

The Breakthrough Project Tall Ship Sailing Residential
October 07 Activity Report

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The purpose of this report is to give some idea of what activities were undertaken during the week, how they altered and affected the individuals taking part, and whether the activities were successful in creating an affective and productive team out of the participants involved.

As previously stated in my June – September report, I had been attempting to forge closer links with any organisation that could offer SAZ the opportunity to develop outdoor pursuits and partnership work. One such organisation was the Trinity Sailing Foundation, who attempt to engage and motivate young people using sailing as we, SAZ, use sport in an attempt to achieve the same goal.

At the time of the initial booking we were offered seven places aboard the Golden Vanity which is a 53 foot vessel with a 10 foot beam that berths nine including the crew. I was only too happy to accept as this was the last available slot for this year, after which the ships are all docked and maintained for the coming season.

I had expected that it would have been a lot easier than it was to get together a group that were willing and able to take on such an experience. During the planning of the trip I had expressed the desire for the trip to coincide with the school half term holiday. It transpired that this was not the case and the dates were actually for the week prior the half term holiday. The implication was that many of the children that would have been available to attend would now still be at school. As soon as I had realised the miscalculation I discussed it with Brian Dickens. I suggested offering all seven places to any of the partnership groups that had sufficient numbers and that could make use of the dates or take one or two children from a number of partnership groups. Brian suggested that we offer a few places to a number of the partnership groups but this also proved fruitless. I then produced an information pack and accompanying letter to parents explaining that the proposed dates for the residential fell just before the school half term and that if they would like their child to attend they should inform the school and that I would provide them with a cover letter should this be necessary. Fortunately, from the group that had been identified this was not necessary and all the parents were only too happy to allow their child the time off school.

My intention was for the trip not to be an excuse for a holiday but instead seen as a voyage of self exploration and discovery; a chance for participants to start their journey from 'boy to manhood'. To this end I had arranged for Arron Miller to accompany me as a mentor for the group which would also help him gain valuable experience for his long term career development.

I arranged for the group to meet each other a few days before the departure in order for them and their parents to have the opportunity to ask any questions and dispel any fears that they might have. Despite all the parents agreeing to attend not one turned up, nevertheless, the meeting went ahead.

The group consisted of: Shane Territ, Junior Njie, Deshane Jones, Hoshman Jaff, Oshane McIntosh.

Oshane was referred by Ayamba through an organisation called Passage who work with young people that have shown an interest in becoming athletics coaches. As the oldest member of the group I suggested that he would get more out of the trip if he worked closely with Arron as his apprentice. Oshane liked the idea and was then introduced to the group as such. We discussed the trip and what they could expect as well as what I expected from them and that there was a possibility of gaining a RYA Start Yachting Certificate and a Trinity Sailing Federation Certificate of achievement. We also spoke about the opportunity to document the trip on daily work sheets and on a camcorder which was to be used to chart their development and successes.

Everybody arrived in plenty of time to catch the 09:20 train which appeared to be a good omen for the start of our voyage. The train journey sparked their excitement as they realised that we had pre-allocated seats and to see the look of excited anticipation and confusion on their faces was pleasing to say the least. In the event the seats turned out not to suit the group dynamic but fortunately we were able to move further up the train and find ones that were all grouped around tables which suited us perfectly.

After boarding the second train at Exeter Central it wasn't long before we were in sight of the coastline and the group erupted with excitement. I was amazed in particular with the transformation that I saw in Deshane. For the first part of the journey he was managing to maintain his version of a screw faced youth, but on catching our first glimpse of sea you would be excused for thinking that he had just seen his favourite gifts under a Christmas tree and the others were just the same. Seeing the level of excitement created merely from seeing a bit of water I hoped that they were going to absolutely love sailing a tall ship. It was at that moment that I let them know that Trinity had been in touch and due to a smaller number than expected booking for their larger ship, we would be sailing on 'Provident', a 95 foot long ship with a 17 foot beam that normally sleeps 16 including crew. Seeing the excitement of the group, some of the locals on the train struck up conversations with them, which were reciprocated – also a really pleasing turn of events.

Shortly after we arrived in Paignton we had an opportunity to walk across the road to a corner shop where the group seized upon the chance of stocking up on sweets and biscuits whilst I arranged a taxi to take us to Brixham pontoon where our ship and crew were waiting.

Our spirits were high, the sun was shining and the palm trees of Torquay made it seem as if we were somewhere in the Mediterranean. Once the taxi had dropped us off at the pontoon we had a short walk to where our boat was moored. Seeing the hundreds of masts and variety of sizes and types of boats increased their expectation once more, especially the luxury yachts on their moorings looking every penny of their million pound plus price tags. There wasn't one person in the group that didn't hope that one of these was our ship for the week.

A little further on we saw our ship and crew waiting for us to board. The three ships were all moored together side by side: Provident, Leader and Golden Vanity, so there was a little scramble across the deck to board 'Provie', as she was called affectionately by the crew. After a brief introduction to the four person crew, (Neil – Captain, Kerry -

First Mate, Annabel – Boson, and Carol – Cook) we were shown below decks to choose our bunks. Deshane, Hoshman, Shane and Junior chose the forward bunks, Arron and Oshane chose one of the two person cabins and I had the saloon. This turned out to be both a blessing and a curse as it was the first place that they wanted to escape from in the evenings and the last place that they wanted to return to first thing in the mornings for breakfast.

After stowing our kit away our next job was to go ashore to the Trinity office to collect our waterproof jacket, trousers and boots that were going to prove to be a godsend. Once we had all been kitted out we returned to the ship where we were issued with life jackets and instructed on how they worked; how they should be fitted; and that they had to be worn when ever we were on deck unless told otherwise. We then pulled out of the pontoon and once out at sea we started the real job of sailing. The group were very excited at this prospect and set about hoisting sails and generally preparing to sail.

We hadn't been sailing long before Deshane had to be sternly spoken to by a member of crew for pushing and fighting with Junior on deck in rough seas. I was at the back of the ship as this was taking place but Kerry, one of the crew members, was close by and dealt with the situation explaining how dangerous his actions were and what could potentially happen. Junior seemed quite distressed by this and came to my end of the ship attempting to keep his distance from Deshane. He wasn't physically hurt but didn't want to talk about the incident either. We continued sailing with half the group hoisting sails which included Junior and Deshane who were soon laughing, joking and working together again whilst the other half were on the lookout for other ships, rocks and lobster buoys.



It wasn't long before all of us started to experience our first bouts of sea sickness. With the exception of Oshane, who was perfectly happy and maintained a smile on his face even as the rest of us were noticeably struggling.

It was going to take us most of the afternoon and early evening to reach the first port of Dartmouth so those that could stayed on deck as lookouts whilst those of us suffering with sea sickness struggled to get used to the environment.

After dropping the sails and preparing to dock for the night we all sat down to our evening meal that had been prepared for us by our cook. This eased us gently in to our new regime which was to have two watches: one watch was called 'Port' and would prepare the meals for all of us whilst the other, 'Starboard' would prepare the ship for sailing. The way this worked was that for breakfast two people from 'Port watch' had to be up at 07:30 to set the table and be on toast duty whilst the rest were getting washed. Breakfast usually consisted of a choice of cereal, tea or coffee, fruit juice, various spreads and toast after which the washing up was done by those that set the table and the rest of the watch cleaned the 'heads' and generally cleaned and tidied below decks.

The other watch, 'Starboard' went on deck to prepare the ship to get underway. For lunch the watches were reversed and then again for the evening meal so everyone had to do everything related to the preparation and serving of meals and cleaning up below deck, as well as all the duties on deck which included steering, putting sails up and down, scrubbing the decks, polishing the brass and folding sails.

At this point the group seemed a little bewildered but still excited about the coming days. There were a few general comments of dissent from the group but for the most part they were initiated by Deshane. I didn't pay much attention to this as I thought it was just them voicing harmless murmurs but worse was yet to come.

That evening we finished dinner and set about learning a new routine for washing up. Two people were chosen to wash up the pots and pans in the galley and two more sat around the dining table and washed up using washing up bowls. This was new to us all but after a lot of moaning people surrendered to the task at hand and just got on with it. Once we had finished they all sat around briefly before taking themselves off to bed to continue discussing the day and generally play around. By 01:30 I could hear Deshane talking at the top of his voice. Still feeling the effects of sea sickness I had to ask them to stop talking completely and go to sleep and reminded them that they would have to be up at 07:30 the next morning. Eventually they settled down and went to sleep, but by this time it was after 02:00.

The next day to my surprise, it didn't take much to get them up they seemed to be settling into the whole routine quite well. We got breakfast out the way without too many problems and then took the dingy off the deck to use it to ferry us across to the on shore showers and toilets as by this time a number of the group who had been resisting using the 'heads' for any thing other than a wee really needed to go!

For the next few days there were moments where as a group we couldn't quite get it right. Sometimes it was due to the group working as individuals, sometimes it was due to individuals losing sight of the bigger picture and sometimes it was just because for whatever the reason, some people just couldn't be bothered. I was amazed at this because the group knew which members were letting them down but did nothing about it and rather than rally together they allowed individuals to dictate the mood of the group. When this happened you could literally see their motivation disappear and it was then that they took turns to slack off. By this point it was clear that despite the initial efforts of the group to find a balance, there remained one person that was able to control the

mood of the group seemingly at will. Unfortunately that person was Deshane. I knew that he was going to be a challenging member of the group when I agreed to allow him to attend the trip, but I hadn't expected his behaviour would have such an overwhelming impact on both the group and the crew alike.

Arron had been working closely with Deshane giving him the chance to talk or ask questions when he wanted to but even he was finding it hard work as Deshane's general attitude seemed to plummet. When I spoke to Deshane he completely understood the affects of his actions on the group and agreed to do more to comply with instructions but wanted those instructions to come from me. I was not willing to agree to this as it would have created a situation where no one else could ask him to do anything unless it came from me first. I am finding it difficult not to constantly make references to Deshane but he was the catalyst for a number of issues that we all experienced.

I had expected a lot more help managing the group from Oshane as he was referred to me as someone who wanted to be a coach and work closer with younger children, but it would seem that I expected too much. Very soon into the trip Arron and I discussed his performance to date and concluded that we had made judgments based on his size and age. It became clear that despite this he was a typical 16 year old adolescent that had some maturing to do.

It was interesting to observe Hoshman as he proved to be a very humorous individual who played the clown often to good affect and lightening the mood of the group considerably.

Shane was the most balanced and responsible of the group. He was often the voice of reason, encouraging and supporting others when they needed it. He still had moments where he seemed to need to be mischievous in order to maintain his position within the group but he knew when to return to being reasonable.

Junior was a lot more difficult to categorise. I had noticed a very individual streak in him and he was very strong willed, often for the wrong reasons. He would decide to follow the lead of certain group members which would sometimes bring him into conflict but would never betray the group.

As it transpired, the ships crew were finding Deshane's behaviour increasingly disruptive and confrontational at this point, so much so that Neil took me aside to discuss ways of addressing his behaviour. I suggested that between me, Arron and Oshane we would ensure that one of us were with Deshane at all times, which appeared to have the desired affect until the morning of his out burst towards Carol. This was the last straw for Neil who decided that their efforts to work with Deshane were fruitless. He was left with no option but to ask for Deshane to be removed from the ship and sent home or, alternatively, the rest of the journey would be cancelled for all of us.

When we began to catalogue the incidences that Deshane had been involved in it was clear that there had been attempts to assist him to address his behaviour but to no avail. In light of his escalated behaviour the crew felt that he should be asked to take no further part in any of the activities on board. This prompted several outbursts from him but for the most part, he went back to his bunk and slept for a few hours. Once he woke up Deshane turned into a one man wrecking machine, running around as much as he could and deliberately being as disruptive as possible. I was able to distract him from his path

of destruction temporarily by talking with him and playing cards. However, this didn't last very long as it dawned on him that this was possibly his last day on board. His behaviour continued all day and by the time we had finished washing up from the evening meal the rest of his bunk mates were all set to return home with him.

Much later that evening Deshane's case worker Andrew arrived to take him home. As the return train wasn't until the early hours of the morning Andrew had plenty of time to talk with the group and crew. It seemed from his general demeanour that Deshane was happy to be leaving the ship. Once the time came for him to depart, and once the others accepted that they were not going with him, the mood of the ship was instantly transformed. There seemed to be almost a sigh of relief as the group took themselves off to bed and slept soundly.

The next morning over breakfast no one mentioned Deshane and without any objections everyone got on with the jobs that were assigned to their watches.

The transformation was startling, everyone was where they should be, when they should be and any one that was available was offering their assistance. They worked so well together that they were able to do a lot more actual sailing than they had done previously and were eager, once more, to achieve their RYA and Trinity certificates. They were all aware that they had to pass a test and also demonstrate a variety of knots which they constantly practiced and quizzed the crew about. When they were informed of their results they were all so pleased, it was a pleasure to see. The group had now become a team.



During the journey home there were pieces of string all over the place as they continued to demonstrate their new found talents. It was also an opportunity to capture their thoughts of the week's events on camcorder which they are all eager to see and have copies of the many photographs that were taken.

Trinity still require us to complete a few evaluation forms and give them some detailed feedback so I will be bringing the whole team back together very soon.

In conclusion I think that there was a lot to be learned about this residential:

- Check and double check booking dates.
- Find out much more about the individual personalities of those seeking to participate by liaising closer with parents beforehand.
- Devote more time to developing behavioural contracts and make them an integral part of the residential.
- Encourage more considered discipline by the team.
- Encourage more group briefing and debriefing sessions.
- Where possible involve participants more in the planning stages by the participants.
- Use camcorder and photographic evidence more extensively.

Finally, I now hope that because of the success of this residential Trinity will be encouraged to work closer with us offering us their largest ship 'Leader' in the high season to a bigger group.

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