

When does a child become a youth then become an adult? How important is this process? Youth2Adult — Y2A — is a new series of articles for *Compass* readers. Featuring the “Caribbean youth or adult next door”, we celebrate junior sailing and its role in ushering local youth from childhood to gainful adult employment within the marine industry. Youth sailing can coax appreciation for the marine world and build seamanship skills, teamwork and self-esteem.

Junior sailing is made up of both “learn to sail”, which the International Sailing Federation (ISAF) refers to as “recreational”, and competitive sailing. Most Caribbean junior sailing programs offer both. Some community-based junior sailing clubs have relatively no interest in modern one-design racing. Instead, youths are encouraged to learn the skills of sailing and teamwork related to local wooden boats (a.k.a. double-enders, workboats, standing boats, etcetera). Most clubs are a mixture and some include getting youths crewing on sophisticated yachts.

Youth2Adult Highlighting Junior Sailing in the Caribbean

by Ellen Birrell

Whether for the outcome of gaining a deeper understanding of the marine world that surrounds them or simply engaging the brain and staying off the street, junior sailing programs play a part in uniting and strengthening communities. Once children learn about safety related to water and weather, learn how to rig and handle a dinghy or crew on a larger boat, they can go on to better appreciate the world in which they live. Against a backdrop of motorized vehicles (cars and boats) and electronics which blare quietly from handheld devices or loudly from speakers, sailing brings calm and allows one to get in touch with Nature and self. In a world where illiteracy, poverty and desperation can spawn despair, apathy and violence, junior sailing brings a positive dimension.

In this series, we'll check into what some Caribbean youth are learning and what adults have come to know working within marine-based livelihoods.

We get what we celebrate. Y2A is an ongoing series in which we'll celebrate what we have and what can be. So let's meet our first two featured Caribbean sailors:

Rufus Clement

Carriacou, Grenada. 15 years of age. Member: L'Esterre Junior Sailing (LJS)



Favorite boat: “All the boats: JAK, Topaz, Opti, double-ender.”

Rufus Clement lives near Carriacou's airstrip. He is in Form 5 at Bishop's College high school. His favorite subject? Integrated Science.

He began sailing at ten years old. When a new junior sailing program started just down the road in 2012, Clement joined. He says that from the beginning he recognized the educational opportunities. He learned boat parts, swimming, knots, weather and safety.

Starting out sailing Optimists,

he now usually skippers one of the club's two Topazes. At 13, he raced a Topaz with crew against Lasers in the Carriacou Regatta (his club has no Lasers in racing condition and the regatta does not offer a Topaz class). The next year, he again competed, this time racing the Topaz single-handed within the Laser class. “I was slower. The Topaz isn't as fast as a Laser. But, I loved it!”

He has crewed on *Jab-Jab*, a local J/105. The owner says, “Rufus has helmed and been crew, including when we have flown the big pink asymmetric from the retractable bowsprit!”

At 15, he has achieved the club's “Senior Sailor” status which affords him use of certain boats on Sundays, with permission but unattended.

Rufus' mother is a restaurant cook and his father a mechanic on inboard and outboard engines. Rufus indicates he'd like to develop himself in both the restaurant and marine engineering areas.

When asked what he'd like to do within the club going forward, “Drive the power safety boat!”

Ryan Alexander

St. Lucian. 26 years of age.

Employment: Yacht Caretaker/IGY Marina Rodney Bay and Assistant Coach/St. Lucia YC Junior Sailing

Ryan Alexander participated in St. Lucia Yacht Club's junior sailing program as a teenager. Once out of high school he worked in construction and plumbing, but remained involved with racing sailboats. Now he is assistant coach at SLYC and a yacht caretaker at IGY Marina Rodney Bay. In addition to his two jobs in the marine industry, he is on a J/24 race team and sails in regattas around the Caribbean.

Alexander's message to Caribbean youth: “The reason why I really love sailing is because I like to travel around the region and the world. You could also work on big cruise ships and travel.”



Ellen Birrell cruises the Caribbean aboard *Boldly Go* with her husband, Jim Hutchins. On the board of the Caribbean Sailing Association, Ellen's passion is junior sailing development. For more information visit <http://caribbean-sailing.com/youth/youth-calendar>.

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