By Andy Beth Miller

Chelsea Group Building Scientist Ryan Kohara has always had a special connection to the water. He is also an individual who cares deeply about people and his surrounding community. Five years ago, Kohara came across a nonprofit that was able to bring together these dual passions – love for the sea and the desire to help those in need—to accomplish a greater purpose.

This perfect marriage was made possible by AccesSurf Hawaii, a local nonprofit dedicated to giving people with disabilities—cognitive or physical—access to the ocean via various activities. Every month, the organization sponsors an official event, with interim events—totaling 40—sprinkled throughout the year as well.



“I first connected with AccesSurf because it resonated in many ways with my own not for profit apparel line, and once I went out to help with the very first event, I was hooked,” Kohara remembers. What “hooked” Kohara—and several of his friends, who had also made the trip to volunteer—was AccesSurf’s “Day at the Beach” event.

Day at the Beach is AccesSurf’s flagship monthly program, and is held the first Saturday of each month at White Plains Beach Park. Participation is free, and is available to anyone with a physical or cognitive disability.

At the event, volunteers aid program participants in swimming, floating, and even surfing via specialized equipment. “From the first hour, we knew it was for us,” Kohara said. “We were meeting these amazing people, watching these kids catch their very first wave ever—it was incredible, and I’ve been going every month since, for the past five years now.”

Kohara especially values the way that these events bring the community together in a special and unique bond. "So often, these people are limited to living their lives on the outskirts—on the peripheral, in a way," says Kohara. "But what struck me at the Day at the Beach event, as I looked around, everyone—volunteer, participants—we were all 'ohana. It was just raw and organic and..human."

From the minute he leaves each event, until it's time to go again, Kohara keeps these kids—and the inspiration and joy they represent—in his mind, filling him with what he can only describe as "pure stoke."

"There's a joy in it all, you receive so much more than you give," Kohara says. "To see these people, and how they navigate through life with such grace, it's amazing. It inspires me to change how I live, every day."



For more information on the scholarship program, and how to get involved visit:
<https://www.accessurf.org/>

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