

Article on Dolphin Therapy...



Deena Hoagland (l), the founder of Island Dolphin Care, with her client, Mary O'Keefe, and the dolphin L.B.

These Dolphins Help Families Heal

By: Lou Ann Walker

"YO, TAXI!" YELLED MARY O'KEEFFE, looking L.B., the dolphin, straight in the eye. L.B. had taken the 5-year-old for a dorsal-fin ride around the ocean lagoon. Now she was excitedly calling him back for another ride.

Her mother, Marianne, and Deena Hoagland, her therapist at Island Dolphin Care in Key Largo, Fla., burst out laughing. A lovely, brown-haired child from Abingdon, Md., Mary has developmental delays and difficulty meeting anyone's gaze. She didn't speak until age 4. And here she was, making a sophisticated joke.

I had come to Key Largo to meet Deena Hoagland, 45, who took the dolphin therapy that had worked for her own son and turned it into a way to help other special-needs kids realize their potential. I was eager to witness the chemistry between these children and the dolphins. What surprised me, though, was the impact the therapy had on entire families: Fathers, mothers, brothers and sisters played together and left changed.

In 1991, PARADE ran a story titled "The Dolphin Didn't Let Him Down," about Joe Hoagland, then 3, who had a stroke during open-heart surgery that left him partly paralyzed and visually impaired. Despite doctors' suggestions, Deena Hoagland, a social worker, was unwilling to commit her son to a full-time rehabilitation center. She'd heard about Dolphins Plus, a Key Largo center that did research on dolphin communication, and asked to bring Joe there.

"It wasn't until Joe met Fonzie that he smiled," Deena recalled. Fonzie was an Atlantic bottlenose dolphin, and the interest was mutual. Before long, Joe was walking – even carrying buckets of fish for Fonzie.

The story drew a huge response, especially from parents asking how to get dolphin therapy for their impaired children. Deena started after-school programs for kids in the area. Eventually, in 1996, Dolphins Plus asked her to set up a full-time, intensive program. Pete, her husband, became the office manager.

"I've walked in these families' shoes," Pete Hoagland said. "It's not just the child that's challenged. It's the whole family." Indeed, the week spent at Island Dolphin Care is the first time some of these families have taken a vacation together. "What we discovered is that there is no program for typically developing children to be with their special-needs siblings," Deena said. "This is a recreational program. We try to give these families the glue to be together, to have fun as families, and they can keep it bubbling after they go home.

The program tries to be inclusive. So, when a physically or emotionally disabled or critically ill child at the center gets into the water, his or her brothers and sisters often are right there at the platform. As Mary O'Keeffe worked on her attention span, social skills, gross motor skills and hand-eye coordination, her brother, Jack, was getting a "dolphin rub" by holding out his hand as the dolphins swam back and forth.

For the parents too, the program offers rare freedom. Many have kids who often are confined to hospitals, and that's where the families spend time together. "One day a father was in the parking lot crying," Deena Hoagland recalled. "I asked what was wrong. He told me it was the first time he'd found a way to play with his fragile son without hurting him."

The five-day program is offered from March to November and costs \$2000. (Families find their own lodging.) The nonprofit Island Dolphin Care provides many scholarships to South Florida children and also offers one-day programs for critically ill children from the surrounding community. Kids come with different diagnoses: attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder, cancer, cerebral palsy, autism or low self-esteem. In order to attend Island Dolphin Care, children must be 3 or older, able to swallow and control their heads, and not be aggressive or afraid of water or animals.

Families attend briefing sessions and learn about dolphin behavior. At the end of the week, one family member and the child in therapy put on masks and snorkels for "unstructured" swims with the dolphins. (Dolphins are free *not* to interact with the children, if they so choose.) "The dolphins react differently with every child," Deena Hoagland explained. "They provide unconditional love and acceptance. It's a gentle experience but a wonderful motivator. There are no miracles here. I don't believe children will do something they couldn't have done otherwise. But it *can* be magical."

10News.com

Dolphins May Be Remedy For Depression

Study Shows Depression Lifted For Patients Who Interacted With Dolphins

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SAN DIEGO -- An up close and personal encounter with a friendly sea creature can give you a rush. Now, scientists say it can be a way to ease depression.

Dolphins are playful and a symbol of freedom, grace and serenity.

These magical creatures of the sea may just be the remedy for people with mild to moderate depression.

Scientists say swimming with dolphins is an effective treatment for mild to moderate depression.

"People feel a greater sense of joy, love, connections and a sense of oneness. It's very intense for many people," said Scripps psychologist Dr. George Pratt.

A new study in the British Medical Journal shows depression lifted for patients who interacted with dolphins an hour a day over a two week period.

"Those that swam with the dolphins had a significant reduction of depressive symptoms -- it was profound," said Pratt.

Pratt uses dolphin therapy with patients suffering from mild to moderate depression.

"There are no words to describe it. It completely changed my life," said dolphin therapy patient Marcella Sandrin.

Sandrin -- one of Pratt's patients -- says her depression disappeared after swimming with dolphins off Hawaii.

"For the first time, I really experienced unconditional love and joy," said Sandrin.

Swimming with these creatures did more for her than anything else she's ever tried.

Related To Story



"I've done counseling and meditations and exercising. I am a much happier person. I don't feel hopeless anymore," said Sandrin.

SeaWorld animal trainer Bob McMains says dolphins have an amazing connection with people.

"The dolphins impact every guest we have," said McMains.

Pratt says playing and swimming with dolphins ignites emotions and releases brain chemicals that make us feel good.

"I am sure there are some neurotransmitters activity and dopamine release," said Pratt.

He says many patients including Sandrin have experienced lasting effects after a session with dolphins.

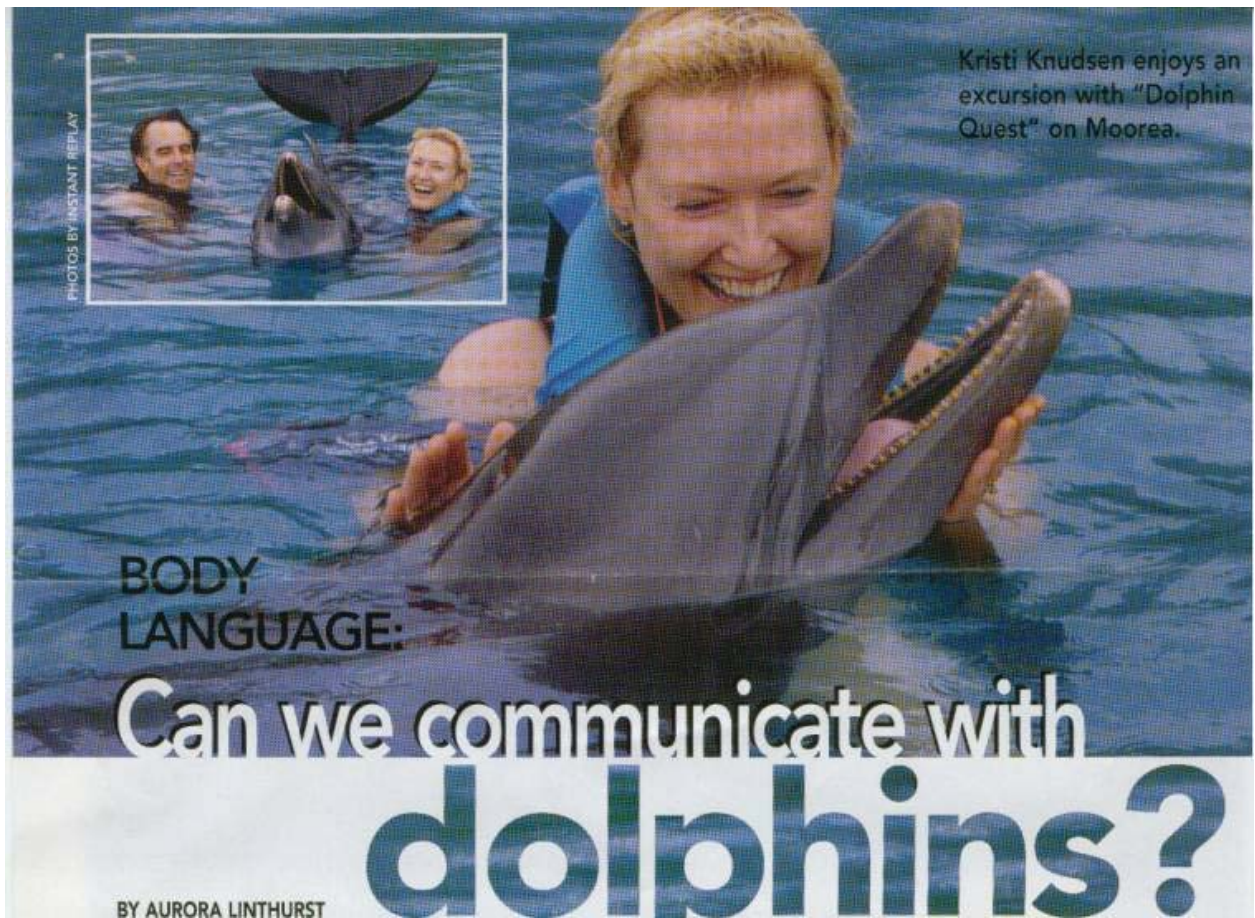
"I saw people become alive," said Pratt.

SeaWorld was not involved in the the dolphin therapy study, but 10News thanks them for helping to demonstrate the findings.

Sandrin did not take part in the original study, but she did take part in a self-healing dolphin swim with Pratt's group.

To learn more about Sea World's Dolphin Interaction Program, click on www.SeaWorld.com. To learn more about Dr. Pratt's dolphin swim, click on www.DrGeorgePratt.com.

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My affinity for marine life began off the shores sandwiched between the Hawaiian Islands of Maui and Molokini. These coastal waters are a refuge and a preserve for the existing aquatic life. Upon my "graduation dive" I donned my tank and weight belt to descend into the turquoise blue ocean. At the second level of the atmosphere - 60 feet below the surface of the waters, I felt as if I were an embryo of the universe and all the tranquility and clarity of life were suddenly brought before me.

The Pacific Ocean is a wondrous world filled with the deepest perceptions of thought. The sound of immersion is the phantom sound which causes a brainstate associated with creativity and euphoria.

In 1973, educational anthropologist Betsey Smith was curious about dolphin and human interaction. Her research included dolphins being used to encourage autistic children to communicate, facilitate learning in Down Syndrome youngsters and ease the pain of depressed people.

Smith developed "Project In Reach" in 1978 and examined the impact of dolphin play on some dozen neurologically impaired youngsters, including some with Down Syndrome and autism. Some of the saddest symptoms of autism are total emotional isolation, self-injury, repetitive behavior and lack of speech.

The world's hub for dolphin research and therapy is the Dolphin Human Therapy Programs in Key Largo, Florida. The program is run by psychologist David Nathanson, a retired psychologist, formerly of Florida International University.

Each year Nathanson treats up to 500 children in the only year-round, full-time dolphin-assisted therapy in the world. According to Anthrozoos, Nathanson's findings were: 1) that dolphin treatment was some ten times more effective than the classroom setting has been; and 2) that children's speech problems using dolphin protocol were more successful than the classroom environment where children were scored with a picture board and rewarded with warm hugs by humans.

Horace Dobbs, once a fellow of England's Royal Society of Medicine and medical researcher runs the International Dolphin Watch. He abandoned his veterinarian research in 1974 to study dolphin-human interaction full-time. Dobbs observed that some wild dolphins seemed to gravitate naturally toward people who were emotionally troubled. He called these "ambassador" dolphins.

In 1991, the Ft. Myers, Florida AquaThought Foundation's David Cole thought that the answers may lie in dolphin sonar. Sonar is how they communicate, using a spot in their skulls called a melon to "see" with sound, all the way through a body.

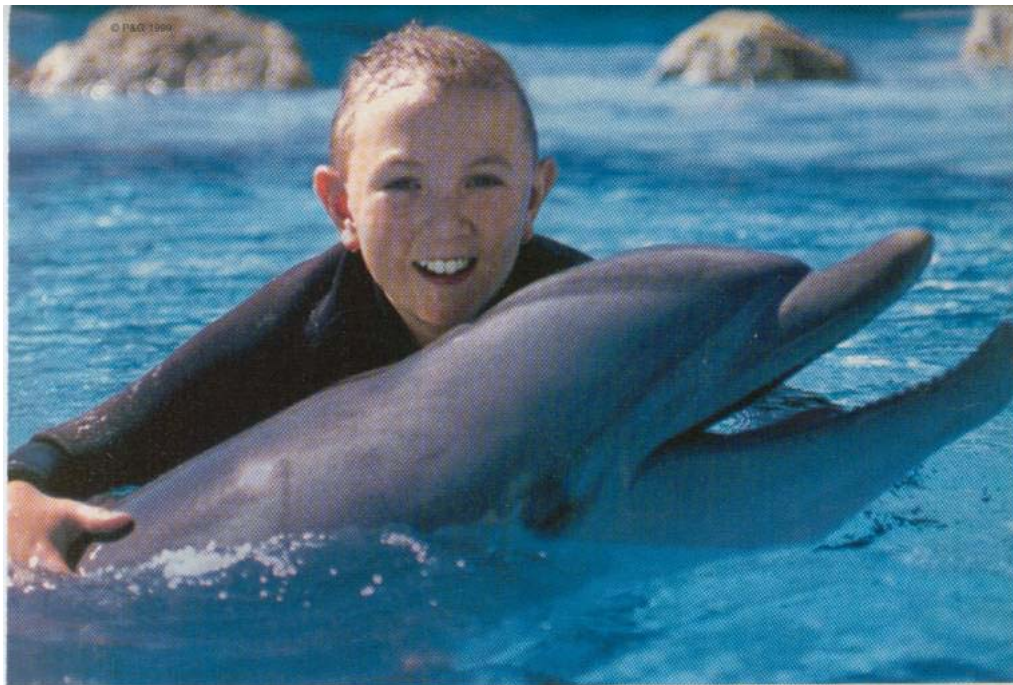
Using sonar, the dolphins may even "read" each other's moods and physical conditions. Their sonar, also called echolocation, can actually be felt by humans: Swimmers have reported a "shimmery" or vibration throughout their bodies during encounters with curious dolphins.

Cole monitors with brain waves of people swimming with dolphins and his EEG's show that the left and right sides of the brain which normally display very different wave patterns become more alike when people swim with dolphins. Cole said "There are dramatic changes, not unlike the characteristics of a drug response and they are documented to the extent that we have 'electroencephalographic evidence.'

He notes that this brainstate known to researchers as "hemispheric synchronization" is typically associated with heightened awareness and increased learning ability.

Cole explains that in the psychological response it can change the stress chemistry of the bloodstream and his theory is that dolphin sonar may possibly affect the firing patterns of neurons.

One may have to search within one's inner unconsciousness to have a glimpse of understanding of the theory of body language. Ethical consideration of having dolphins in captivity when it comes to dolphin therapy can be made but Nathanson mentions the dolphins remain on their own accord.



**We're helping terminally ill kids get
a different kind of treatment.**

"Swimming with the dolphins was way cool.

My whole family got into it. My sister and I fed them.

I named the big one Harry. 'Cause he had no hair.

Like me. So I thought that was kinda cool.

He's the one in the picture. My dad took tons of pictures.

Every time I turned around, I'd hear 'Smile.'"

For kids who are terminally ill, laughter really is the best medicine.
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Let's make it happen...

Research Scientist/Therapists Specializing In Dolphin Therapy

1. http://www.dolphins.org/visit_special_needs.php

Dolphin Research Center
Special Needs Pathways Program
58901 Overseas Highway
Grassy Key, FL 33050-6019

Where It Began - Dolphin Assisted Therapy (DAT)

In 1988 many of the dolphins in the Dolphin Research Center's (DRC) family became participants in a very unique form of therapy called Dolphin Assisted Therapy (DAT). A pilot study was conducted at Dolphin Research Center with therapist Dr. Nathanson. The study was based on the Attention Deficit Hypothesis, which theorizes that the main impediment for learning in children with mental disabilities is their inability to pay attention, rather than their inability to learn. Working with their trainers, the dolphins helped a multitude of special children and adults achieve new goals and gain a new sense of confidence. The dolphin's format for these sessions was based on DRC's successful public dolphin swim program, Dolphin Encounter. In the dolphin assisted therapy sessions, the dolphins worked with the patients in structured play sessions, performing specific behaviors which their trainers requested of them. Some examples of the behaviors would be a dorsal tow and a foot push. The dolphin knew the behaviors very well and often adapted them to suit the abilities of the individual patient. In one dramatic example, Natua the dolphin adapted his dorsal tow behavior to tow a quadriplegic woman by her bent inner elbow, since she had no grasping ability with her hands. Dolphin Research Center continues to work with special needs individuals using these same style sessions on a regular basis.

2. <http://www.gulfarium.com/jfdolphin.html>

Dr. Janet Flowers

CCC-SLP, Ed.D

Project Founder of the JF² Dolphin Project - Lead Therapist

What is the JF² Dolphin Project?

The JF² Dolphin Project at Florida's Gulfarium is a one to two week therapy program for children with academic, communication, and/or physical therapy

needs. It is a research based and cost efficient program designed to enhance traditional therapies. The JF² Dolphin Project combines the expertise of State of Florida licensed therapists/teachers and the Gulfarium's experienced dolphin interaction trainers. The project utilizes Pantropical Spotted dolphins as motivational tools. Interaction with a dolphin is used to motivate children to accomplish specific therapy and learning goals.

The JF² Dolphin Therapy Project is the culmination of 5 years of research and development work by Dr. Janet Flowers. Dr. Flowers' breakthrough work in linking current brain research to the reasons for positive outcomes of dolphin-human therapy is the basis for the next generation of research on this topic. "DR. Janet's detailed reporting on increased time on time, response time and expressive communication skills for children completing dolphin assisted therapy session at Florida's Gulfarium will continue to be the focus of Dr. Flowers' research.

3. <http://www.drgeorgepratt.com/inside.html?philosophy>

George J. Pratt, Ph.D.

Dr. Pratt draws upon the best of Western traditional tools such as cognitive and behavioral strategies to create a relaxation response and to desensitize people from fearful or anxiety-provoking factors. He also incorporates Eastern integrative and complementary perspectives that recognize the subtle influences of the mind and body and practical applications of mental, emotional, spiritual, and physical energy.

Dr. Pratt's 31 years of experience and a vast depth of advanced training provide clients with an effective blend of human understanding; compassionate caring, and professional skill in which you can have confidence.

[Dr. Pratt uses dolphin therapy to treat depression.](#)

4. <http://waterplanetusa.com/subdex.htm>

Water Planet - 709 N. Lagoon Drive, Panama City Beach, FL 32408

HARMONY PROGRAM

The emotional impact of a dolphin encounter in his own environment combined with expressive art, massage, watsu and music can be a beneficial experience for emotionally challenged and fragile children. We find that our "Harmony" program

can help a wide variety of children: most spectra of autism, manic depression, Rett Syndrome, Turrets Syndrome, ADHD, Down syndrome, hyperactivity, etc. We can also help children with more general mental and emotional disorders or difficulties in social adaptation and even children with terminal illnesses (cystic fibrosis, cancer, leukemia, etc.)

5. <http://www.vallarta-adventures.com/dolphins/dolphin-therapy.html>

Ongoing research at universities and dolphin centers around the world suggests that the sounds that dolphins make when they communicate underwater have a therapeutic effect. It is believed that swimming with dolphins, due to their sonar function, improves a person's immune system and stimulates the production of hormones and neurotransmitters, which are responsible for sensations such as peacefulness, happiness, self-awareness, and high self-esteem.

Our Dolphin Assisted Therapy programs help participants learn to feel more positively about themselves in an environment that promotes fun, play and learning, providing them with the opportunity to bridge that experience back into their personal lives. The overall experience causes a relative improvement in the child's awareness, mental state and in the way they relate to the environment around them, which can be noticed in session after session.

6. <http://www.myhero.com/myhero/hero.asp?hero=ludmilaalukina>

One woman who has seen the potential for dolphins to aid in healing humans is Russian scientist, **Dr. Ludmila Lukina**. She retrained Dolphins who had formerly been used in Russia to explode war machinery and gave them a new objective as part of a revolutionary 1986 study on "Dolphin Assisted Therapy."

Lukina's research team at the State Oceanarium of Ukraine, (located in the Sevastopol, Crimea), conducted a study which resulted in dramatic results. The team was able to build a methodology, a theoretical base, and practical recommendations for a kind of dolphin therapy used by adults and children suffering from a range of diseases, including **autism**.

Many of her more than 1,000 subjects were recommended dolphin therapy by their regular doctors because traditional therapy did not work for them. Those who participated in Lukina's 1986 study showed elevated moods and an increase in their productivity. In particular, interaction with dolphins showed significant effects in the treatment of patients with cerebral paralysis, stammering, and specialized phobias.

Emerald Echo

Emerald Echo will service special needs children through dolphin therapy.

Dolphin therapy has been **proven** to help children with emotional and mental challenges as:

EMOTIONAL AND CONDUCT DISORDERS

- Attention Deficit Disorder
- Hyperactivity

ENVIRONMENTAL DIFFERENCES

- Communication disorders
- Speech disorders
- Language barrier

SPECIAL NEEDS AND HEALTH DETERIORATION

• **Autism** According to report issued by the Department of Developmental Services, "Changes in the Population of Persons with Autism and Pervasive Developmental Disorders in California's Developmental Services System" in 1999, between 1987 and 1998 there was a documented 273% increase in reported cases of autism in California. The report also documented a 69% increase in the total Regional Center consumer population of 80,483 to 136,383 during same period.

According to other reports these numbers continue to increase. The Autism Speaks Organizations reports autism affects as many as one in every 150 children born today.

- Spinal Bifida (thorn bone)
- Hydrocephaly or Macrocephaly
- Microcephaly
- Special visual needs
- Learning disabilities
- Mental deficiencies
- Brain paralysis
- Down Syndrome

While there are programs such as Applied Behavior Analysis, Floor-time, Occupational Therapy, Relationship Development Intervention, Sensory Integration Therapy, Speech Therapy, TEACCH, and Verbal Behavior Intervention, few in California offer dolphin therapy for this increasingly wide population of special needs children.

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answer to a
billion people's
prayers...*

