



The sailing instructor

Helen Salisbury, 65, is a dual member of Market Harborough WI, Leicestershire & Rutland Federation and Braybrooke WI, Northamptonshire Federation

I took up sailing in my early 40s, when my marriage broke down. Life started to change, the kids had grown up and I wanted to do something for myself.

I've worked since I had a paper round at the age of 13, so when I retired from my job in middle-management further education at the end of 2014, I didn't hang around.

By February 2015 I was training to become a Royal Yachting Association (RYA) dinghy instructor. The course was one of the most challenging things I have ever done. Not only did I have to learn how to teach up to six adults in two boats, but also up to six people in single-handed dinghies – way out of my comfort zone.

But I completed the training and I now instruct on both adult and youth RYA-accredited sailing courses.

I enjoy taking people from 'nothing to something' and watching their confidence grow. Often they don't realise what an

involved sport sailing is. You have to work with the weather and respond to the balance of the boats; you can't just sail from A to B. It's always different and you really have to concentrate, which means you forget everything else around you.

I love the challenge of it. On a windy day, going off-wind with three sails up will beat any fairground ride. I helm my own boat, a Fireball – quite a technical vessel – and I now have a female crew which is brilliant. Teaching makes me feel I'm really giving something back to a sport that I only took up seriously in middle age.

I get so much out of it – being in a positive environment makes all the difference. I imagine if I were stuck at home it would be easy to become quite isolated and negative, and that's not for me.

I love the camaraderie of fellow sailors of all ages. I'm very aware that most of the team I work with are young enough to be

my grandchildren, but it's never been a problem at all. Age doesn't matter, and we're all so supportive of each other.

In some areas, the young sailors have more experience than I do, and vice versa. Everyone brings something to the table.

It's so important to stay active. When I first retired, I was keen to train as an instructor because I had always been defined by what I did, by my career. That was how I valued my self-worth. I've since learnt, with the help of my partner, that people like me for who I am.

Now I do a lot of things socially and I'm invited everywhere. I'm not just Helen the manager at work, I am who I am, and people value that. A career and a job are not everything. I wish I could've got my head round that earlier, but there's still time.

My advice is keep active, look for challenges, don't let age put you off, and always have a go.