

Voyage Note for NMCF support to OYTS “Prolific” October 2024

You will recall that we had £1,000 left from the NMCF last grant, and we have just allocated it to this voyage involving some very deserving young people, an exciting race, and RCC member Andrew Wilkes on board as one of our volunteer sea staff.

The voyage was for young people from the King’s Academy Bay House School in Gosport, and two accompanying teachers. Our Staff Engineer Josh is a former Bay House student and we have a longstanding relationship with the school, which has a real interest in maritime studies and aims to ensure that students from all backgrounds are aware of the possibility of diverse careers in the marine sector, given Gosport’s close links with the sea. They are very keen to show students from disadvantaged backgrounds that this is their world too and not solely the preserve of wealthy yacht owners.

The school gave us some background on the ten young people selected to sail (alongside two school staff). All the students were aged 14. These young people are all in the same year group, but most didn’t know each other well due to the size of the school.

A is a young person with Special Educational Needs, and struggles with dyslexia and challenges among his peer group. The school hopes that this voyage will allow him to shine in a different environment, and encourage his self-confidence.

B suffers with Trichotillomania (pulling own hair out) which has impacted his confidence.

C has ADHD traits, and so sometimes finds himself in trouble. The voyage will allow him to push himself to his limits and develop his ability to react calmly to challenging situations.

D is a service child whose father spends long spells away from home. She is selfless and spends time raising money for charity. This voyage will allow her to get something back, and feel appreciated and valued.

E lost his mother when he was four, and this has impacted the whole family. Being the youngest, he often feels he needs to shout to be heard, and struggles with anger. This voyage will help his resilience and belief in himself, and his ability to stay calm.

F has an education, health and care plan (EHCP), due to difficulties in speech and language, and moderate learning needs. He finds it extremely difficult to fit in, and he can be seen as an easy target by others due to his inability to always recognise unkindness. He would benefit from the opportunity to build his self-esteem and resilience.

G lives in his family home next door to his grandfather, who has Parkinson’s. He is loud but likes to hide his emotions. Hopefully this voyage will allow him to be part of a team, and not just the team focussed on caring for his grandfather.

J is a quiet and shy girl who has received unkindness in the past, which has knocked her confidence. This voyage will allow her to flourish outside the classroom. She receives free school meals, and her parents would be unable to afford a trip like this.

K is a service child who suffers with anxiety and struggles with school attendance. She thrives in the outdoors and the freedom from her thoughts that this provides.

L has struggled since his grandfather died last year, this would be a positive experience for him.

Voyage report

After introductions, familiarisation and briefings, they set off into the Solent:



It was quite late by this time, so they didn't hoist sails, but motored down Southampton Water and anchored for the night in Stokes Bay. The crew got a view of Gosport, their local town, from a different perspective, and were able to enjoy the stars that night with less light pollution around them. After dinner, the crew played a game around the table together, resulting in lots of laughter.

The following day, they began the work of training for the ASTO Small Ships Solent race against other sailing training vessels crewed by young people. They completed lots of manoeuvres, tacking and gybing in watches, until the crew were working together like a well-oiled machine!



They also did a man overboard recovery drill and people had a chance to sit out on the bowsprit.



Prolific finished the day in Haslar Marina, in Gosport, with a lovely dinner of fajitas followed by extreme washing up as a group around the table before bed.

On Friday, *Prolific* had to head to Cowes, in order to complete a pre-race inspection of the safety equipment carried on board. The crew left Gosport quite early, and motored across to Cowes. The young people went ashore with their teachers, to explore, have an ice-cream, and go to the beach. After dinner, they had an early bed-time, for tomorrow would be race day!

The ASTO Small Ships Race is an exciting opportunity for over 150 young people from fifteen boats and several sail training organisations to race against each other, and is a highlight of *Prolific's* calendar. On Saturday the crew rose bright and early, with a lively atmosphere on the pontoons, and many boats dressed in colourful flags.



After leaving dock and hoisting sails, all the boats took part in a parade of sail. Our crew wore colourful wigs and danced the macarena as they passed the Royal Yacht Squadron, where sponsors of the event were watching.



The race started, and *Prolific* was first across the start line, the sun shining down on them. The crew really came together as a team, and there was genuine excitement as the boat powered up, and they sailed along as fast as they could. Everybody had a lot of fun during the race, and even though they didn't finish in a prize-winning position, many of the young people described it as the best part of the week.



Big thanks to Max Mudie for these images:



After finishing the race and returning back to Cowes, the young people had ice creams in town, before attending the crew party, which included a disco for all of the young people from all of the competing boats, dancing and celebrating together. Capturing the spirit of the whole event, some crews were invited to tour each other's boats, and *Prolific's* crew made lots of friends.

Next day the crew headed back to Ocean Village. They sailed 94 nautical miles and [you can see their complete voyage track here](#).

Individual reports

A (14): Always observant and very keen to help when the vessel was coming alongside – he became the watch leader's go-to helper for roving fenders! He was always keen to help sea staff, and he taught other crew some knots. Incredibly helpful with the clean-up of the boat at the end, as well as generally being a really engaged member of the team above and below deck. He was very interested in pursuing sailing.

B (14): Did sometimes struggle with concentration, but he was entertaining and enthusiastic with his peers. He always made the crew laugh and join together in the excitement.

C (14): When absorbed in a task, incredibly focussed and worked very hard. He was eager to help and first to raise his hand to volunteer. He was helpful with clean up and cooking and a good team player. Showed maturity/great social skills in his ability to hold engaging conversations with both crew and sea staff alike. He showed amazing gratitude at the end of the trip, by thanking every member of sea staff individually and by shaking their hand – this was a lovely farewell! He was good at teaching others knots as well.

D (14): Sensible, observant and no matter the task, she was always happy to lend a hand. A fast learner and quickly became both competent and confident with her Start Yachting knots – she swiftly became a reliable and trusted member of the watch, particularly in times of higher urgency (e.g. when coming alongside). Her kind nature and maturity showed through her social skills with both sea staff and other members of the crew. She was very mature and paid attention to detail when doing the daily engineering checks with our bosun.

E (14): Entertaining and enthusiastic. Struggled sometimes with concentration - this was mostly caused by distractions from his peers. During the race, however, he came into his own, really embracing the spirit of racing and working incredibly hard. He was also the life and soul of the party. Incredibly good help in the galley, volunteering to help whenever he could – he engaged in mature conversation while making lunch for the crew on race day.

F (14): Quiet throughout the trip and despite significant effort from all sea staff and teachers, continues to be more interested in his phone than the trip and the sailing. However, he was very polite, and friendly. He did struggle to complete tasks; and other crew members had to support him by taking on some of his tasks also. He did really enter into the spirit of the race, being one of the first on the dance floor and meeting other crew members from the fleet of boats.

G (14): The stand-out member of his watch: polite, friendly and interesting to chat to, and showing brilliant leadership skills. He took the lead on cleaning the heads (toilets) and other areas of the boat, and could help his watch leader to motivate the team. On deck, he worked very hard, listened intently and was really interested in the technicalities of sailing. He should be encouraged to sail more in the future, as he seems to have a lot of potential.

H (adult leader): A huge asset to the team, helping with behaviour management as well as supporting with sailing and cleaning. She chatted with lots of the staff, and she would be welcome to come sailing again soon.

I (adult leader): An incredibly helpful and trusted member of the team. His sailing knowledge from smaller boats meant he was aware of potential hazards/safety matters and wind direction/points of sail. He was enthusiastic and positive about OYT South and would be great to have back as a volunteer/trainee watch-leader if that was something he wanted to consider. (That would allow him to sail on other voyages in the holidays; but in terms of future school voyages, he could potentially have a volunteer berth at no cost, and free up a place to bring an extra student).

J (14): Quiet but incredibly observant. She sometimes seemed shy, however never pulled away from lending a hand where needed! She was at the helm during the race finish – she seemed to really love steering and had a smile on her face whenever at the helm!

K (14): Went above and beyond on the last day, not only completing her own jobs, but then jumping in to help others. A real help and great team player. Always keen to lend a hand and listened well to instruction, becoming a trusted member of the watch. Although occasionally becoming overwhelmed by the noise and bustle of the boat, she overcame this quickly and handled her feelings with maturity. She expressed an interest in coming back and she would be extremely welcome.

L (14): Started out quiet on the trip, reserved but polite and respectful. He listened to instruction well and was an active member of the team. He was very helpful both on deck and also with housekeeping and domestic jobs - one of the stronger members of the clean-up team each day.

Certificates

All the group earned RYA Start Yachting qualifications.

We always like to stress that an RYA certificate is a proper recognised qualification which can be kept in someone's Record of Achievement. It shows that they mastered some basic sailing skills; but perhaps even more importantly, earning the certificate also provides evidence of transferrable skills. To complete it, people have to be able to listen, concentrate, work in a team, practise things until they were able to get them right – even if they initially struggled, take part in routine tasks such as cooking and cleaning as well as the more exciting jobs, cope with living in an entirely unfamiliar situation, cope with being away from home, undertake tasks which some will have found really challenging, take responsibility when asked, follow safety instructions, and much more. They should be proud of themselves for doing so well.

Outcomes Wheel self-evaluation

We use an exercise called Outcomes Wheels, developed with Children in Need and the Prince's Trust, to measure how crew members feel about themselves at the start of a voyage and again at the end, giving themselves marks out of 6 in different areas.