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## Blind teens enjoy date with dolphins at Seaquarium

BY NICOLE BARDO-COLON

Under water, the teens could hear the dolphins talk to their trainers in a high-pitched warble. Above the water, they touched the animals' rubbery noses, flukes and fins.

The 28 teenagers from Miami Lighthouse for the Blind had never met a dolphin, but on Thursday, they got the chance to experience them with their hands.

The dolphin encounter at the Miami Seaquarium was part of a summer camp program, intended to promote independence and educate the blind or vision-impaired.

"I love them," said Jhonathan Saldana, 18.

``Like when they imitate what we do."

With the help of the trainers, the kids twirled in circles and shook their bodies all over, making the dolphins mimic their movement.

Putting their hands face up in the water and wiggling their fingers, they signaled the dolphins to speak and trainers rewarded the friendly creatures with fish.

The mammals jumped through the air and let the children kiss their noses.

One camper felt a little funny kissing the male dolphin, Ripley.

"It felt like wet rubber that moved," said Timothy Wynn, 15.

Before the kids went in the water with the dolphins, they learned about the creatures' training and behavior.

"We do hope that they get a greater understanding for these animals and just to develop a respect for them and a unique bond for them," said Carolina Perrina, spokeswoman for the Seaquarium.

The campers were all smiles when the dolphins brushed just under their hands as they rested on the water's surface.

"It was amazing, absolutely *amazing*, how sweet the dolphins were," said Natalia Sulca, 16. ``And they appeared to enjoy our company."