



Adam Green '87

Founder, Rocking the Boat

“It’s amazing to be able to say that Rocking the Boat, now a \$1 million non-profit, is my first job out of college. Just like our students, everything I’ve learned in the process has been by doing it.” Adam Green is the founder and executive director of Rocking the Boat, an organization that engages South Bronx high school students in boatbuilding and on-water education. Students learn to construct traditional wooden boats from scratch, drafting the plans and then cutting, sanding and fitting pieces together to create vessels ready to be sailed. In the water education program, students learn maritime skills while working with scientists to study the Bronx River and initiate habitat restoration projects. Participants acquire practical skills and experience, but they also gain self-confidence and a sense of purpose. Solving problems and making decisions reveal the students’ ability to change the world around them, while working together builds community.

Adam founded Rocking the Boat to create a truly different educational experience—“I had been in school for eighteen years, and it didn’t prepare me for anything I would directly apply in life in a practical way.” A semester-long break from college spent working in a carpentry shop and sailing on the sailboat Clearwater offered a new perspective. Adam used his new skills to build an 8-foot dinghy with a group of students at an East Harlem junior high school. He started Rocking the Boat with a grant

from the Echoing Green Foundation in 1998 and now has built nineteen boats, works with over one hundred high school students each year, and has an additional seven hundred students sailing through his community on-water program. His work has received liberal press coverage and many accolades, including a Union Square Award in 2000. The Rocking the Boat community has taken on a life of its own, with a staff that includes twenty-four former students and is supported by parents and Bronx neighbors.

One of the inspirations for Adam's work was his time at the MCS Farm, which taught him the importance of process. Milking, weaving, and gardening taught him about the work leading up to the final product, an approach echoed in Rocking the Boat programming. He was inspired by his parents, who were involved in social and political movements when he was growing up. Adam is also grateful to Pete Seeger, who donates wood from his property and hosts Rocking the Boat camping trips. One of Adam's proudest moments was when he introduced Pete Seeger to his father, fulfilling one of his dad's lifetime dreams.

Adam recently paid a visit to MCS and was struck by the energy, the community, the colors: he would like his students to attend similar schools. He is happy, though, that Rocking the Boat exists outside of a world quantified by testing and standards. "The focus is not how many boats we can build or how many acres of wetlands we can save. We measure our success based on the successes kids have and the failures they don't have—how big their smile is, the fact that they show up every day....We are giving them the fundamental tools to navigate life."

I believe America should show the world positive steps for activism and peace. Our own humanity is enhanced by helping others fulfill goals as we work toward our own.

Mitsuko Yabe '06, on MLK Walk