Brigid O’Donoghue, left, makes a video as 7-year-old Alex Wyatt reels in a fish while flanked by his mother, Rebecca Wyatt, and boat owner Marc Turner. O’Donoghue founded the United Special Sportsmen Alliance, which offers outdoor adventures for terminally ill and disabled children. Turner is now planning a Washington chapter.
Sporting chances

Boaters give disabled, terminally ill children a day they won’t forget

Washington launches a chapter of USSA — a charity that helps terminally ill and disabled children enjoy outdoors adventures.

BY CRAIG HILL
The News Tribune

A member Silvers’ eyes widen and a smile spreads across her face as Susan Fine emerges from the cabin of Relentless holding two trays of herring.

Fine and her husband, Ken, had hoped to put some big smiles on children’s faces by donating their 51-foot yacht to take them fishing off Browns Point. But they had no idea that making a 4-year-old girl’s day would be as easy as showing her a tray of dead fish.

Amber is like most children her age. She’s delighted by the little things. The only thing different about Amber is the electronic device implanted in her head behind her right ear.

Without the device, called a cochlear implant, a noise as loud as 95 decibels would register as only a whisper.

Amber turns to her mom, Elyane Silvers of Bremerton, and says with her hands, “Look, Mom, a little fish.”

“Yes,” her mom signs back, “we’ll use the little fish to get a big fish.”

Amber is the youngest of eight children spread out over three yachts. All the children are either disabled or terminally ill. For most, as they reel in flounder after flounder, it’s their first time fishing.

The person who seems to be enjoying the sunny day the most is Brigid O’Donoghue, the Wisconsin woman who organized this two-day trip.

Through her organization, the United Special Sportsmen Alliance, O’Donoghue sets up similar outdoor adventures across the country.

She’s on this trip not only to make these eight kids happy but also to help launch USSA’s Washington chapter. From the

UNIVERSAL SPORTSMEN ALLIANCE

WHAT IT DOES: This 501(c) nonprofit charity provides terminally ill and disabled children opportunities to experience outdoor activities.

ACTIVITIES: Hunting and fishing trips have been most popular, but USSA has taken kids water skiing, trap shooting, out to use personal watercraft and on other adventures.

VOLUNTEERS: USSA is looking for fishermen, hunters and other outdoor recreationists to volunteer to lead outings for children in Washington.

SIGNING UP KIDS: Submit an application from the Web site and a statement from a physician.

ON THE NET: www.childswish.com

Please see CHANCES, page E4