

# No Arms, No Legs, No Worries

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One might not think that someone with no arms and no legs could swim, much less scuba dive, but with the help of one non-profit organization based in the Chicagoland area, children, veterans and people of all abilities around the world can benefit from zero gravity and scuba therapy.

The Downers Grove-based Diveheart Foundation has been serving individuals with everything from spinal cord injuries and traumatic brain injuries to those on the autism spectrum and with post-traumatic stress disorder.

Since 2001, this 501 C3, volunteer-driven charity has done everything from helping to facilitate cutting-edge scuba therapy research with university medical centers around the country to launching a leading international adaptive scuba training program for scuba instructors, dive buddies and adaptive divers (Diveheart refers to people with disabilities

as adaptive divers, not handicapped or disabled divers).

"It's not about scuba diving," according to Tinamarie Hernandez, Diveheart Executive Director.

"Diveheart's ultimate goal is to take the unrealized human potential that exists with individuals with disabilities and create a paradigm shift in their lives," she says.

"We take Chris in the wheelchair and help him or her become Chris the scuba diver. Now Chris is no longer defined by his or her disability," she adds.

"Diveheart then helps direct them to activities like coral reef restoration, marine biology and oceanography, giving them focus, purpose and helping them to feel valued while they are learning to become good stewards of the environment."

Diveheart's free scuba experience programs reach from coast to coast in the U.S. and are replicated by Diveheart teams as far away as Malaysia.

Researchers from around the country have found that the benefits of scuba therapy and zero gravity underwater range from relief of symptoms caused by post-traumatic stress disorder and chronic pain to increased focus and a sense of well-being in those with developmental disabilities.

Researchers have also discovered that there are big benefits in going deep because the body produces an extra output of serotonin once divers reach 66 feet underwater. However, those with developmental and physical disabilities can benefit from the very first pool session.

Diveheart's ultimate goal is to secure funding to build a deep warm-water research and training facility so that the benefits of scuba therapy can be replicated in a safe, confined, warm-water environment.

More information on Diveheart and scuba therapy can be found

at [www.diveheart.org](http://www.diveheart.org)