

"As If" Challenge – Saturday, April 16, 2016

by Joyce Russotto

Another "As If" Challenge is in the books. It was a beautiful, but breezy day out on Lake Minnetonka where a group of ISKers took part in this training. The "As If" Challenge is a great opportunity for learning and having fun while doing it. It covers scenarios that involve rescues, towing, navigation, communication, leadership and group skills that can be learned in a safe environment to give paddlers the knowledge to handle situations that can happen in real life situations. It also gives paddlers the opportunity to use some of the gear that we bring along even though it doesn't get used much (hopefully).

In the past, we typically were split into teams and each team would choose a leader for the day. Things were changed up for this challenge as even though we were split into teams, each person on the team was a leader for a segment of the paddle. We had scripted incidents such as injuries which sometimes involved towing, capsizes which sometimes involved multiple victims, cases of hypothermia, missing hatches, lost paddles and uncooperative paddlers. It gives those who participate and lead the chance to find out what works and what doesn't work. After all, practice makes perfect (or permanent).

This was my first time for leading a group of people as I am usually a follower. I found that things can get out of hand quickly. During my segment I had to gather the group together and tell them what my plans were for navigating to the island where we were stopping for lunch. While handrailing along the shoreline in a fairly strong wind, we had someone lose a hatch cover. We gathered up to see who had a temporary solution for covering the hatch. While we were getting out the materials, we were getting blown towards shore and a dock rather quickly. We were able to get the temporary covering on the hatch safely and get on our way, but not without doing a lot of scrambling. As we neared the island, one of the people in our group stated that he was very cold. We determined he was hypothermic and he was able to paddle to the beach on the island. Once there, we wrapped him in tarps, one of the guys set up a tent to get him out of the wind, gave him some hot liquids and got his spare bag of clothing from his boat. The other leaders of the different segments had scenarios that were just as challenging and some were possibly worse and more chaotic than mine. When we were near our launch site, both groups did an "all in" rescue where everyone ended up in the water and had to either self-rescue or assist others in a rescue once they were back in their boat. Let me tell you, that water was cold!

Afterwards, we gathered at Jeff and Michelle's house for a debriefing of the day, discussing what went right, what went wrong and how to make a particular situation better. Each time I have participated in this training, I come away with valuable knowledge as even though some of the scenarios have the same elements, there are dynamics of each situation that make each one unique.

Thank you to Jeff, Michelle, Sam and Katie for their guidance and roles as observers. It was a great day of learning and having fun with good paddling friends.