



EDUCATION

Indianapolis engineer launches free rocket boot camp for kids

An Indianapolis engineer is helping kids build and launch their own rockets through a free boot camp funded by the Minority Engineering Program of Indianapolis.



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INDIANAPOLIS — Is the sky really the limit?

For one Indianapolis engineer, that question is fueling the imagination of young minds one rocket at a time.

When night falls over downtown Indianapolis and thunder rolls across the skyline, Tanaka Chonyera is at work inside his apartment.

There's barely room to walk inside his home. Rocket parts, boxes and materials fill nearly every corner. Furniture was once part of the plan.

"My initial intent for this space was to actually have furniture," Chonyera said.

Instead, it became mission control.

A passion that started across the world

Chonyera's love for rocketry didn't begin in Indiana. It started in high school in Botswana, where he proposed building a rocket for a STEM competition.



Credit: WTHR

Tanaka Chonyera with one of the rockets built through his Indianapolis boot camp.

"Some people laughed at me because they thought it was like a ridiculous, outlandish idea," Chonyera said. "The infrastructure for it wasn't really there."

But Chonyera pushed forward.

Chonyera went on to win an essay competition about education, hosting competitors from

Chonyera went on to win an essay competition about satellites, beating competitors from across the African continent. That victory took him to French Guiana, where he watched an Ariane 5 rocket launch, a moment he said cemented his passion for space.



Credit: Tanaka Chonyera

Tanaka Chonyera in French Guiana, where he watched an Ariane 5 rocket launch.

Bringing rocket science to Indy kids

Now in Indianapolis, Chonyera is paving the way for the next generation.

Chonyera launched a free rocket boot camp for kids in Marion County through the [Minority Engineering Program of Indianapolis](#). After pitching his idea to the nonprofit's board, the program backed it with grant funding, allowing students to participate at no cost.

"This brings them closer to that dream if they've had it as a kid, like I had it as a kid," Chonyera said. "When they go through this, it makes it real."

Students build and launch their own rockets, learning hands-on engineering skills along the way. Chonyera emphasizes safety, teamwork and creativity, even encouraging unique paint designs that reflect each child's personality.



Credit: Tanaka Chonyera

A student examines a rocket during Tanaka Chonyera's free boot camp in central Indiana.

Chonyera's grand mission is ambitious. He wants to see 1,000 rockets launched from Indianapolis by the end of the year.

"To make Indy have the most rockets per capita in the world," Chonyera said. "I am at around 80 right now...so that's 80 individual people each with their own rocket."

The boot camp, Chonyera said, gives kids a chance to gain hands-on experience in the STEM field.

"Space is the limit, really," Chonyera said. "And there is no limit in space. It just keeps going."



Credit: Tanaka Chonyera

| Tanaka Chonyera with rockets that are used to teach students in his free boot camp.

If families are interested in getting involved, they can contact the [Minority Engineering Program of Indianapolis](#) through its website or social media pages or by contacting Chonyera through [his social media](#). The program is completely free.

EDUCATION

Indiana colleges, school districts impacted by Canvas cybersecurity hack

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A cybersecurity attack on the nation's most widely used classroom software has potentially exposed the personal data of millions of students and educators.

