Wave Riding to Wellness

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Diana Gish/KMXT

When Gary Marlar took a group of kids out surfing with him he realized what a difference the sport could make in their lives. Since that time the substance abuse counselor has been working on a surfing wellness program to help young people with substance abuse problems. Diana Gish has more:

Even though Marlar has yet to find financial backing for his idea, he hasn't given up on the program. For now he and his wife Debbie and their friends continue to take a few kids out at a time. They share their equipment, their knowledge and their passion for the sport. Marlar talked about the joy of surfing and his desire to pass it on as he waxed down a board at Surfer beach.

-- (Surfing 1 "I'm just real tired ....oh no!".)

Surfing is expensive, especially in Alaska where wet suits are an absolute necessity. Marlar makes his own surf and boogie boards. And that's another aspect of the experience that he considers healing.

-- (Surfing 2 "Once you get into it....or anything.")

Marlar enjoys making boards for friends but not for money. He said if it were a job it

would take the fun out of the experience. One of the boards he made, the one he was waxing down as he spoke, was for fellow counselor Josene Warnecki. On one side of her pink surf board is a photo of the Holy Russian Orthodox church and on the other a design of her own making.

(Surfing 3 "We'd sit on .....blessing for all of us.")

In the hopes of sharing that blessing Marlar keeps looking for ways to cut expenses and still make the surfing experience available for others.

-- (Surfing 4 "If you...and still have the experience.")

And then there are the wet suits. For Kodiak surfing "5-4" wetsuits are the thing. Marlar says that the suits let a little water in but are "just right" temperature-wise. They're made of a special material that enables surfers to move. Marlar and friends watch for winter sales down south when other surfers switch to spring gear. The going price for a "5-4" wetsuit is 300 dollars no matter what size. The program's surf and boogie board supply is in good shape but its the need for the suits that keeps Marlar hoping for some financial support.

For other kinds of support Debbie Marlar is there. She's a photographer, a boogie boarder and also Gary's wife. On an unusually bright ,sunny day in Kodiak, she sat on the beach taking pictures and sharing stories. She watched as a 13 year old young man got his very first taste of the surfing life.

-- (Surfing 5 "How was it.... ....fun".)

I'm Diana Gish.