



# Wildlife Immersion and Leadership Development: Employing Under-Supported Youth in EE



The Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens' Wildlife Immersion and Leadership Development (W.I.L.D.) Program provides paid employment for culturally- and economically-diverse teens from under-supported communities in Jacksonville, Florida.

# Grant Funded Program

- Initial funding came from a grant from the Mayor's office and the Jacksonville Children's Commission aimed at occupying students' out-of-school-time, providing mentorship, job experience, and leadership opportunity for culturally and economically diverse teens.
- The Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens uses this funding to pay hourly wages to the teens in our program, as well as cover supplies and event expenses.

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# Grant Requirements

The grant stipulates (among other things):

- Participants must be between the ages of 13-18
- Participation must take place during “out of school” time
  - afterschool, weekends, summer, early-release days
- Participants must live in or attend school or church in one of 10 pre-selected zip codes
  - These 10 areas have the highest crime rates, lowest school retention and graduation rates, and were considered high priority to the City of Jacksonville
- Participants must have parent/guardian permission to track their grades, school conduct, grades, and truancy

# The 3-Year Program Model

- The W.I.L.D. Program functions on a three-year engagement model.
- Each year focuses on getting youth outdoors, community advocacy, environmental literacy and cultural representation and awareness.
- Students age out of the program when graduating from high school.
- Each year provides positive youth development in the following:





Interpretation



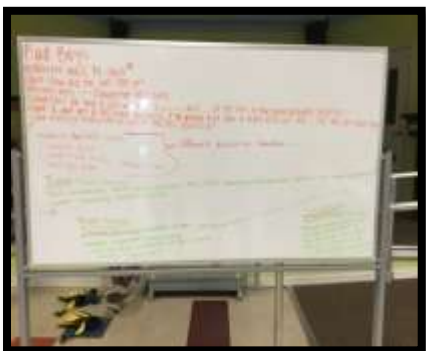
Wildlife Immersion



Animals



Public Speaking



Program Development



Leadership Development



Team Building and Bonding

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# 3-Year Engagement Model

These levels, the W.I.L.D. Steward, W.I.L.D. Ambassador, and W.I.L.D. Advocate, essentially introduces the W.I.L.D. Program experience in a series.

Each level have specific roles and responsibilities which in turn makes the leadership journey more holistic and impactful. This adds yet another unique dynamic to the program's development model.

Think of the W.I.L.D. Program's levels as the learning, the practice and the action.

With added responsibilities each year of employment, there are added benefits, and each promotion in the program brings a raise in pay.

It also makes recruitment for both entry into and retention within the program extremely competitive.



W.I.L.D.  
Steward



W.I.L.D.  
Ambassador



W.I.L.D.  
Advocate

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# Year One: W.I.L.D. Stewards

Their primary role is as an outreach educator; creating and delivering educational programming in the community using live animals and biofacts.

- Training focuses on the essentials of EE, exploring outdoors and shaping an understanding of their leadership personalities.



# Tools and Methods Used

Our most influential/innovative tools for shaping leadership personalities and preparing informal environmental educators

- Leadership Days
- Videography
  - “W.I.L.D. Fire” Videos
  - “Rapid Fire” Videos
- Wildlife Immersion
- Outreach Programming

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# Leadership Days

- Each Steward is assigned a leadership topic to research and must deliver a one-day lesson on the subject to the team.
- They incorporate lessons learned in all realms of school, work, home, and must include activities to illustrate their topics.
- Each Leadership Day serves as an opportunity to design and deliver a program, manage time, people, and resources, and build strength into their team.

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# Videography

- capture testimonials, self-expression, evaluation, measure growth in key aspects
- “W.I.L.D. Fire” Videos
  - commercials for their Leadership Day
  - 30 seconds to 2 minutes
  - teens can get into character, use props, costumes, live animals and even other teammates or coworkers

# Videography

- “Rapid Fire” Videos
  - 30 seconds to 2 minutes, similar to “W.I.L.D. Fire” videos
  - No limit to subject area; can be about anything the teens want to share
  - Some topics include introversion, gardening, animals facts, respect, and more...

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# Wildlife Immersion

Multiple studies have shown the many benefits of being immersed in nature ranging from reducing stress and anxiety, promoting creativity and imagination to building community connections and supporting cultural representation.

Therefore, we are intentional in making the W.I.L.D Program physically immersive within wildlife and the outdoors. This helps create smoother transitions into individual relationships with wildlife and ultimately inspiring more meaningful connections to the outdoors. Wildlife Immersion also lends itself to establish experiential learning. Our work, learn, play model is more visible through our wildlife immersion process.



# “Work” – Animal Handling, Husbandry, and Care

W.I.L.D. Steward job duties encompass animal handling, husbandry, and care for a wide variety of animals from the exotic Rose-haired tarantula and Hyacinth macaws to Florida natives like the American alligators, and invasive species, like the Burmese python.



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# “Learn” - Conservation

They visit our local beaches and help with the removal of invasive plants and debris. This helps establish a conservation connection and a better understanding of environmental conservation in general.



They also do neighborhood clean-ups. Many of the first impressions with nature happen in our own backyards. Helping to keep these areas clean not only gives back, but also helps rebuild connections that may have been lost in the past.

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# “Play” - Recreation

We understand that simply having fun outdoors can build the strongest bonds. So, we engage recreationally in kayaking, archery, gardening, fishing, camping, and hiking.



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# Outreach Programming

As employees, W.I.L.D. Program members are uniquely positioned to be the face of our Zoo in their community, and the voice of their generation for the environment. They primarily focus on environmental literacy on a local level. While each level of the W.I.L.D. Program provides outreach, the Stewards take primary responsibility in creating new outreach programs. The Ambassadors and Advocates serve as guides and mentors during this process.

These programs are free and must be delivered to an organization or facility that has been influential in the staffs' lives. Live animals and their artifacts are used as supplemental materials during a W.I.L.D. Outreach program. These educational outreach programs aim to address the very real issue of promoting environmental literacy by communicating directly to the audiences within our community that reflect the interests of the teens while highlighting the teens' leadership role in the campaign. 100% of the W.I.L.D. Program Outreaches are created and presented by the teens involved. This allows the teens to deliver contemporary messaging that reflects their personalities and personal nature connections.

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# “Snack Attack” and “Bad Boys”



During the summer months, the teens work on creating outreach program topics, brain storming, supply collecting and trial-running. The fall and spring lends itself to delivering the programs to the community. From start to finish, we have seen a 3 – 6 month period before a program is ready to be delivered to the public.

## “Snack Attack”

Currently, there are two programs available: 2016’s “Snack Attack”, a 45-minute presentation which explores the relationship of predator and prey within an ecosystem, and 2017’s “Bad Boys”, an hour-long, interactive and theatrical presentation that highlights citizen science and the removal of invasive species within Florida.



## “Bad Boys”

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# Year Two: W.I.L.D. Ambassador

Their primary role continues to include environmental education, but as a mentor to incoming first-year Stewards.

- More individualized attention to focus on career investigations, community partnerships, and local initiatives

# Tools and Methods Used

To assist second-year staff in their personal and professional development

- Career Investigations
- Professional Development
- Mentorship

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# Career Investigations

We have created four guided career tracks that may be explored with the zoo and community partners, which may provide transferrable skills, certifications, and opportunities to network

- Science and Research
  - Careers in the biological or environmental sciences
- Animal Care and Conservation
  - Careers involving animal care, husbandry, training, or in situ wildlife conservation
- Communications
  - Careers involving communications, public relations, or customer service
- “Other”
  - A customized career track, unique to the student, which leverages any available community partners, subject matter experts, or other professional connections

# Professional Development

Often the result of participation in a guided career track, these opportunities can include transferrable certifications, additional job responsibilities, external leadership opportunities, and conference presentations. Below are a few of the professional development opportunities that are available to or have been attained by the W.I.L.D. Ambassadors.

- Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens Animal Trainer Certification
- Citizen Scientist Certification
- Animal Husbandry Certification
- Interpretation Certification
- Canoe/Kayak Instructor Certification
- Wildlife First Aid Certification
- Customer Service Course/Certification
- Regional Conference Presenter

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# Mentorship

W.I.L.D. Ambassadors mentor the W.I.L.D. Stewards in almost every aspect of their experience from animal handling and presenting, to interview tips and customer service best practices.

Ultimately, the heart of the success or failure of the W.I.L.D. Program lies within the effectiveness of the W.I.L.D. Ambassador mentoring process



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# Year Three: W.I.L.D. Advocate

After receiving the fundamentals of EE, establishing a leadership personality and job experience during their first year, exploring their prospective careers and networking with community partners during their second year, W.I.L.D. Advocates become a part of the leadership team.

- The most autonomous position, requiring synthesis and application of all skills learned.

# The Advocate Brand

Three options currently exist for Advocates to showcase what they've learned and apply these concepts to a final project/culminating presentation.

- Conservation Project
  - Working within a current Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens conservation project allows the Advocate to collaborate, learn, and contribute to real conservation.
- Non-Profit or Community Organization
  - Will research and start up a non-profit organization or community project that promotes EE, scientific literacy, or an initiative of their passion.
- Conference Presentation
  - Will submit a paper, presentation, or poster to a local, regional, or national conference that aligns with their work. If accepted, they must be prepared to present at the conference.

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# Challenges

## (The Short List)

# Challenges so far...

- Scheduling
  - Growth (10 to 20 to 30 staff members in 3 years!)
  - High schoolers are busy!
  - Delivering outreach programs during “out of school time”
- Funding
  - Grant funding runs out
  - Increased transportation and space needs are unavoidable
- Evaluation
  - Getting authentic feedback and data without it feeling like “school”

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# Successes





# Successes – Internal and External

The teens have managed to create community-based programs that reflect their interests and engage multi-layered conservation and environmental efforts, and develop and deepen their connection with nature.

They have also explored many aspects of a leadership including establishing and refining their own leadership personality.

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# Successes

More success than has been measured, of course!

- Recruitment
  - Word of mouth is spreading: applications have tripled
- Programming
  - Delivering interpretive conversations, synthesize enthusiasm and environmental literacy, to thousands of people, and by special request!
- Personal and Interpersonal
  - Students report reduced anxiety, increased confidence in public speaking, increased ability to work with new people, speaking more in school, easier time making new friends, being more comfortable speaking on a wide variety of subjects
  - To date, a 100% graduation rate, 100% college acceptance rate, and hundreds of thousands of scholarship dollars secured

# Jacksonville Zoo and Gardens/W.I.L.D. Program

## 2017 Association of Zoos and Aquariums Award Winner

### Significant Achievement in Diversity



Through the Angela Peterson Excellence in Diversity Award, the Association of Zoos and Aquariums (AZA) recognizes significant achievement in work force and audience diversity by an AZA member institution. The award recognizes the most significant innovative, productive, far-reaching, program to promote diversity in institutions throughout AZA.

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# Marquese Fluellen

## NAAEE Global 30 under 30 Award Winner

Thirty young people, ages 30 and under, were recently recognized by the North American Association for Environmental Education (NAAEE). The EE 30 Under 30 highlights the work of young professionals of various backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, and communities who are using education to help protect the environment.

In 2017, the program expanded its search beyond North America to include international candidates, through support from the Global Environmental Education Partnership (GEEP) and the US Forest Service (USFS). It shines a spotlight on the incredible efforts of young people around the world and motivates others to get involved in environmental education in their communities.



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# Devine Quisenberry

## Mayor's Youth Leadership Advisory Council Member

The Mayor's Young Leaders Advisory Council (MYLAC) was established in 2014 and is composed of 50 high school juniors and seniors. MYLAC gives youth with leadership potential the opportunity to learn more about city government and effective citizenship so they can make positive differences as young leaders. The Council also shares ideas with city officials and advises on issues facing Jacksonville youth.



# CONTACT US!

**We LOVE to talk about our program!  
Feel free to reach out for more information.**

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