



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 23, 2025

Contact: Stu Keiller

772-492-3243

stu.keiller@ysfirc.org

Keaona's Inspirational Sailing Story

Keaona's is a sailing story of grit and perseverance overcoming difficult life circumstances to launch herself on a voyage to successfully achieve her full potential. Keaona came to YSF in the Fall of 2023 through a collaborative program with an agency serving families in desperate need of housing security. Having little in the way of social and intellectual stimulation, thirteen-year-old Keaona was a reticent child who kept to herself and tried to meld into the 'woodwork'.

Everything changed as she ventured out on the broad waters of the Lagoon in a 12-foot Feva dinghy. With a crew of two, the Feva is a perfect teaching platform with the more experienced sailor skippering and the crew, Keaona, literally and figuratively learning the ropes. Teamwork is essential. Fail to execute sail trim or a weight shift, and you go from sailing to swimming in a heartbeat.

Keaona's learning curve was steep and solid. Sailing Director Clark Lewis said: "Keaona blew away all of the coaches with her laser focus during chalk talks; when she returned for the second class, she remembered every part of the boat, all vocabulary words that she had never been exposed to. (usually takes a couple of weeks) She is just the ideal student!"

In short order, Keaona was on the tiller, learning to steer the boat. She overcame the challenges of sail trim, helming the boat, and coordinating with the crew to keep the boat upright on an even keel. With success, her confidence soared. The increased confidence shattered her protective shell with smiles and happy chatter.

As the 2023-2024 school year flowed into spring, Keaona blossomed into a young lady with natural leadership qualities. She was soon skippering, with a command presence her crews embraced. By year's end, Keaona was skipper in the advanced racing 420 dinghy, an Olympic-class boat sailed by the top high school and collegiate racing teams across the United States.



Keaona at the helm of a 420

As the end of school approached, Keaona was staring at lonely days at home on her device. Sailing Director Clark Lewis took about a New York minute to solve that problem by suggesting Keaona serve as a volunteer instructor at YSF's Summer Sailing Camp. The circle was closed. From rank beginner to assisting instruction, Keaona was out there five days a week for two months, helping introduce sailing to over 200 children, many from her community.

The beat goes on. Keaona continued to sail and grow through the 2024-25 season and will instruct during the 2025 summer camp. As she approaches her 16th birthday, Keaona is preparing to take the rigorous U.S. Sailing written and practical sailing examination to certify her as a Level One Instructor. Going from beginner to professional in less than three years is an amazing achievement for an amazing young lady. The sky's the limit as Keaona sails over new horizons.

Youth Sailing Foundation (YSF) of Indian River County, Inc. is a 501 (c) (3) non-profit that eliminates cultural and financial barriers to sailing. YSF was founded in 2009 to use sailing as a medium to help children achieve their full potential. We operate under the banner "YSF Community Sailing" to reflect that we now serve the entire community. We make it easy and affordable for children, adults, and families to enjoy the thrill of sailing. For more information or to make a tax-deductible donation, please visit: www.ysfirc.org Contact: Email info@ysfirc.org Phone 772 492-3243

Donate Now