

# DEL MAR TIMES

## Lifeguards, artist treat refugees to day at beach

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**By Roger Li**

*Contributor*

Refugee teens, hailing from Burma to Somalia, were exposed to a quintessential part of Southern California culture on July 12 - a day at the beach.

As part of its Students Plus summer school program, the International Rescue Committee (IRC) rewards participants with a weekly trip to the sand and surf. Each Monday, IRC staff and volunteers take the students, now living in City Heights, to a different beach in San Diego.

This particular Monday in Del Mar, however, was different.

Del Mar resident Patti Fox, along with her team of artists, contacted the Del Mar Lifeguard Association to organize a more memorable excursion for the IRC students. Throughout the afternoon, lifeguards took the teens out on speedboats so they could see the Pacific Ocean past the breakwater.

Although the first students in line warily approached the boats, they came back with an infectious enthusiasm that quickly spread to the other students, who then eagerly waited their turns. Pizza, tents, and drinks were also generously provided.

Selena Marinello, Fox's photographer for the day, shared her thoughts on working with the refugees.

"Yesterday I was able to capture stories of awkwardness turned to joy and shyness turned to smiles. Seeing their faces light up as they explored the Pacific Ocean, some for the first time, was interesting as a native to these waters," she said.

"The Lifeguard Association of Del Mar has earned eternal thanks from all of us. Their dedication and commitment to these courageous kids was awe-inspiring."

Thomas Bosworth, emerging San Diegan artist and member of Fox's team, spoke of his day at the beach.

"My experience with the Somali refugees was eye-opening and intensely moving. Seeing the broad smiles of the Somali girls Patti Fox was teaching how to boogie board was enough to dissolve any awkwardness I had felt initially with the group," he said. "We, as a world, can't afford to let these people fall through the cracks. Their struggle is just too important and human to ignore."

Realizing the language barrier, Bosworth said he sought ways to relate to the students.

"Play was an immediate resource for connection, as well as sports, food, the ocean and simple conversation," he said.

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Lifeguards and students play a game of soccer at a Del Mar beach.

Photos by Selena Marinello



"Throughout the day, these factors melted away the gap between our cultural differences."

Abdi Moalim, a student from Somalia, compared the day to what he would experience back in his home country. "The oceans in Somalia aren't safe. We couldn't do this because someone might come and take our boat. There's no people in my country like the lifeguards that would care about us to keep us safe and have fun with us," he said. "They are friendly people, and they cared about us to welcome us to their country."

Fox said she was inspired to advocate for refugees after visiting her son in Tanzania. He was stationed there in 2007 for his stint in the Peace Corps. While in Tanzania, Fox was afforded an opportunity to help with a mural project at an orphanage, which would heavily influence her passion to help underprivileged children globally.

In the future, Fox plans to coordinate with her team to bring art classes to the refugee students of Crawford High. Music and environmental awareness will also be included in these workshops.

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#### About the IRC:

The International Rescue Committee responds to the world's worst humanitarian crises and helps people to survive and rebuild their lives. Founded in 1933 at the request of Albert Einstein, the IRC offers lifesaving care and life-changing assistance to refugees forced to flee from war or disaster. More at [www.theirc.org](http://www.theirc.org).

**Event blog:** [www.pattifoxart.com](http://www.pattifoxart.com)

