

WHERE WE LIVE: DETROIT



Kyla Foreman, 10, of Detroit, left, holds a rope as Harry Jones, Detroit Community Sailing Center president, makes some adjustments for her and her crewmate Eleazar Smith, 10, of Detroit, on the Optimist (opti) boat they will set sail in on the Detroit River as part of their participation in the Challenge the Wind program on July 24 from the banks of the Belle Isle Boathouse. PHOTOS BY MANDI WRIGHT/DETROIT FREE PRESS

# There’s a transformation happening in youth at the Belle Isle Boat House

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If there was ever a collective metaphor for life, learning how to sail incorporates pretty much every aspect.

Harry Jones, president of the nonprofit Detroit Community Sailing Center, runs the Challenge the Wind youth sailing program at the Belle Isle Boat House, and he sees his students transform in all of life’s lessons.

Once the kids get on a boat, Jones said, “I have seen them go from deathly afraid, to confident and working as a team, and really enjoying it and appreciating the environment.”

That was the transformation that got Jones hooked in 2011, helping to educate youths ages 10 to 17 about how to sail on the Detroit River using the U.S. Sailing curriculum, water safety, and connect them to a related STEM course where students learn the physics of sailing and even take water samples to study the ecosystem of the river. There are three two-week sessions. Enrollment is open to the public, and each student pays \$100 to participate. Jones and his team are determined to keep the program affordable to help deconstruct any barriers to youths who

otherwise would not have the opportunity to participate.

Not only do students learn how to tack and jibe – sailing actions that help to navigate winds on the water – but at times to negotiate conflict resolution and team-building dynamics. For 17-year-old Bloomfield resident Celine Washington, a former student in the program who is now a junior coach, “The best way to learn is to teach.” She added, “Sailing improved my confidence level to go into a field that’s masculine-dominated, just like sailing,” said Washington, a senior at Bloomfield Hills High School who wants to major in biomechanical engineering when she settles on a college next year.

After a recent hot day on the water, students got to jump into the coolness of the Detroit River.

As enthusiastic first-year participant Nicholas Young, 11, of Detroit, emerged between jumps off the dock of the Belle Isle Boat House, he couldn’t decide what he loved most. “I love it ... I love all of it.”

To help keep this program afloat, please consider making a donation to the 501(c)(3) Detroit Sailing Center, at [sailingdetroit.org](http://sailingdetroit.org), or volunteering your sailing expertise.

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Dean Cole, 9, of Warren, left, works together with Challenge the Wind crewmate Austin De’Andre Shepard, 10, of Detroit to flip over their Optimist (opti) sailboat to get it assembled for sailing on the Detroit river from the banks of the Belle Isle Boathouse.