



Inspiring people to love and protect nature

Bienestar Explorador Camp

Summer 2010



Bienestar Explorador 2010 Final Report

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Explorador Nature Camp

Summer 2010 Outcome Report

This summer, Bienestar Community Development Corporation and the Audubon Society of Portland partnered again to offer the camp known as the *Explorador Program*, introducing 96 students to the natural areas and greenspaces found within their own neighborhoods and the greater Pacific Northwest. Participants had the opportunity to discover, investigate and learn about the native flora and fauna of local ecosystems. Exploring lakes, rivers, beaches, forests and wetlands gave the students an increased familiarity with the many different habitats found within the region, and enhanced their understanding of environmental concepts and issues relating to these natural areas. The fundamental goal of the program was to help students build a deeper appreciation of, and gain confidence in, the natural world while having a lot of fun. Based on student and parent feedback, attendance and the results of the student assessment, the 2010 Explorador program was a tremendous success.

Bienestar is a Washington County nonprofit providing affordable housing and resident service



programs for farmworker and working poor families. Bienestar's mission is to build housing, hope and futures for the well-being of working families and seniors. The average income for a family of four at Bienestar is under \$20,000, 98% of the residents are Latino, and most of the families have both parents working. The farmworker families, in particular, have summer working days of dawn to dusk, so the structured activities

offered to their children by Bienestar are very important during the summer.

The Bienestar/Audubon Society partnership is in its third year, and has expanded to include family nature outings and nature presentations during the fall and winter as well as the summer Explorador Camp.

This summer's program consisted of four, week-long day camps that served Bienestar apartment communities in Hillsboro, Aloha and Forest Grove. A typical week of camp served 18 to 24 students and operated with a staff of six to eight. Explorador staff included two Audubon Society Program Co-Directors/ Instructors, one or two Audubon Interns, up to three high school Counselors, (two of whom were Bienestar residents), and a Bienestar Promotora who served primarily as counselor/interpreter/liaison.



The general format of the program gave students the opportunity to visit, study, and explore a different destination each day. The students were picked up by school bus each morning in front of their apartment complex at 9:00 a.m. and returned home by 3:00 p.m. On Fridays, students returned at 5:00 p.m., as the week ended with a trip to Cannon Beach and Haystack Rock. The program provided each child their own

Explorador hat, along with a classic, wood-cookie nametag, both of which were intended to serve as keepsakes and mementos of the camp experience. Students also made their own unique journal, personalizing it and filling it with drawing and notes from each day's activities. Bienestar provided lunch for the students for the first two weeks and Audubon provided lunch the remaining 2 weeks.



In essence, the Explorador Program is a "traveling summer camp" that brings the fun and learning to the community, inviting children and families to explore the natural areas in their own backyard and beyond. We at Portland Audubon feel that the Explorador program and our partnership with Bienestar are flagship examples of how people and organizations can work together to raise environmental awareness in underserved youth and enrich children's lives.

Program Outline

Monday; Location: Portland REI, Tanner Springs Wetlands and Jamison Square

- AM** 9:00am - Pick up/sign-in
Introduction/Ice Breaker Activity
Distribute Explorador Hats/Name Tags
Introduce Program Expectations /pass out snack
Divide students into three small study groups to rotate through locations
Tanner Springs Wetlands – Discuss history of wetland and recycled items at the park
Team Building Activity
Distribute and complete initial Knowledge Assessment
Create and decorate student journals and explore urban wetlands
- Lunch**
- PM** Walk in small groups to Jamison Square
Urban Ecosystem study and fountain exploration
Walk to REI and prepare for climbing
Rotate through the REI climbing pinnacle
Closing/Bead Ceremony/ Ice cream
Drop off at 3:00pm

Tuesday; Location: Portland Audubon Society

- AM** 9:00am - Pick up/sign in
Travel to Portland Audubon Wildlife Sanctuary
Explore Audubon's Wildlife Sanctuary
Sit Spots
Service Project/ Invasive ivy pull in the Sanctuary
- Pizza Lunch**
- PM** Teambuilding activities
Macro-invertebrate study in Balch Creek and pond
Journal Activity
Closing/bead ceremony
Drop off at 3:00pm

Wednesday; Location: Tillamook Forest Center

- AM** 9:00am- Pick up/sign in
Travel to Tillamook Forest Center
Split into three small study groups for rotation
Interpretive hike along the Wilson River Trail
Exhibit Games and Exploration
- Lunch**
- PM** Forest fire ecology - view movie on the Tillamook Burn
Wilson River exploration and aquatic invertebrate study
Closing/bead ceremony
Drop off at 3:00pm

Thursday; Location: Henry Hagg Lake

AM 9:00am - Pick up/sign in
Travel to Henry Hagg Lake (Sain Creek Area)
Team Building Activity
Jays & Juncos animal survival activity
Lake trail exploration and investigation
Search for animal tracks and create plaster casts with each student

Lunch

PM Teambuilding Activities
Travel to Scoggins Creek
Postcard Craft/ watercolor painting
River Walk to look for tracks and macro-invertebrates
Closing /Bead Ceremony
Drop off at 3:00pm

Friday; Location: Cannon Beach

AM 9:00am- Pick up/sign in
Travel to Cannon Beach
Beach/ Tidepool exploration
Coastal Ecosystem Intro
Ecosystem sand sculpture contest

Lunch

PM Explore beach at the mouth of Ecola Creek
Final Knowledge Assessment
Final closing/bead ceremony
Ice cream celebration at Dairy Queen
Drop off at 5:00pm



Expanded Program Outline

A typical week of camp began on Monday with an ice breaker activity, name game, and an overview of the schedule, expectations and Audubon's behavior policy for the week. Students were each given a wood cookie name tag and their own Explorador hat. The group began their week of experiential outdoor education by participating in a guided rotation to explore some of the urban ecosystems in the city of Portland. Students were split into three small study groups by age, and then rotated through Tanner Springs Wetland, Jamison Square and NW REI's indoor climbing wall. At Tanner Springs, groups discussed the history, formation and importance of the wetlands in the old industrial area of NW Portland. Students were able to take time to explore the wetland as well as observe the structures in the park made of recycled industrial materials. Students also created their own nature journals to use throughout the week and participated in the initial Knowledge Assessment. The group then hiked to Jamison Square Fountain Park, where the students ate lunch and explored the urban ecosystem of the park.



In the afternoon, the students visited REI in the Pearl District, where they were outfitted with climbing shoes and harnesses and participated in the teambuilding challenge to climb the indoor climbing pinnacle. The three small groups then reconvened and celebrated their successes with ice cream before traveling back to their homes.



On Tuesday, the students spent the day at Audubon Society of Portland. The children learned about the Wildlife Care Center, saw a behind-the-scenes view of wildlife veterinarians treating sick and injured wildlife, and were treated to a personal presentation with one or more of the Audubon Society's Educational Birds. The rest of the day included an exploration of the Wildlife Sanctuary, as well as learning about the environmental components of an old-growth forest and the importance of healthy watersheds. The students had time to reflect while sitting quietly in the woods, wrote about or drew things they saw in their journals, explored the creek and pond for aquatic invertebrates, newts, frogs and turtles, and came away with a much richer understanding of the ecology of a forest.



On Wednesday, the group traveled to the Tillamook Forest Center and participated in activities dealing with coastal rainforest and fire ecology. Students were split into three small study groups. One group began by taking an interpretive hike along the Wilson River, searching for animal sign and identifying plants and edible berries. Students ate berries and leaves that they harvested from wild plants; for

many, this was the first such experience in their lives.

The students then explored the interactive, hands-on exhibits inside the Tillamook Forest Center, and learned about the life of loggers, the life cycle of salmon, native cultures of the Coast Ranges, and forest rehabilitation. The groups then watched a video on the history of forest fires in the Tillamook Forest and were able to climb to the top of a fire lookout tower to learn more about fire ecology.

After lunch students explored the riparian ecosystem along the Wilson River, learning how to identify frogs, tadpoles, water striders, caddis fly larvae and more, as well as participating in discussions about frog and insect metamorphosis. This was truly a day of discovery for all.

Thursdays were spent at Henry Hagg Lake in Washington County. The students hiked through the forest while learning the ancient arts of tracking and shelter building, and other survival skills. Students also participated in activities in which they learned to walk silently like a coyote, listened like a deer or an owl, pretended to eat like a Dark-Eyed Junco and hunted like a Steller's Jay. From these animals, students learned skills that enabled them to walk through the woods quietly with increased "wilderness awareness."

Students then had the chance to search for animal tracks in the mud at different locations along the creek. Students created their own plaster casts of the footprints left by Raccoons, Great Blue Herons, Coyote, squirrels, and many other species. Groups discussed the survival and hunting



strategies of some of the birds they observed at Hagg Lake such as Canada Geese, Great Blue Herons, Belted Kingfishers and Bald Eagles. The students ended the day by using watercolors to paint postcards of the environments around them.



On Friday of each week, camp was concluded with a special trip to the Oregon Coast. Students spent the day at Cannon Beach where they investigated rocky intertidal, sandy beach and riparian habitats.

During low tide weeks, Explorador partnered with the Haystack Rock Awareness Program (HRAP) and students were led on guided explorations of Haystack Rock's intertidal areas by a trained HRAP naturalist. When the tides were high and intertidal exploration was limited, students used the sand and other natural objects to create different habitats and their features or different animals and their adaptations.

After lunch, the group spent time exploring the beach at the mouth of Ecola Creek and discussed the uniqueness of the brackish water of the estuary habitat, where saltwater meets fresh. After leaving the beach behind, students completed their final Knowledge Assessments and then celebrated the week with a trip to Dairy Queen.



During the week the Explorador staff chose daily themes to incorporate into each day's activities. These included, but were not limited to:

- **Geology** – Discuss the geologic history of the areas that students explore. Create opportunities for students to see how geology affects and creates different habitats.
- **Local, Natural Resources** – Focus on historical uses of various resources as well as interactions with the environment and local resources throughout history, as seen in the recycled structures and history of Tanner Springs Wetlands. Discuss how we use local resources and interact with the environment, on an individual scale and a large, community, city or national scale.
- **Habitats** - Students explore wildlife habitats throughout the week as we travel to different locations. Discuss the animals that live in each habitat and how they differ from one another.
- **Adaptation** – Discuss and identify the special “equipment” animals use to help them survive in different places.
- **Survival Skills** – Introduce the five senses and take part in activities to utilize each of the five. Identify basic survival needs and practice skills such as mapping, fire building, shelter building and identifying edible and poisonous plants.
- **Animal Tracking Skills** – Students learn how to identify various animal signs and birdsong and take part in discussions and activities in which they learn to move and act like an animal.
- **Forest Fire Ecology** – Introduce the importance of forest fires and the potential devastation they may have on a habitat. Students viewed burned areas and explored areas that have grown again after forest fires.

Knowledge Assessment and Outcomes

Each year, the Explorador Program has grown, developed and touched the lives of many children and families. Assessing Explorador's educational impact is vital to understanding the effects of the program and its success within the community, and to continuing to improve the program.

Explorador's success is gauged by both attendance and the Knowledge Assessments completed by the students.

Summer 2010 had the best attendance record yet achieved for the Bienestar Explorador Program.

Overall we achieved over 90% attendance, nearly meeting our cap of 24 students every week.

The Knowledge Assessment tool we used was developed specifically for this year's Explorador Program and was as an image-based questionnaire. This relatively-new assessment format was created to better address the wide variety of children's ages, as well as their different reading, writing and general language skills. The questions on the assessment were kept relatively simple and related to the basic environmental knowledge of the Pacific Northwest. Students were asked to identify animals that live in Oregon, identify animal tracks, match animals to their habitats and primary food source. Children were also asked if they would like to return to Explorador camp next year, and to rate their personal *comfort level* in or with nature (research shows a student's comfort level with nature can greatly impact their desire or ability to learn about it.) This was an important indicator for the Bienestar children, who typically have had no experience in nature. Each year on the first day of camp, some of the children are afraid to get off the bus, believing that "lions and tigers are in the woods."

Each student was given the assessment twice, once on the first day of the program, and again on the last, in hopes of measuring a change in their level of knowledge, understanding, and comfort level in nature.

We collected the following results:

- Statistically, **81% of students showed a significant increase** in their level of knowledge and understanding of the environmental concepts taught during the program.
- The students' had an **average increase in score of 23%** (range of increase:10% to 57%)
- **92%** of the students said they **felt comfortable in nature** at the end of the week.
- **94%** of students indicated wanting to return for **Explorador's 2011** summer program.

- Of Note: 48% of students were returning Explorador participants.

Based on the high outcomes of the assessment, and on the student's attitudes, level of excitement for the program and their enthusiasm to return, we feel the Bienestar Explorador 2010 program was a complete success.

The assessment tool we used this year addressed many challenges previously encountered when staff have attempted to assess and quantify the educational and experiential impact of the Explorador program. The results listed above support the anecdotal evidence seen by staff: that many Explorador participants do not have the opportunity to regularly connect with or explore natural and/or wild areas. The Explorador Program provides children with rich experiences that allow them to form real and meaningful relationships with the natural world, and to gain a heightened awareness of the role that they, as individuals and a community, can play to help insure the environment is protected.

Another success for the summer 2010 season was the increased involvement of Bienestar residents and the recruitment of two counselors from the Bienestar Community. Elvira and Gerardo Lemus, two high school students with an interest in nature and the outdoors, were asked to join the Explorador Program as paid counselors. To prepare them for the job, Elvira and Gerardo attended a four-day Audubon training (including a three day/ two night overnight at the Audubon's cabin outside of Sandy, OR) during which they learned specific tools, survival skills and activities to help them excel as Audubon counselors. As the summer progressed we saw them grow in confidence and ability and they were willing and able to lead many activities by the end of the summer. We are very pleased with the job done by Elvira and Gerardo and hope they can join us again next year, perhaps as mentors to other new counselors.

For the second year in a row, Bienestar Promotora Alejandra Aguilar served as additional staff to the camp, serving as counselor/translator/liaison to the Audubon Staff. Her presence at the camp fostered participation among residents, since typically Bienestar parents are reluctant to let their children go out with strangers that they do not know. A low-income resident herself, she was also able to augment her family income through this assignment.

Family Days, Evening Presentations & Suggestions for Next Year

In response to feedback from the 2009 summer program, we spent much of the year leading up to this summer's Explorador Camp building relationships with the families and communities that are served by the Explorador Program. In the months between February and June 2010, the Bienestar Community had the opportunity to participate in six family events. Four of the events were "Family Days" during which family members were picked up at one of the Bienestar sites and participated in the Sauvie Island Raptor Road Trip, Oaks Bottom Festival of Birds, an Audubon Society Sanctuary Tour and a day of bird watching at Jackson Bottom Wetlands. The Audubon Society also held two evening programs at two of the Bienestar sites. The first was a Beautiful Birds program at Montebello Apartments, and the second was an Owls program at the Sunset Apartments. Both programs included a PowerPoint presentation, hands on activities and a visit from an Audubon education bird. At these family nights, the Audubon Society staff provided hand outs (in Spanish and English) explaining who the Audubon Society is and what Explorador Camp is. We strongly suggest the continuation of Family Days and evening presentations, and would welcome and encourage additional suggestions for destinations or topics to be covered.

Other suggestions include:

- Hold additional focus groups meetings at each of the sites
- Deliver evening programs at all apartment sites in Spring 2011
- Continue to incorporate Bienestar staff and community members in the program
- Offer an overnighther during the weeks of the summer Explorador program

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