

Project: Youth Conservation and Science Leadership program  
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Project Website: [http://http://www.czs.org/czs/Conservation-Leadership/Creating-Conservation-Leaders/Career-Ladder-for-Youth-\(1\)](http://http://www.czs.org/czs/Conservation-Leadership/Creating-Conservation-Leaders/Career-Ladder-for-Youth-(1))

Project Categories: Programs, Evaluation and Assessment

Primary Target: Youth (High)

How to Reach Primary Target: We provide a youth volunteer program (YVC) at the zoo.

Secondary Target: Youth (Elementary)

How to Reach Secondary Target: We provide after-school family and middle school outreach programs in Chicago Public Libraries

General Demographics: YVC-diverse with regard to urban/suburban; white/non-white; more than half female; Outreach--mostly urban; non-white For 2007, ZAP! participants were: 74% Hispanic; 9% White; 8% African American; 6% Mixed descent; and 2% Asian/Pacific Islander. In 2007, Kids' Club served 52 participants who are: 50% Hispanic; 21% White; 15% African-American; 9% Mixed descent and, 4% Asian. In 2007, Youth Corps participants were: 62% White; 22% Hispanic; 5% African American; 4% Asian/Pacific Islander and 6% mixed descent/other. Sixty-seven percent of participants were female. Outreach

Project Dates: 1/1/1997 - 12/31/2008

Funders

Chicago Zoological Society / Brookfield Zoo  
 3300 Golf Road  
 Brookfield, IL 60513  
<http://www.brookfieldzoo.org>

Funders:

Institute of Museum and Library Service  
<http://www.ims.gov>

Kemper Educational and Charitable Foundation

Evaluation and Field Testing

Evaluators: Zoo and Aquarium Teen Program Assessment Consortium  
<http://www.zatpac.org>

Evaluation Strategy: Through our partnership in the Zoo and Aquarium Teen Programs Assessment Consortium (ZATPAC), we have developed measurement

tools and have used them throughout the Youth Conservation & Science Program. ZATPAC is a collaborative effort to strengthen the ability of American Zoo and Aquarium Association-affiliated institutions to provide teenagers with experiences that build environmental literacy, enhance personal growth, and foster a sense of stewardship for the natural world. The collaboration includes Brookfield Zoo, Monterey Bay Aquarium, New England Aquarium, Philadelphia Zoo, San Francisco Zoo and Woodland Park Zoo. Through ZATPAC, we continue to increase our evaluation capacity ([www.zatpac.org](http://www.zatpac.org)). Evaluative tools in use include surveys, performance evaluations, observations, and exit interviews.

### Project Descriptions

Summary: The Conservation Science & Leadership Program, or “Career Ladder”, achieves Chicago Zoological Society’s mission of inspiring conservation leadership by connecting people and communities to wildlife and nature. It embodies the Society’s institutional value of diversity by engaging diverse city and suburban communities in initial family-based programming and science exploration at local libraries and increasing career development opportunities for young people through the youth volunteer opportunities and internships. These programs build long-term relationships with communities, families and youth to create conservation leaders, those that act positively on behalf of the environment and encourage others to do so. In 2007, Chicago Zoological Society was awarded the IMLS National Medal for Museum and Library Service in recognition of the connections we have developed with the communities we serve. Within the last decade, we have exponentially expanded our outreach and programming by working with community groups, libraries, schools, and community members particularly focusing on Chicago’s underserved neighborhoods. Community-based collaborations have been instrumental in helping to strengthen our relationships throughout the greater Chicago area to bridge the gap between underserved communities, our conservation mission, and the future of America’s conservation voice. The expansion of community outreach and reciprocal program design, in which the community guides program themes and topics, allows us to address changing demographics by offering culturally sensitive ways to engage community members. The program begins with a community-based outreach program for children and their families in disadvantaged communities. The program, called Zoo Adventure Passport (ZAP!), introduces children to basic science and conservation through fun, family-based activities. In the second step, we invite them to join our community-based Kids’ Club, an after-school program for middle school students that develops key science skills. High school youth can then put in their application to the third step, our Youth Conservation & Science Corps that

provides hands-on, project-driven mentoring and training. Fourth, we offer paid positions in a real-world conservation setting at Brookfield Zoo for high school and college students. Fifth, we provide merit-based scholarship support for college education in conservation and science. Sixth, we offer both paid and unpaid internships throughout the Society including animal programs, education, marketing and administration in addition to a growing number of other areas.

Impact:

With regard to our family programming (ZAP!), the impact is summarized as follows: An analysis of the results indicates that 74% of the families report spending more time in nature as a family since beginning in ZAP!. Seventy-three percent visit Brookfield Zoo more often. A majority of families (76-85%) are also reporting that they talk about nature and science more, talk with children about school more and help children with their school work more when compared with the amount of time spent in these activities before the ZAP program. Evaluation of our after-school middle school science program, Kids' Club: When asked how much interest students had in science and nature after Kids' Club as compared to before, the majority of students stated that they have more interest after having participated in the program. No students responded that they now have less interest in these subjects. The difference in responses was significant. Many students also reported that they now talk about science and nature more when at home, an insignificant difference. Students were also asked whether or not they felt Kids' Club helped them in school. 81% of respondents replied that it did help in school. Field trips are the biggest source of enjoyment for Kids' Club students (47%, n=15) with hands-on activities and games coming in at a close second (40%). Other reasons students gave for liking the program include learning, working with other students, and being exposed to new/different information and experiences. Results from the 2007 Survey on Environmental Behaviors indicates that teens involved in our Youth Corps showed statistically significant increases over time with regard to four listed conservation actions. Especially encouraging was the increased involvement in advocacy efforts on behalf of conservation issues.

Lessons:

Through our evaluation efforts within the ZATPAC group, we are able to begin drawing conclusions about which type of experiences are most effective at increasing knowledge and intent to engage in conservation action among teens working at zoos and aquariums. We can extrapolate these results to determine how these experiences can be incorporated into informal STEM programming at other venues.