

Youth Paddlers Take to the Sea to Support Young Patients at Cancer Center of Santa Barbara

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By Daniel Langhorne, Noozhawk Intern | [@NoozhawkNews](#)



The Santa Barbara Harbor Patrol provides a welcome spray as Keiki Relay Paddle participants head toward shore at Leadbetter Beach on Sunday. (Fritz Olenberger / [www.olenberger.com](http://www olenberger.com))

Keiki Paddle's annual nine-mile flotilla brings joy, proceeds to children with cancer and a program for their siblings

The [Keiki Relay Paddle](#) brought out 120 paddlers, ages 7 to 17, for an open-ocean paddle relay Sunday to raise money for pediatric patients at the [Cancer Center of Santa Barbara](#).



Youth paddlers raised around \$20,000 and expected even more donations to come in this week. Half of the funds will help 6-year-old Ashley Vasquez-Castro, who is fighting leukemia, and the rest will go to the ["I Count Too" program](#) that supports the young siblings of children with cancer.

“It’s happy for us to see her here outside of the hospital,” said Mayra Castro, Ashley’s 17-year-old sister. “It’s a great blessing with people helping us out, too.”

Around 1 p.m. Sunday, participants dove off the flotilla of 16 fishing and leisure boats off Campus Point at [UCSB](#) with their stand-up and long-distance paddleboards. Even though it was a cloudless afternoon inland, the group paddled nine miles east through a dense fog cloud to [Leadbetter Beach](#).

Some completed the entire marathon while others swapped out in a relay.

The paddlers were welcomed at the finish line with cheers from their parents and mist from the fire hose blasted by a [Santa Barbara Harbor Patrol](#) boat. Ashley and her family members also took an inflatable motorboat to meet them on the water.

[An advisory board of teenagers was in charge of everything](#) from selecting Ashley and the Cancer Center as the recipients of this year’s proceeds to selecting the color and design for this year’s Keiki Paddle T-shirt.

The Keiki Paddle is an offshoot of the [Friendship Paddle](#), which organizes long-distance paddles out to the Channel Islands to raise money for locals fighting life-threatening illness. “Keiki” means “child” in Hawaiian.

Steve Campbell is on the Friendship Paddle’s board of directors but also works as an organizer for the Keiki Relay Paddle. Now he’s passed the paddle, so to speak, with his children participating in the Keiki Relay.



The grin says it all. (Fritz Olenberger / [www.olenberger.com](http://www olenberger.com))

“It’s really gratifying to hand this project to the kids,” he said.

Teenagers and children understand that they can help someone by participating, he added.

Lindsey McFadden, a youth advisory board member and high school senior, said Ashley was picked because the board believed her family needed the money the most. Ashley's mother, Marta, is only able to work three days a week at her current job, said Castro.

The teenage board members also recognized that cancer is tough on entire families and wanted help the siblings of cancer patients by choosing to support "I Count, Too," McFadden said.

"It's a great connection because its kids out there supporting other kids in our community," said Lindsay Groark, the Cancer Center's public relations and administrative manager.

[Click here for more information](#) about the Cancer Center of Santa Barbara, or call 805.682.7300. Join the Cancer Center of Santa Barbara on [Facebook](#).

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Triumphant smiles brighten an already sunny day at Leadbetter Beach. (Fritz Olenberger / www.olenberger.com)