

Building Boats, Building Life Skills

Urban Boatbuilders is a Saint Paul-based youth development nonprofit, seeking to empower youth to build the skills they need to succeed in school, work, and life through the building and use of wooden boats. The organization pursues this mission through two programs. The Partnership Program brings hands-on education to the classroom in the form of boatbuilding instruction, offering students a creative alternative to a standard curriculum. The second, the



Youth instructor connects with new apprentices as they complete the box lashings that hold together the framework of a 17-½' skin-on-frame canoe.

Apprenticeship Program, takes place at Urban Boatbuilders' workshop. Through this program, the organization trains and employs low-income youth who face barriers to employment.

The Apprenticeship Program is an employment training program through which underserved youth build the 21st century skills that research shows are

critical to finding success in the future.

During the school year, youth work after school in a cohort of peers to build boats, gaining technical and workplace readiness skills. They attend weekly workshops on a range of topics from how to receive feedback to developing a growth mindset.

The nature of woodworking and boatbuilding provides many opportunities for instructors to incorporate 21st century skill practice. The work is naturally team-oriented and there are many occasions for problem solving. Youth flex their verbal communication abilities in order to manage the projects and delegate tasks. At the end of each day youth reflect on a topic that relates to a key component of skill development, their goals or navigating work environments. This model of experiential learning feeds into each youth's workplace competency. Youth emerge with an expanded sense of their own capabilities as well as knowledge about what will be expected of them at work in the future.

Working in a cohort to build a few boats at a time also provides opportunities for youth to guide and teach each other, allowing leadership skills to emerge in a unique setting. For each crew of seven apprentices there are two youth instructors who train in new apprentices and manage the



Former youth instructor who currently volunteers and a recent graduate of the apprenticeship program embark on a two day canoeing and camping trip with other apprentices using the paddles and skin-on-frame canoe they constructed.

Wilderness of northern Minnesota. During these one-of-a-kind handmade trips, youth get to test out their work as they celebrate their individual and collective accomplishments.

For more information about this program, contact Angela Robbins, angela@urbanboatbuilders.org, <http://urbanboatbuilders.org/>

projects. Youth instructors develop their own leadership style as they navigate their roles as educators, project leaders and skilled craftspeople.

One of the highlights of each cohort is the culminating canoeing and camping trip that apprentices take on a

local river or in the remote lakes of the Boundary Waters Canoe Area