

# Exploring Chicago

Hear from Laura, who's been running the NEW Paddle Explore Award in Chicago



I work for a non-profit organisation called Chicago Adventure Therapy. We use adventure sports, such as paddling, to help under-served youth in our city become healthy adults. As part of our programs, we have been training youth, staff, and adult volunteers in individual paddling, leadership and coaching skills. We recently ran two Paddle Explore Award with paddlers who are working on improving their technique and becoming more proficient paddlers.

Some of the candidates came in with zero paddling experience and over time have worked towards the Paddle Explore Award by training with us. Other candidates were volunteers for some of our programs and picked up the skills and knowledge they needed throughout their time volunteering with us.

Some of the candidates want to become paddling coaches. Some just enjoy paddling. Others simply want to be the best paddler they can be. **Based on the goals of the candidate, we focused more on some skills and competencies than others.**

The youth we work with are always excited to receive recognition for their accomplishments. I think it means the most to those who started out afraid of the water and very uncomfortable in the boat and have overcome both of those fears. **The multiple-level tiered system means that anyone, at any paddling level, can always be working towards something more. I think this motivates all of us to continue learning.**

