

## **THE GIFT OF THE DOLPHINS**

An organization from Germany made it its goal to enable to as many children as possible the wonderful encounter with dolphins. Meanwhile it is scientifically proven: Dolphin therapy leads to a significant improvement in the quality of life of special-needs children.

During the baptism of his sister, Kirsten Kuhnert's son nearly drowned in a pool. After his clinical death, one Doctor was able to revive little Timmy, but he remained in a waking coma. For his family, it was a time of helplessness. Five months after the accident Tim still did not sleep, had no sense of day and night. Then almost half a year after the accident, his mother had a dream. She saw Tim swimming with dolphins and laughing happily. Back then she had no idea how this dream would change her life. Kirsten Kuhnert's odyssey led her from doctor to doctor, from therapy to therapies. Nobody could help Tim. He stayed in a coma.

Kirsten Kuhnert met therapists who gave her hope. One therapist told her to get Tim to swallow again. Because a child that does not swallow can never talk again. Thus the therapist prevented Tim from having to be nourished artificially. However, when he finally started to swallow again, Kirsten Kuhnert could not be happy, since his condition was poor.

One day she hears about Dr.Nathanson and his dolphin therapy. Dr.Nathanson is the founder of Dolphin Human Therapy. He is the first scientist that was able to prove that children with various deficits learn up to 10 times faster while being with dolphins. To date, Dr.Nathanson has enabled a better life to thousands of children.

Ten months after her dream Kirsten Kuhnert prepares the family's first trip to Spunky and the other dolphins in Key Largo, Florida. The therapy takes place on four swimming docks. The most important part of therapy are the dolphins. The first couple of days pass uneventfully. But finally, at the end of one of the sessions, Spunky was softly pushing Tim's feet and all of a sudden Tim laughed out loud. Spunky had freed him from the coma and his isolation. From then on, Tim made small but steady progress. Out of these moments of joy, dolphin aid was founded in October 1995.

The first group organized by dolphin aid consisted of eight children and traveled to Miami in October 1996. For one of these children, dolphin aid had financed the entire cost of travel and therapy. All these children made excellent progress with Doctor Flipper. Since then, dolphin aid has helped thousands of children. Dolphin aid is currently working on the implementation of a dolphin center in Italy as well as on pre- and post-treatment clinics in Germany. Furthermore, the organization still sends children to therapy in Florida or to their new facility in Curacao. Dolphin aid employs five people, and the rest of the organization are volunteers, meaning that the entire board, including Kirsten Kuhnert, the scientists and lawyers of the organization work for free. Thanks to the dolphin therapy center in Curacao, waiting periods have been reduced. It is important for dolphin aid that the animals are kept in their natural surroundings and that they are treated with respect.

Two years ago Kirsten Kuhnert and her children moved to Florida. Cindy's story is especially touching. After a couple of unsuccessful chemotherapies, doctors only gave her a few more weeks. It was Cindy's fondest wish to swim with dolphins. Thus, dolphin aid made it possible for her to fly to Florida with the result that a couple of months later the tumor had become smaller and Cindy was doing well. Tim is now able to swallow, sit, recognize his mother and loves classical music. Thus Kirsten Kuhnert's message is to listen to your inner voice. After the successful therapy for her son, she started to fight for the scientific recognition of dolphin therapy. Nowadays more and more doctors are convinced by children, returning from therapy. Kirsten Kuhnert is convinced that in every bad there is something good. Her son showed her that she has so much more strength than she ever thought possible.