



The Power of Zoo Education

Alex Brown - Education and stewardship assistant for the Nature Conservancy

“I love having an impact on others and making a difference, sharing the passion I learned from my mentors at the zoo.”

I basically grew up at the Zoo! I started going to Zoo Camp when I was 4, moved on to teen programs including being a junior keeper, and then I became a Zoo Camp counselor, performer and Ambassador Animal Handler. These experiences changed me from being a shy kid to someone who now influences and excites others about conservation. I saw myself in the campers as well as the visitors and was able to work with them in a way that made them feel comfortable and excited. I went on to get a degree in Captive Wildlife Care & Education, and work for the Nature Conservancy on Block Island. Every day is new way for me to pay it forward. I lead teen groups and volunteers, maintain trails, and do field research. The highlight of my summer was when

I caught and confirmed the first sighting of a new frog species on the island. I love having an impact on others-- and I know that I'm able to do this because of my experiences at the Zoo.



April Alix - Conservation Program Coordinator at Providence Parks Urban Wildlife Refuge Partnership, US Fish & Wildlife Service

“I now help kids understand nature and change their ‘ewwws’ to ‘ahhhs’.”

I began Zoo Camp at age 11 and eventually became a camp counselor. From the beginning, I remember feeling that I had found my people. I was with others who loved animals the way I did, and they had jobs working with them! That was the first time I realized you can work with animals in many capacities, not just as a keeper. I experienced one incident as a camper that totally changed my life: on a river outing I screamed at seeing an unfamiliar bug – a Dobsonfly. My counselor took that fear in a totally different direction. Pointing out the bug's cool features, emphasizing its role in nature, and how to respect all creatures was something I'll never forget (and later I went on to study aquatic entomology.) When I was an Americorps member, we had on-site trainings at the Zoo that focused on bringing science programming to disenfranchised kids. And I guess you could say the rest is history. In my current role I engage urban audiences by exploring local habitats and helping kids feel a sense of stewardship. I partner with local community groups and libraries running outdoor engagement activities. For example, I help facilitate a mobile nature swap with the Zoo as part of a collaborative Urban Nature Explorers program we run. I'm deeply grateful to the experiences and partnerships I've had with RWPZ on a multitude of levels.



Edie & Tony Kubica - Docent Volunteers

“We take great joy in adding an additional layer of meaning to the wonderful experience a visitor is having at the Zoo.”

We've both been volunteering as RWPZ Docents for several years. It's such a joy sharing stories about animals, talking to visitors, and getting them excited about what they're seeing.

You can't duplicate the look on a child's face when they learn a fun fact or gain a deeper understanding about a species or habitat. What really gets us excited is the kids. We've yet to hear a question that doesn't make sense, and you'd be surprised at how often the adults ask questions, too. We like to give hints to visitors about what to look for in certain exhibits, so they can go into an area with a sense of purpose. One day, the goats in the farmyard were very mischievous and head-butting each other. Kids wanted to know if they were fighting, and we explained the complexities of animal behavior. They were fascinated, entertained, and at the same time we helped them hone in on their observational skills. I remember spending time with a child on a school visit who wasn't keen on zoos. By listening to him and engaging in a brief conversation, he began to understand the importance of zoos as we talked about enrichment and conservation. The reason we keep going back.... it's fun!



Samson & Freya - Samson (12), Freya (9), and Mom Alyson Lombard: zoo campers, nature swappers, and Earth Agent family

“My bedroom is more like a nature museum with books, bones, shells and pinned insects. Who knows what I'll find next?”

We heard other home schoolers talk about the Nature Swap program and jumped at the chance to participate. As a mom, I especially like the Nature Swap because it's a great opportunity for the kids to write. You can bring things in that you find on nature walks, but you can also swap your own nature journals. This opportunity has motivated the kids to overcome their hesitancy about writing. It's great to see them so motivated to do projects. As Earth Agents we created a program within our community to teach people about rainforests. The Zoo gave us instructions for making a keystone species game using a Jenga set, which we made and played with people who came to our event. Samson also made his own game to teach people about key things they can do to save the rainforest. Samson, Freya, and their friends also created a video about saving the rainforests and put it on the Internet.

Freya: “What I love best about Nature Swap is that I can bring something in and swap it for something I've been saving up for. One time I wrote a little book on sea turtles and traded that in. I also traded a felted tarsier that I made. One of my favorite things I got is a moose femur. I love showing it to my friends. We find new things every time we go.”

Samson: “I love our quests inside and outside the Zoo and writing about them. I made a really cool card game about animals and traded it in for a rare turtle shell. My friends like to come over and see the new things I have.”



Chloe Olean - Studying Environmental Studies & Early Childhood Education at Keene State College

“The profound experiences I had at the zoo gave me a fire in my belly to make sure all of my students get what they need.”

As a Zoo Camp CIT and counselor, I've seen campers grow and change because of being in such an inclusive environment. I'm in college now and have decided that I want to focus my career on integration of regular and special education students. This is all because of the Zoo's Autism Spectrum Disorder support programs. Through that program, I met children from all walks of life when I was a counselor, and it made me think of ways to create successful experiences for each camper. My first summer at Zoo Camp, I had a six-year-old who was apprehensive, sitting in the corner crying. I made it a personal goal to give that child a fabulous experience. Now he's a teenager who's still active in Zoo programs and wants to become a zookeeper. I would not be the same person I am without the Zoo. I used to be very fixed, but I learned how to appreciate the unplanned, to tap into what the children need in my classroom, and to take those moments not in the schedule to create memories and lessons that my students will remember. I'm going to carry so much of the Zoo into my formal teachings, such as this lesson and countless others. My goal is to have an inclusive classroom with environmental education influences. I want to help children become environmentally aware citizens, and better citizens overall. Roger Williams Park Zoo is the major influencer for that.



Josh Johnston - Director of Middle Grades at the Learning Community Charter School, Central Falls

“Our partnership with the zoo empowered students to be strong advocates and protect the animal members of their communities. They now have more ways to be empathetic activists and protect the environment.”

Community Responsibility Blocks that revolves around community responsibility. Our mission is to empower students to use their voices, assume community responsibility, and take social action. We invite outside partners to work with our students to help them grow as community members by becoming more aware of the outside world and strengthening their relationships with each other as members of new communities. Our program with RWPZ has been successful in

those goals, and the students love it, too. The results for their class, Pets and Vets, have lived up to our biggest hopes and dreams. Many students already passionately care about animals, but as a result of this class, students now have the tools and knowledge to act on that passion. They want to take action and take care of the animal members of their community. At the end of the year, the kids took the initiative to promote a free spay and neuter clinic in their neighborhood. They made flyers, assigned jobs, and even gave a brief talk to each homeroom about the importance of the free clinic. This was a perfect example of how the Zoo program has empowered these kids to have an impact on their communities.



Rona Principe - Certified Child Life Specialist, Hasbro's Children Hospital Behavioral Health Unit

"After a zoo visit one of my patients told me that it gave her a big source of happiness and strength. You can't get much better than that."

The Behavioral Health Unit serves children and teens who suffer from a variety of psychiatric issues. Patients can be admitted anywhere from weeks to several months at a time. The Zoo's animal-assisted therapy program is a highlight for many of these patients who are normally in this very structured, clinical environment. Having the animals visit gives them something to look forward to and the opportunity to interact with others. It's also a unique way for us to build rapport with these patients and help them ease into treatment. We divert their attention by changing their focus to the excitement of an upcoming Zoo visit or pleasant memories of one from the past. I worked with one patient who was very difficult to engage. Slowly, through contact with the animals, her personality began to emerge, and she lit up every time the Zoo visited. I've heard patients say, "That's totally what I needed today," and "It makes my heart happy when I see the animals." Some of these kids wouldn't necessarily have the opportunity to go to the Zoo. Most importantly, the program allows the patient to engage and become educated about certain animals and gives them permission to just be a kid!



Dominique Aveller - Zoo Camper

"My zoo camp friends are amazing people. My experience was extraordinary, amazing, educational, and fun!"

As a result of writing a winning essay about her challenges with autism, Dominique received a grant for a free week at Zoo Camp. Her mother Dawn says: I'm grateful to the Zoo for giving her this opportunity that I wouldn't be able to give her.

What an amazing experience it has been! She learned about different animals and habitats, but most importantly, she made life-long friends. Being kind makes an impact on people and the staff was so amazing, I could see positive changes in Dominique's social behavior. Every day was a different experience, and never once did she feel left out. She'd always come home happy. Last year she befriended another camper who also felt different from most other kids, and the two of them really blossomed. One day he gave her a pin that she still wears, that pretty much sums up the whole zoo experience: Better Together."

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