

# As Seen in...



## Making Anything Possible

Friday, January 21, 2011 - 8:37am  
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### The Ocean Healing Group hits the waves in Costa Rica for some great surf.

As a nine-year veteran and athlete in the disability community, I have been blessed with many adventures and opportunities to meet some of the most amazing, vivacious people in the world. When I sustained a spinal-cord injury at age 21, as a result of a domestic violence incident, I had no idea it would be the start of a new life.

From the very beginning, I made up my mind anything was possible, and I was not only going to prove that to myself but to others through my journey. Some of the opportunities I have been blessed with include holding the title of Ms. Wheelchair America 2010, being part of Team Colours, for Colours Wheelchair, and of course participating in my favorite sport, surfing. I had the honor of surfing in many different Life Rolls On events around the nation as well as the WSA West Coast Championships of Surfing in May 2010. None of these events, although cherished memories, have touched my life as much as my recent adventure to Costa Rica as a participant in the Ocean Healing Group's Just Add Water (JAWs) Program.



Ocean Healing Group (OHG) is a non-profit (501c3) foundation dedicated to taking children with spinal-cord injuries and their parents on a lifetime adventure to Santa Teresa, Costa Rica. The adaptive surfing program is not limited to surfing but gives the youngsters the opportunity to zip line through the Costa Rican rain forests, ride down the Nicoya Peninsula on ATVs, and go snorkeling, and horseback riding, all with the company of amazing volunteers. This program allows parents to enjoy a vacation as well, which is a rare opportunity due to the day-to-day care their special-needs children require. All these activities, at one time, were thought impossible for children with disabilities, leaving them feeling unaccepted or awkward. Well, times have changed. OHG is an organization helping replace that feeling of awkwardness with a sense of accomplishment, proving that anything is possible.

The JAWs program takes place at the beautiful Shaka Beach Retreat, located north of Mal Pais and Santa Teresa in the neighborhood of Playa Hermosa. On arrival at our camp, I was amazed how peaceful and luscious our surroundings were. I could smell the warm sea air, feel the calm welcoming breeze, and hear the hustle and bustle of monkeys above our villas. It was paradise. There was no need or desire to check e-mail, answer cell phones, or watch TV. More importantly, I observed the children interact and knew they could be comfortable in their own skin, proud of who they are and what they were accomplishing. Throughout the week I saw the transition as the kids slowly emerged from their shells, replacing fears with smiles, and best of all, make many lifelong memories. Volunteers, parents, and campers all truly became a family through this experience.

OHG is possible thanks to the selfless efforts of founders Christiaan Bailey and Frank Bauer. Bailey, OHG's C.E.O., is a professional surfer and wheelchair user who was injured during a skateboarding accident in 2006. He is a coach at other camps for children with disabilities, working closely with families and offering his guidance along the way of recovery. The children chosen for OHG trips have a fire in their eyes the moment their parents drop them off at summer camp.



“For them, camp is a once a year opportunity, and they aren’t going to wait a single second of it,” says Bailey. “These kids don’t hide behind their disability, and refuse to let anyone make excuses for them.” These are the kids he looks for when selecting participants for an OHG camp. “The kids are passionate about making the most of the opportunities given to them. They just need someone to provide them that opportunity – that’s where we come in,” says Bailey.

The waves break over a surfer in Costa Rica. Photo courtesy OHG.

I was able to see that spark after meeting Timothy Rodriguez, 12, and Chase Marcott, 14, who accompanied me on my OHG adventure. Both boys individually possessed that passion and yearning to experience everything life has to offer and push the limits put on their lives through their disabilities. Rodriguez and Marcott were born with spina bifida, and neither was willing to let that stop them in life.

The most encouraging part for me was watching these children as they got into the ocean for the first time. Their vibrant, ear-to-ear smiles as they caught their first wave, and the confidence they had knowing they were accomplishing something they never thought possible was a memorable moment for all. Their proud parents watched in awe as their children beat the odds on the shore of Costa Rica, completely at ease knowing they were in the safe hands of the many volunteers. As a parent, I understand the promise we hold for our children to reach every goal they dream.

I believe this program is the steppingstone to the path these children are going to make for themselves, making anything they encounter in their life possible. The ocean is truly healing, not only physically by the surf it provides but also the emotional and mental healing as the kids overcome the stigma of being “confined” to a wheelchair. Aside from the surf and excitement of each day’s activities, the nights at Shaka were my favorite part of the experience. We spent each night eating dinner together, laughing, talking, playing games, and sharing the moments of our experience together as a new family. What could be better? The love and compassion from each of the volunteers was felt from the moment of arrival. I learned throughout the week, while talking with the volunteers (a couple of whom have been a part of OHG camps in the past), how the experience has humbled them and changed their lives, knowing they had a positive impact on the children’s lives in such a proactive way.

For more information visit [Ocean Healing Group](#) online.