



Nick Gabaldón Day – Celebrating Diversity, Environmentalism, and Ocean Readiness

Recipient: Heal the Bay
Project Period: 1/2/2023 – 7/26/2025
Award Amount: \$50,000
Project Number: #8006.22.074206

Summary of Accomplishments

Grants funds supported the planning and execution of Nick Gabaldón Day (NGD) which took place on June 3, 2023 and June 1, 2024. Over 300 stakeholders participated in the annual events at historic Bay Street Beach in Santa Monica. Activities included educational presentations by Heal the Bay naturalists and historic preservationists, hands-on beach cleanups, and swimming/surfing lessons. NGD, which Heal the Bay has coordinated with Black Surfers Collective (BSC), Surf Bus Foundation, and the Santa Monica Conservancy since 2013, seeks in part to enhance the recreational use and enjoyment of water-based, shoreline, and near-shore activities along the Los Angeles County coastline (Santa Monica Bay watershed).

Project Activities

Arriving on the beach participants rotated through stations, which included a surf lesson, history lesson and beach ecology learning experience. Participants were also invited to visit the LA28 tent to hear inspirational stories from Olympic athletes and receive a gift bag with goggles, swim cap and water bottle.

Prior to arriving at Nick Gabaldon Day, Heal the Bay contracted with Swim Up Hill as our swimming lesson partner. Through an innovative teaching method, para- Olympian, Jamal Hill helped to create restorative justice through swimming for underserved communities with little access to this life saving essentials. Jamal provided swimming lessons to youth from: Crete Academy, South Central Swim League, Swim Revolution, East LA Rising, and Boys and Girls Club of Pasadena.

Heal the Bay's **Aquarium under the Santa Monica Pier** was free for all visitors in honor of Nick in 2023 and 2024 thanks to the grant funding. Aquarium activities were offered, as well as screenings of documentaries exploring issues of race, coastal access, and following your passion against all odds. The films include: "12 Miles North: The Nick Gabaldón Story" (2012) and "La Maestra (The Teacher)" (2014).

When we applied for the grant we had assumed that we could be continuing to partner with YMCA's to provide the swim lesson portion of the program. The pandemic caused a disruption in these facilities bringing their swimming programs back on line. When we learned we couldn't offer swim lessons through the YMCAs

we pivoted to Swim Up Hill. We felt strongly that the swimming lessons were a crucial element of the program.

Project Outcomes

- In 2023 we were able to provide 80 kids with 2 weeks of swim lessons leading up to NGD. In 2024 120 kids received free swim lessons through the Swim up Hill program. In total, over 300 people participated in Nick Gabaldon Day events.
- As a result of the pandemic the swim programs at the YMCA's did not come back on line in order for us to start swimming lessons in early 2023. This caused us to pivot to a new swimming lesson partner, Swim Up Hill.
- Partnering with the Black Surfers Collective and having the opportunity to mentor them while they built capacity internally, acquired their 501c3 and learned the ropes of fundraising, was a powerful unexpected outcome. Heal the Bay was able to use our 40 years of experience to lift up and amplify the message and programming of this amazing organization. One father from East LA said he had never seen his daughter so happy in his life. He accepted the challenge to put on a wet suit and give surfing a try. His family was so proud of him too!

The Future

The Black Surfers Association has acquired funding for the 2025 program. Heal the Bay will continue to provide support and the ecology sessions during the event.

Lessons Learned

The lack of available learn to swim programs in impacted neighborhoods cannot be over stated. Kids who learn to swim enjoy the beach more fully! We would like to expand the partnership to include other City of LA rec centers. Increasing access to learn to swim programs for all Angelinos is critical.

Project Photos



Group photo of Nick Gabaldon Day Participants in 2024



Heal the Bay Naturalist sharing beach ecology with students during Nick Gabaldon Day



Students enjoying surfing lessons



T-shirt art for Nick Gabaldon Day 2024