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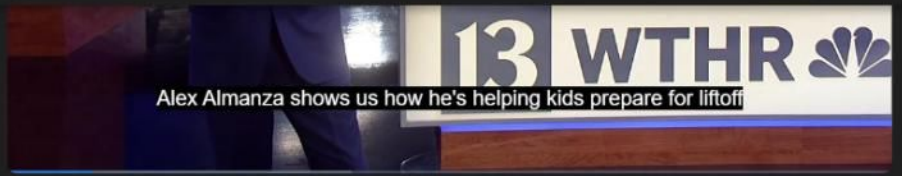
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# Indianapolis engineer launches free rocket boot camp for kids

Alex Almanza
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**Key takeaways**

- Indianapolis engineer Tanaka Chonyera is inspiring young minds by leading a free rocket boot camp for kids in Marion County, teaching hands-on engineering skills and emphasizing safety, teamwork, and See more

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.

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"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.

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

But he pushed forward.

He 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.

**Bringing rocket science to Indy kids**

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

He 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.



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"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.

His 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," he said. "I am at around 80 right now...So that's 80 individual people each with their own rocket."



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

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

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 Tanaka through his social media. The program is completely free.

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