

INSPIRING JOURNEYS

Young sailors realise their dreams

SINCE ITS INCEPTION THE SAILORS WITH DISABILITIES CHARITY HAS IMPROVED THE LIVES OF MANY PEOPLE.

• BY MICK FLETORIDIS



TOP RIGHT: We made it! At the Australian Wooden Boat Festival in Hobart.

ABOVE: Young crewman Jackson trimming while sailing into Hobart.

OPPOSITE PAGE: The *Wright of Passage* crew during a stopover at Eden.

David Pescud founded his non-profit charity organisation Sailors with disABILITIES back in 1994 after deciding to help a wheelchair-bound sailor complete the Sydney to Hobart yacht race.

"I couldn't resist the challenge," Pescud recently told *The Magazine*.

"We got a team of guys together of varying disabilities and we did the '94, which was the 50th (Sydney to) Hobart."

Since that time the charity has annually run a disabled crew in the famous yachting event. Pescud also expanded its focus in the late 1990s to begin helping disadvantaged children turn around their lives.

"It was all about giving people who'd fallen by the wayside an opportunity and a pathway for their future and to develop their skills," Pescud explains.

"We've taken kids that were having a tough time and now they're getting jobs or they're going on to secondary training or university."

In February 2018, SWD received a boost by way of a donated 53-foot Canadian Herreshof timber ketch. While the craft would require major work to become shipshape once again, Pescud saw it as a great opportunity to involve young people in the project and ultimately help prepare them for future jobs, while honing social and communication skills. The Wright Of Passage program was born. As well as providing valuable lessons for program participants the chance of sailing the vintage ketch to Hobart for the Wooden Boat Festival proved a very attractive incentive.

"We'd been thinking about this kind of program for some time, about getting kids involved in a hands on thing, getting TAFE

involved and get some formal training from them and so on."

The program's concept was well received by prominent people in the sailing community who helped ensure it got off the ground.

"The Oatleys down at Woolwich came on board and supplied the venue for us and we couldn't have done it without that and we started it just over 12 months ago," Pescud explains.

Once the Wright of Passage project was underway Pescud soon realised his team faced a monumental task to prepare the wooden yacht to take on Bass Strait.

"It was a mess! We pulled her out of the water and the mast fell in half (while) lifting it out of the boat ... it was like that for quite a while. We got her out of the water and refastened her, replanked her in parts, new frames and then sealed her up to the waterline ... put her back in the water and then started doing the superstructure, of which most of it you could put your hand through. It's one of those things you take on and think, oh it's not too bad..."

The ketch eventually took shape again thanks to the efforts of its young crew, a supervising tradesman and army of volunteers. And with five excited trainees on board the rebuilt wooden craft headed off to the Australian Wooden Boat Festival in Tasmania last February.

Pescud says the first leg of the voyage went very smoothly for the crew.

"She's got a lovely big Cummins diesel in her and that helped, we got the sails up and it was good. We sailed to Eden as a sort of shakedown cruise ... there are plenty of ports between Sydney and Eden we could put in to if anything goes wrong."

Thankfully, nothing did.



“We got to Eden in good time and we sat out a southerly in Eden for about six hours and went on with a nice northerly nor-easter and down to Tasmania where first stop was Triabunna where the boys and girls all went adventuring. It was quite amazing watching them.”

A highly experienced sailor, Pescud talks of a “transformation” that happens to new crews as they gain confidence after leaving NSW waters for the first time bound for Bass Strait.

“These kids were no exception, they were confident, taking responsibility.”

After docking in Hobart, Pescud delighted in seeing the young crew’s newfound confidence as they approached Wooden Boat Festival visitors for donations and excitedly chatted about their adventures on the high seas.

The charity head takes obvious pride in seeing kids turn their lives around through his programs and he says the lessons they learn can potentially have a positive effect on other Australians.

“The skills we learn as a nation when we tackle these problems, the benefits they’re not seen, but when you solve a social problem like this and come up with some innovation the whole society learns, the whole society gains and wins.”

At the time of writing the Sailors with disABILITIES charity has, since 1996, helped 45,000 children over its various programs. The charity has been involved with many schools and mental health care organisations and largely survives thanks to private donations and sponsorship. 

If you’d like to help out by donating or volunteering to Sailors with disABILITIES go to www.sailorswithdisabilities.com for information.



IMAGES: SAILORS WITH DISABILITIES

“THE CHANCE OF SAILING THE VINTAGE KETCH TO HOBART FOR THE WOODEN BOAT FESTIVAL PROVED A VERY ATTRACTIVE INCENTIVE.”