

PROBATION NEWS



PROBATION YOUTH EARN OPEN WATER SCUBA DIVING CERTIFICATIONS

One early morning in September, LA County Probation youth accomplished something none of them had ever considered possible. Four months ago, through the support of the Placement Services Bureau's Independent Living Program (ILP), the Los Angeles County Probation Department, Rancho San Antonio Boys Home, and Malibu Divers, they began an intensive, fun-filled SCUBA (short for self-contained underwater breathing apparatus) diving program.

The Probation Department has a long history of collaboration with Rancho San Antonio, which was founded in 1933 by Catholic Big Brothers to serve the community's foster care youth.

ILP services are available for Probation youth who are suitably placed after the age of 16. The services include educational financial aid for vocational training programs such as this SCUBA diving program. Participants can also earn college credit for participation in the program which includes advanced diving certification and connections to career pathways.

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PROBATION YOUTH EARN OPEN WATER SCUBA DIVING CERTIFICATIONS (CONT)

LA COUNTY PROBATION DEPARTMENT, RANCHO SAN ANTONIO BOYS HOME, AND MALIBU DIVERS COLLABORATE ON SCUBA DIVING PROGRAM

“Diving is a big confidence builder. It includes physics, science, and math and can lead to future careers. If all they do is learn to dive and don’t take it anywhere, it will change their lives.”

-Barbara Gentile, Malibu Divers

Barbara Gentile, the owner of Malibu Divers and a Professional Association of Dive Instructors (PADI) Course Director, first presented the program opportunity to the young men at Rancho San Antonio in March 2022.

“At first, I thought they were operating like any other salesperson, but as soon as they said we were going to Catalina Island, I realized we were going to dive for real,” one program participant said.

Barbara, who has been diving for more than 30 years and is amongst the top three percent of dive instructors worldwide, gained the young men’s trust, and they enthusiastically began the program. They started by completing online dive theory and safety courses. After completing the theory and safety portion of the program, they graduated from pool diving and eventually extended to open ocean dives, including the waters off Catalina Island.

On September 1st, the youth participated in the final scuba dive at Paradise Cove in Malibu. The young divers and staff arrived early that morning, full of energy, equipment in tow, and ready to take on the Pacific Ocean. After everyone suited up, instructor Barbara and her co-instructor Nicholas facilitated a pre-dive safety check, including testing the divers on underwater communication and an inspection of all the equipment. The positive rapport, respect, and trust between the youth and the dive instructors were evident when observing their interactions.



Barbara shared, “Being able to help and expose them for the first time to the underwater world is such a privilege. Because they trust me to train them, it’s kind of a special relationship and bond that forms between us.”

Placement Services Bureau Chief Paul Vinetz shared that, “I have known Barbara for many years. As a local small business owner, she is committed to giving back to the community through educational opportunities like this one as well as being an advocate for the environment through coastal clean-up events and ocean ecology awareness. She truly cares about these young people and looks forward to making further contributions to the youth served by the Probation Department. The SCUBA program was created to challenge our young people to prove to themselves that they could do something and do it very well.”

After the pre-dive safety check, the divers, Mr. Jesse Wallace, Rancho San Antonio’s Educational Coordinator, and dive instructors Barbara and Nicholas entered the ocean in two separate groups using a buddy system. Buddies are established during diving not only for safety reasons but also to nurture teamwork and sharing of the experience.

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PROBATION YOUTH EARN OPEN WATER SCUBA DIVING CERTIFICATIONS (CONT)

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“Divers always dive recreationally with buddies. You rely on each other. As in life, you must communicate and work together to solve problems,” Barbara shared, “The youth grow a lot through the Program, and life skills are learned. They learn to be responsible and mature. The Program shows them people are willing to help them grow.”

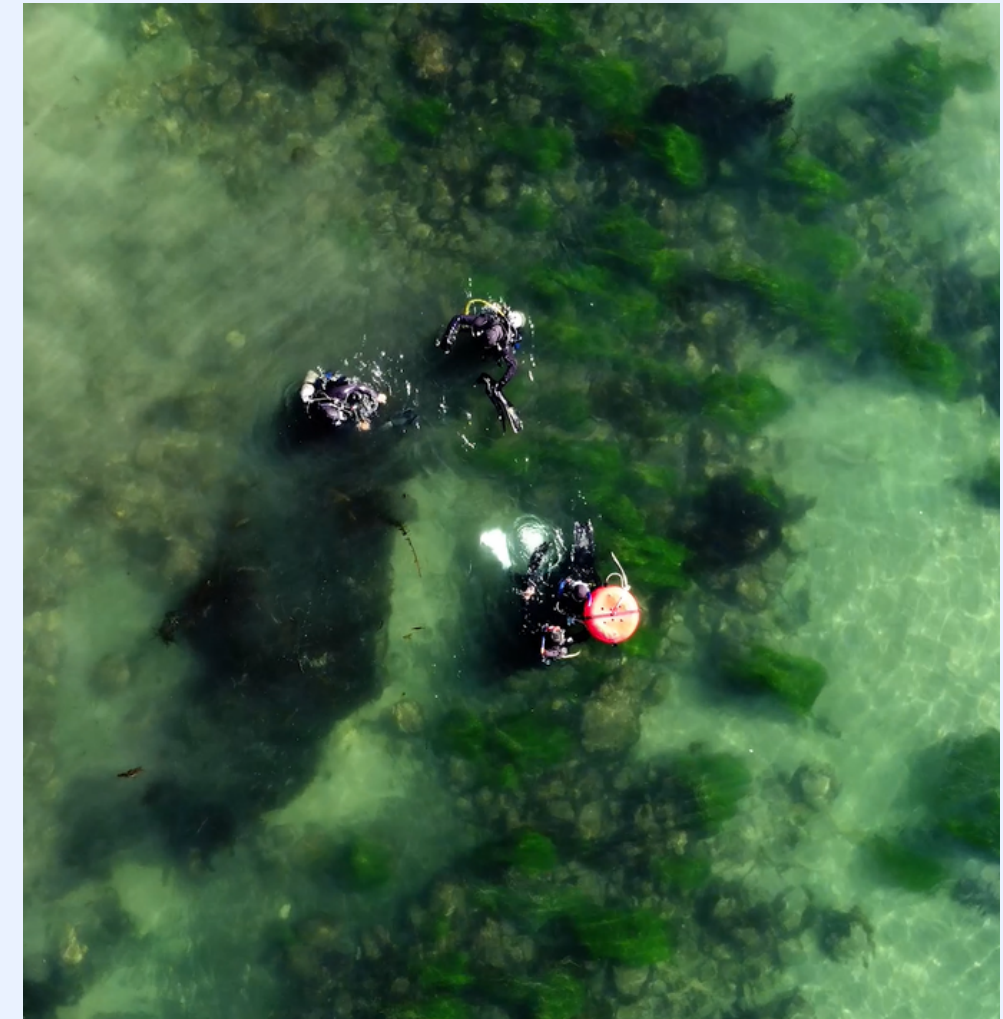
The September 1st Paradise Cove dive was the culmination of the current Program. After successfully completing dives, six youth and one staff earned their certifications as PADI open water divers. With their certification, they can legally dive on their own with another certified diver.

“It’s very intense but extremely cool at the same time. It’s a brand-new experience for the youth,” expressed Mr. Wallace. “It exposes them to opportunities they might not have thought of before or may not have access to. We are trying to bring as much exposure to positive educational experience as we can. There are so many career opportunities in diving. It’s not just recreational.”

At the end of each dive, the youth fill out a dive log which includes the dive depth, water temperature, weight, amount of air, and time length. Logging allows them to reflect on areas they may need to improve, but equally as important, the day’s achievements. “This program has a huge positive impact, especially on the inner-city kids,” expressed Rancho San Antonio Child Supervisor Williams. “It creates a positive alternative, a different conversation, and an opportunity to learn a different skill.”

“It’s very fun, and very adventurous. I didn’t know what was under the ocean. I would recommend the experience. I have a lifetime certification now. I can go anywhere in the world, Hawaii, Australia, anywhere and say I’m a certified scuba diver, show my certification and say, I would like to dive,” shared a proud youth diver.

Rancho San Antonio’s Executive Director Aubree Sweeney observed, “Watching the youth put the equipment on was like a superhero trying on their magical suit for the first time discovering their superpowers. This experience gave the youth an opportunity to live out Rancho’s vision statement of Risk, Change, Grow; to learn a skill that is truly the chance of a lifetime. The goal of working with our youth is to replace maladaptive coping mechanisms with new, more productive ways to cope and to heal. Malibu Divers gave six youth an opportunity to experience diving as one of these new coping mechanisms, an activity that many had only seen in the movies. They conquered fears, saw an underwater world bigger than them, and began to believe that anything is possible. The youth were given an opportunity to experience an entire world beneath the sea that they had never imagined, expanding the depths of their imaginations and broadening their scope of the world.”



Probation and Malibu Divers plan to extend the SCUBA certification program to placement youth throughout the County and create opportunities for many more participants in the future.

Thank you, LA County Probation Department, Rancho San Antonio Boys Home, and Malibu Divers. Partnerships and programs like this genuinely change lives, expose young people to new possibilities, and teach them to always dream beyond their circumstances.

Congratulations to all the new certified divers!