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Young Surfers Receive Special Healing

7th Annual Surfers Healing camp brings joy to hundreds of autistic children

By Nick Malfitano | [Email the author](#) | 9:00am | [Print](#)

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Malfitano

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A group of young surfers taking to the waves in Belmar is a common sight in the late summer months; however the event providing for the children to meet the incoming surf is far from common.

"Surfer's Healing", a California-based group which allows for autistic children to experience surfing with the assistance of trained volunteers, held their seventh annual camp on the 7th Avenue Beach in Belmar this past Sunday morning.

Nearly 200 autistic children who pre-registered had the opportunity to ride the waves at this unique gathering.

The organization was founded by Israel "Izzy" Paskowitz and his wife Danielle, when their son Isaiah was diagnosed with autism at age three. Finding that surfing in the ocean gave Isaiah a sense of peace, the Paskowitzes decided to bring this unique form of therapy to other families with autistic children, and the results have been a wonderful success, according to Fran Hines of Belmar's First Aid Squad.

"We have a two-day 'Beach Bash' in conjunction with Autism Family Services of New Jersey, and the Surfers Healing group," Hines explained. "Their trained surfers from California and Hawaii guide the children down to the shoreline, then load them on the surfboards and take them out on the water. We're trying to provide a fun day at the beach for these children and their families."

Hines said that the event has been very successful, and that its resources have only grown over time. "Our first year, we had two tents and a small grill – now, we have a dozen tents and 800-900 hamburgers and hot dogs will be served today," Hines remarked. "We have received all manner of donations, financial and otherwise, from all kinds of people; Belmar is generous and we stick together."

Prior to the children being led out to surfing, Israel Paskowitz and his surf volunteers led a Hawaiian chant and prayer service, followed by the paddle-out of a memorial wreath dedicated to the victims of the September 11th terrorist attacks.

Jessica Barzilay, Assistant Director of the Epilepsy Foundation of New Jersey, stated that while many may feel that Sunday's event was about surfing, it was instead about possibilities.

"These kids are saying that they won't be defined by their limitations, but rather by their possibilities. Our organization seeks to help them take on challenges, and one day help them to lead independent and productive lives," Barzilay commented.

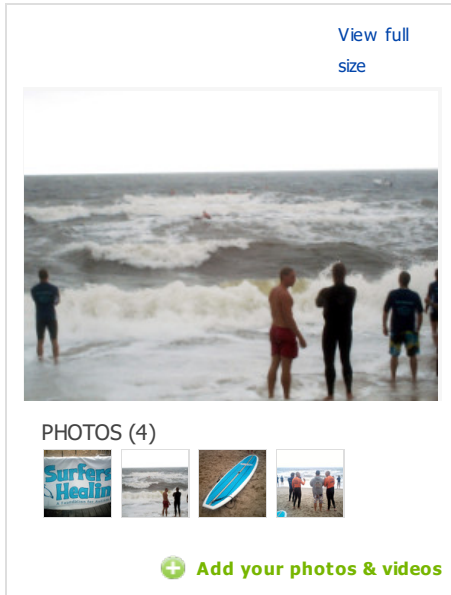
Barzilay went to say that Belmar has welcomed the group "like no other town", and the effort put in by all staff volunteers was "phenomenal", mentioning that up to 5,000 people have been in attendance for previous incarnations of the Surfers Healing camp in Belmar.

"We've got zumba, we have an arts and crafts tent, Whole Foods Market donated for the event; it's like a beach party here today."

Ralph Tejada of Livingston, New Jersey brought his young son Jake to the event.

"He's excited about having the chance to go surfing again," Tejada commented.

Liza Gundell, Deputy Director for the Epilepsy Foundation of New Jersey, called their coordination with Surfers Healing their "biggest annual event."



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"Many of these (autistic) children have tactile issues," Gundell said, referring to their reluctance and fear with touch and feel sense movements. "But once they're out there on the surfboard, everyone's happy."

Gundell joked that the trained volunteers from Surfers Healing who came from the west coast and Hawaii may have been looking for bigger waves than New Jersey could provide, but that the event was being enjoyed by all.

"The childrens' sense of accomplishment is wonderful," Gundell added.

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