



Caymanian interns, in white shirts, from left, Jason Ricketts, Carol-Ann Campbell and Tareek Ricketts, with Stay-Focused's Ryan Chalmers, left, and Roger Muller. - Photo: Supplied

Cayman teens lend helping hand to young divers with disabilities

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Three Caymanian teenagers have spent the last few weeks volunteering in a unique programme that brings young people with disabilities to Cayman to learn how to dive. Jason Ricketts, 16; Tareek Ricketts, 15; and Carol-Ann Campbell, 16, who all attended John Gray High School, were this year's internship team with Stay-Focused, a charity founded by Roger Muller, which is celebrating its 20th anniversary this year. Each year, Caymanian interns are chosen to work and learn side-by-side with the young

US visitors, gaining their PADI Scuba Diver certifications, which allows them to dive at a maximum depth of 40 feet under the supervision of a professional diver. They can also progress through to higher levels. This year, Jason, who returned to the internship programme for a second consecutive year, gained his Open Water certificate, and hopes to go on to complete his Advanced Open Water and Dive Master qualifications. The charity has now offered him a paid position so he can return to work with it during future visits to Cayman. He says he's thinking about becoming a professional diver.

"It's been so surreal for me. The past two years, just growing with the programme and earning respect as you go along," he said. **'Like a family'** Having been on the programme two summers in a row, Jason says he's grown close with the kids taking part, as well as the adults involved. "It's like a family, we have a bond," he said. "You're doing challenges that you never thought you could have done. For these kids especially, with their disabilities, they are learning new things, some of them are travelling by themselves without their

parents for the first time. It's so good; I don't have words to describe how great this programme is." In the Stay-Focused programme, the able-bodied students – the interns – and the visitors go through the same dive training, share the same meals, stay in the same hotels and have the same experiences. For Jason, it's been an eye-opening couple of summers. "As you know, there is a lot of stigma still around disabled people here," he said. "When on island, you really don't see many disabled people around. It was so weird for me at the start to see people in wheelchairs acting all



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