Ahoy there!

Rocking the Boat lets kids build & sail own craft

BY CORINNE LESTCH
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The exhausted teenagers rowed with all their strength to turn against the tide at Clason Point Park, but the current was too strong. On one boat, the mast broke, forcing another one dubbed the 'Legacy' to pull it along by a thin rope.

It was the dramatic last leg of a four day journey for about 20 students involved in Rocking the Boat, a youth development program in Hunts Point that teaches kids about environmental sustainability and boat-building.

The teens, on boats they made, set sail from Calf Island, a small island preserve off the shore of Greenwich, Conn. They took in new sights and made stops along the way to Rye Playland in Westchester County and Morris Yacht Club on City Island.

“We traveled a long distance,” 15-year-old Rigoberto Montecino said of the 35-mile voyage, once his feet were back on land Thursday. “It was a new world.”

During the trip, the kids learned how to camp and rough it in the wilderness.

“Never thought I was going to do this,” said Jessica Martinez, 16, showing off red splatters of mosquito bites running down her legs like badges of honor.

“There were so many bugs,” she said. “And sand.”

Adam Green, executive director of Rocking the Boat, said this was the third year students took this trip.

Three sailboats, each 19 feet long, and a 20-foot powerboat took them the whole way. One boat was made from a fallen oak tree from the New York Botanical Garden, he said.

“This trip is phenomenal, because kids literally get to board boats they built and sail off into the Bronx River and on to the rest of the world, which is a great power,” he said. “That sense of accomplishment rarely happens for any of us.”

And little did Green know he would create a scenario that would actually happen.

“I was talking to a friend (one night) and said, ‘What would you do if one of the boats broke?’ They said they’d fix it,” he said the day before the return home. “That degree of empowerment is pretty exciting.”

Many of the kids have never been out of the city before, and Rocking the Boat provides an outlet not just to explore the water but to build positive relationships in a safe, structured environment.

On the day of the return voyage, dozens of children gathered near Hunts Point Riverside Park, painting murals, discussing geography and learning about the different parts of a boat.

Doing these activities — and rowing to another state — can take their minds off of other things.

One 16-year-old boy who went on a sailing trip had cut it short to make a court hearing. Another was still thinking about a friend who was stabbed and left to die near a Parkchester hair salon in April.

“This keeps children out of the streets,” Lloyd Mgalo, 15, said of the program. “This is a place where you can get out of trouble. It’s peaceful.”

Mgalo came to the Bronx from South Africa six months ago, and his introduction to the program was taking part in the four-day excursion.

“To know that I’m sailing on a thing that I made is the greatest experience ever,” he said with a smile. “It’s like cooking your own food that’s good, then eating it.”

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