

# Being part of the solution – adopt a ship

Creating a better connection between ship and shore starts in the classroom

**George Hoyt FNI**  
IMO Maritime Ambassador, InterManager Vice President

One of my favourite professors would tell us that we need to decide if we are going to be part of the problem or part of the solution. Over the years, I've been very lucky and honoured to be part of the teams that developed and delivered some very exciting and useful maritime solutions, including The Nautical Institute's *Alert!* human element programme, the shipping KPI system, the maritime satcom glossary, and so on. There are still many issues to tackle, but three in particular cannot be solved by the maritime industry alone and need urgent action. These are:

- Unfair criminalisation of seafarers;
- Denial of safe ports of refuge;
- Seafarers being held hostage for ransom by pirates.

A great deal of activity has been directed at these challenges over the years, but we haven't been able to overcome them by ourselves. We need the support of those outside the maritime community. We can only do that if they know who we are and why these issues matter. That means the first thing we ought to do is to increase the non-maritime community's awareness of seafarers, shipping and the maritime community.

The global population at large needs to learn how much their current and future quality of life is dependent on seafarers, shipping and the maritime community. Higher levels of awareness among the general public increase the effectiveness of the work of the IMO, The Nautical Institute, InterManager, and everyone in the maritime community. And once established, this knowledge needs to be maintained – or to increase – with every generation. That means starting now, with an immediate focus on children.

Creating programmes for all children, starting at age 10, will expand our potential to bring more of the best and brightest young men and young women into a continually expanding range of challenging and rewarding maritime, and maritime-related, careers. This will help create the leaders who will develop future maritime policies.

This can be expensive and time-consuming, and it can be difficult to know where to start. One possible solution is the Adopt a Ship programme. This aims to create real links between children and those serving at sea, bringing the topic to life in an imaginative way.

## Adopt a Ship

The Adopt a Ship programme is a well-developed, free tool that can help begin the process of increasing children's awareness of seafarers, shipping and the maritime community. It is a useful and enjoyable way of bringing home the critical importance they play in the quality of life for almost everyone on the planet.

The Adopt a Ship programme was initially developed by the Cyprus Shipping Chamber (CSC) and the Cyprus Maritime Environmental Protection Association (CYMEPA) in 2006 to bring together elementary schools with seafarers on board ships operated by CSC members. More than 70 ships are participating in the Cyprus programme. The programme has since expanded into the Philippines, Poland, India and Greece, and this year more than 4,500 children are taking part in the Facebook Adopt a Ship International programme in Manila alone.

The programme takes a variety of forms depending on the country where it is based (for more details, see box). In essence, it matches a ship with an elementary school class or an orphanage, shelter or hostel. The children are given a 2m x 3m world map marked with sea lanes. They use the map to track the movement of 'their' ship around the world. Once a week, a senior officer from the vessel (usually the captain) exchanges a short email with the class and answers their questions.

The children ask a wide range of questions, like: 'What happens when a seafarer gets ill or dies on board the ship?'

'Why doesn't such a large ship that is made of metal, sink?'

'How does the ship dispose of garbage?'

'How does the crew know the safest way to sail between two cities when sailing at night?'

Some of the captains provide very amusing, educational and inspiring answers.

One of the team members involved in the Manila programme shared this story with me: 'I am sitting in a workshop with the teachers involved in the Adopt a Ship programme. It is very heartening to hear feedback from the teachers as well as identify areas for improvement for everyone involved. A teacher told us about a student whose father was a seafarer. The boy did not understand what his father did, and their relationship was strained. But through the Adopt a Ship programme the young boy began to understand his father's profession and his mother was very grateful that the boy had this opportunity. The learning is



going beyond just the hardware and reaching out to both the children and teachers in deeper ways. This further deepens our appreciation for the Adopt a Ship programme and its potential to educate and raise awareness about shipping and our global maritime professionals.'

From personal experience I can tell you that the children in the orphanages, shelters and underprivileged schools get very excited and are very grateful that someone cares enough to send them a message every week, with the location of their ship and the answers to the questions they asked.

### Get involved

We encourage leaders of the maritime, education and welfare communities to create Adopt a Ship programmes, because these tools can eventually help to significantly increase the safety and quality of life of our current and future seafarers working on board.

Are you interested in taking part in the programme? Perhaps you are a shipowner, a manager or a seafarer. You may already know a school that would be interested in taking part. If so, a good first step is to visit the Adopt a Ship International page on Facebook and to search for existing programmes in your area. We will try to assist all organisations, companies and individuals who want to participate.

Worldwide rights have been secured for schools and orphanages who participate in Adopt a Ship programmes to print that 2m x 3m world map. This digital version allows logos of participating organisations and pictures of ships to be added at the bottom of the map. We will share the right to print this map with organisations and companies who want to participate.

The Adopt a Ship programme can be used in combination with the Seafarers Mosaic. This is another initiative designed to raise awareness of the importance of seafarers worldwide by showing what it is that they do every day and why it matters so much. At [www.seafarersmosaic.com](http://www.seafarersmosaic.com) we already have more than 1,000 videos of seafarers working on board and ashore – but the site has room for up to 40,000. To protect the identity of the seafarers participating, we don't use names, but all contributors are given an ID code so they can share their contributions with others if they wish. Paste these codes into the Mosaic's search function to meet some of The Nautical Institute team: M2962999-41, M2962999-46, M2435418-40, M2435418-33, M2962999-44, M2962999-43.

We encourage every member of The Nautical Institute to make some time to get involved in spreading the 'good news in shipping' to the non-maritime community. The best way to do this is by sharing positive stories about shipping and seafaring in local communities and on social media platforms.

Please visit us at Adopt a Ship International on Facebook and provide us with suggestions about how we can all become part of the solution. 🌐



Students take a keen part in the programme



Following the ship's track on the map shows the scale of the industry



Even young children can take part



Creating engagement in the classroom



### How it works

The Adopt a Ship programme is very versatile, and can be adapted to work with the educational needs of the country or school in question. Beyond the basics outlined in the article, we list below a few of the possibilities.

### Measuring learning

Before the programme starts, the children are given a 'pre-test'. They are shown a world map with the outline of the oceans and continents, but with no names. The teacher asks them to fill in certain details. Ten weeks into the programme, the children are given the same test a second time. Results are then compared with those of the previous test. (Details of the very positive results are available for review on request.)

### On screen

Children are shown films from the IMO, the International Chamber of Shipping and other sources.

### Online

It may be possible to set up a Skype session or similar once or twice a year between the ship and the classroom or orphanage.

### In person

Executives from participating organisations, and sometimes seafarers who have participated in the scheme on board, can visit the schools or orphanages that are involved in the programme.

### Site visits

At the end of the school year, or on some other agreed date, the children visit some of the shipping companies that are participating in the programme. They might be shown equipment used on board and models of ships. They may even be allowed, when properly supervised, to use some of the training facilities, such as simulators. These visits are sometimes followed by a question and answer session and/or a test.

### Rewarding participation

Certificates are given to the seafarers who participate on board, to shipping companies and to the teachers and administrators who run the scheme within the schools and orphanages.