

A Different Vista

From the Decks of a Recreational Sailing Program for Blind and Visually Impaired Students, Pleasant Bay Community Boating, Cape Cod, Massachusetts

By Natalie Coleman-Fuller and Pam Groswald



Just the right touch- A visually-impaired student relies on her sense of touch to nudge the main halyard lock into place.

Now in its fourth season, the Blind and Visually Impaired Sailing Program at Pleasant Bay Community Boating (PBCB) has found its sea legs. True to its mission of making boating, marine education, and environmental stewardship affordable and accessible to all, PBCB responded to a growing need in the community by developing a sailing program to reach new and seasoned sailors who are blind or visually impaired (VI).

In a successful collaboration, several vibrant, blind/VI community leaders joined forces with PBCB to train volunteer guides, develop a new sailing curriculum, and implement sailing instruction in PBCB's fleet of 15 Flying Scots.

Each sailing season begins with guide training in the parking lot, followed by guiding practice along a wooded path, down the rickety dock*, and into the cockpit of a Flying Scot. Along the way, friendships are formed over the guides' verbal descriptions of the obstacles and

the bravery shown by the adventurous, blind/VI students.

After orienting these sailors on the Flying Scot, it is not long before the students are able to rig the boat, hoist the mainsail, and ready the boat for an afternoon voyage, without much help from the instructor. Once underway, the instructors orient the students using descriptions of an analog clock, with 12:00 being the bow. Thus, when sailing on a starboard reach, the students learn that the wind blows on the right cheek