

# MidWeek

## Removing Limits To The Ocean

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By Guest Writer



By Mark Marble, President & CEO  
AccesSurf Hawaii inc.

Living in Hawaii is a dream for many. The warm and welcoming spirit of its people, the deep-rooted sense of 'ohana, the year-round tropical climate, and the historic, rich ocean culture and activities are just a few of the reasons why I decided to move to the Islands.

When arriving on Oahu in 2004 for a job as a Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist (CTRS) at Rehabilitation Hospital of the Pacific, I helped people with disabilities find new ways of participating in activities they enjoyed doing prior to their injury. Many expressed their desire to get back into the ocean to surf, swim and snorkel. That is when I decided to start AccesSurf.

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In November 2006, AccesSurf's "Day at the Beach" program was launched to offer beach access and therapeutic ocean programs that would in turn empower people with disabilities by providing adaptive surfing instruction and therapeutic educational programs on water recreation.

Now each first Saturday of the month at White Plains Beach in Kalaeloa, more than 70 volunteers, including pro surfers, medical professionals and community members, coupled with beach paths and specialized adaptive equipment, help more than 50 participants gather with their families for a day of surfing, swimming and snorkeling in a safe and barrier-free environment.

AccesSurf also strives to enrich lives by assisting families to access the beach and ocean, which is apparent in many of the stories of its participants.

“When we first moved here to Hawaii, my son



Photo courtesy AccesSurf

Volunteer Chris Courtois helps an AccesSurf participant ride a wave

Jacquob would hardly go into the water. He was absolutely terrified. This was a symptom of his post traumatic stress disorder,” says Mrs. Littlejohn, Jacquob’s mother. “Due to the AccesSurf Program and its many wonderful volunteers, he now surfs at competition levels and has very little fear of the water. Jacquob’s doctor is amazed by the progress he has made and feels this is because of his participation with the AccesSurf Program. Jacquob is now able to face his fears and has gained self-confidence and empowerment. It is such a therapeutic healing experience.”

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Cynthia Bartlett, a mother of a teenage daughter who has autism and Down syndrome, also experienced firsthand the benefits of AccesSurf’s programs. “When we go to ‘Day at the Beach’, she comes alive with joy. It is the most fun she has all month. Having safe access to this water program is so wonderful,” says Bartlett. “She rides a long tandem board with a trained volunteer and feels so grown up. When they catch a wave together she is in heaven, the smile on her face is priceless. She actually starts

talking and reaching out to people more in the water and riding the waves, and I can see it is such good therapy.”

AccesSurf is a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization supported by contributions from people in the community. For more information on how you can support AccesSurf and its programs, visit [www.accessurf.org](http://www.accessurf.org) or call 236-4200.

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