

WOA SOUTH WEST GROUP – Plymouth Charity Rally 02-04 September 2022

By Bob Walker in SANGELAI

Introduction

The WOA South West Group (WOA SWG) held the Plymouth Rally for charity in partnership with Barnardo's (Plymouth) on Saturday 03 Sep 2022.

The background to this event is that Barnardo's (Care Journeys) is a programme which prepares young people with care experience to leave the care system when they reach adulthood. A sailing activity weekend is a way that we yacht owners can support Barnardo's to introduce a life experience which we are fortunate to have and are willing to share with these young people and make it more likely for care experienced young people to reach positive destinations. Barnardo's ambition is to create the change to ensure that young people with care experience will be as likely to be in 'positive destinations' just the same as others who have not been in care. The single objective was to share our passion for sailing with Barnardo's to help them and the young people deliver their ambition.

The Day At Sea

In planning this rally, the weather was always going to be the key influencer. Aside from the usual risk management which we yacht owners are used to there was the added risk of young people on a yacht who just want to have an enjoyable day out, not one that is cold, wet, and bounced around. As we approached the weekend it became clear that the unusual hot weather, we had enjoyed for many months was about to break and the cold, wet bounced around was becoming a reality. Several yachts from farther afield wisely decided to not attempt the journey to Plymouth and so as Friday approached 7 out of the 8 yachts participating were all local to the Plymouth area.



Friday night was assembly in Jolly Jack's restaurant, Mayflower Marina. As well as enjoying the food it also allowed me the opportunity to brief the WOA team and issue each yacht with a special flag to mark the occasion. See Figure 1.

Figure 1: Assembly in Jolly Jacks

Saturday morning, we all assembled outside the marina office to meet the Barnardo's team and make final plans for the day. The rain was already upon with a wind that was gusting around 20 kts. If there is one thing I know about Westerly Owners, it is that we are a resilient bunch and if the rally was to go ahead then Plan B to postpone the event was not an option. Within minutes of Plan B being muted, the marina boardroom was purloined, and Plan C and D were hatched. Plan C was to stay firmly tied up in the marina and allow the Barnardo's Team to flit between each yacht and listen to our salty sea stories and Plan D was to sail up river to Saltash using just partial headsails and motor back.

The Barnardo's Team arrived, and it took them all of 2 seconds to dismiss Plan C and go for Plan D. It could be argued that the threat of our salty sea stories was worse than being cold, wet and bounced around, but I like to think that they were just as resilient and tenacious as we were for the poor weather sailing.



Figure 2: Barnardo's and Westerly Owners Assembly At Mayflower Marina

The Barnardo's Team consisted of 6 staff members, 12 young people and a step dad. The eldest young person was 20 years and the youngest was 7 years old. Staff members remained with the young people who were under the age of 18 and a project worker who remained with step dad and his two step sons aged 7 and 10.

Plan D unanimously accepted by all, and now armed with pre ordered baguettes for lunch, the Barnardo's groups set off with their appointed Westerly Owners.



Figure 3: Barnardo Care Leavers boarding GEM



Figure 4: Project worker and care leaver boarding FRIGATE OF COWES

As the 8 Yachts slipped their moorings, a break in the weather allowed for a very pleasant passage up the River Tamar under much reduced sail. Turning about having passed under the Tamar Bridge at Saltash put the strong wind directly onto the bow and so as planned, sails were dropped and engines started for the return to Mayflower Marina. This gave each person from Barnardo's the opportunity to helm under sail and motor and a good 3 to 4 hours in which to enjoy the experience.



Figure 5: WHISTLER on the return leg



Figure 6: FRIGATE OF COWES Outbound

With a lively tide and wind to make entry back into Mayflower exciting, the marina staff ensured each of the yachts were safely moored. It was time then for a belated lunch and refreshments on board the yachts followed by a supervised move of the Barnardo's Groups between yachts.

As the day closed, what was emerging were enthusiastic care experienced young people thrilled with the experience. The Barnardo's staff were just as excited by the day with one particular staff member hitching a ride with BIDWELL back to Queen Ann Battery (QAB). It was also apparent that many of the Westerly's had been touched by the experiences of young people and later that evening as we rendezvoused in Wildwood Restaurant in Royal William Yard, much of the conversation was about these young people and their experiences.

“Walk a Day in Our Shoes: Not One Size Fits All!”

My experience with the young care leaver and project worker on board SANGELAI is worthy of a few words here. 3 days after this rally, Plymouth care leavers took their experiences to the House of Commons and invited MPs to ‘Walk In Their Shoes.’



Figure 7: Plymouth care leavers send a powerful message to MPs by delivering colourfully decorated shoes to Westminster – each one of them with a story to tell. SANGELAI's care leaver is far right in the picture and all three participated in the Rally.

The special delivery is part of the “Walk a Day in Our Shoes: Not One Size Fits All!” project organised by young people supported by Barnardo's Plymouth Care Journeys.

Almost 20 pairs of white training shoes have been decorated by the care leavers to represent their challenges, achievements and ambitions, as well as the stigma they've faced. Each pair also comes with a young person's life story which make powerful reading.

The aim is to help people understand that every young person leaving care is unique, each on a journey shaped by their experiences good and bad.

I believe that I can say, on behalf of all 8 Westerly Yachts that participated in the Rally, that we felt humbled and privileged to have met these young people with care experience and to give them a day of new and happy memories.

Grateful thanks to Mayflower Marina and the follow Westerly Participants;

BIDWELL
FRIGATE OF COWES
GEM
HECATE
ROMANIST
SANGELAI
SENYOL III
WHISTLER