

Lehigh Valley Greenways Conservation Landscape SUCCESS STORY

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Allentown Conservation Career Explorations (Awarded 2024)

SUMMARY

During the summers of 2024 and 2025, Lehigh Gap Nature Center (LGNC) partnered with the City of Allentown and Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center to present a series of free, educational, and experiential Conservation Career Explorations for Allentown youth. In total, LGNC and its partners led three dozen programs – including Conservation Career Days and summer playground visits – for over 650 individual students. Participants left each program with a deeper connection to their backyard ecosystems, a greater appreciation for Allentown’s parks, an awareness of conservation career opportunities, and a fun variety of free tools and bilingual resources to support future explorations.



CHALLENGE

The City of Allentown is home to one of the nation’s largest park systems per capita, consisting of over 2,000 acres of green space, trails, and outdoor recreational amenities. Yet, due to deeply rooted systemic barriers, nature and outdoor recreation remain inaccessible to many Allentown residents. Likewise, in Allentown and more broadly, BIPOC communities are underrepresented at all levels of the conservation field, resulting in conservation efforts and outreach that might not align with the lived experiences, languages, and identities of those they aim to benefit.

LGNC’s conversations with Allentown community members reflect these trends and demonstrate a desire for affordable, bilingual science education; improved access to nature and outdoor recreation; leadership training and employment opportunities; and increased representation of BIPOC community members in conservation. LGNC’s Conservation Career Explorations seek to address these needs while working actively and intentionally to make conservation more inclusive.

FUNDING

Grant Award:
\$4,500.00

Match:
\$6,159.59

Total Project Cost:
\$10,659.59

PARTNERSHIP IS KEY

- City of Allentown Bureau of Recreation (program partner)
- Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center (program partner)
- Alliance for Watershed Education (financial partner)
- Fowler Family Fund (financial partner)
- The Harry C. Trexler Trust (financial partner)
- Just Born Quality Confections (financial partner)



SOLUTION

LGNC and Jacobsburg Environmental Education Center provided collaborative conservation programming to all participants in the 2024 and 2025 Allentown Summer Playground Program, coordinated by the City of Allentown Bureau of Recreation. During our two Conservation Career Days, students rotated through interactive stations highlighting Allentown ecology and conservation careers. Activities included birding, stream studies, fishing, wildlife forensics, and art. In addition, LGNC led career-oriented environmental education programs at each Summer Playground Program site during both summers. Programs took place in Allentown parks and were offered at no cost thanks to LVG support. Participants received “I Love Allentown Parks” kits complete with stickers, temporary wildlife tattoos, magnifiers, notebooks, bilingual guides to Allentown wildlife, and much more, all created and purchased by LGNC through this grant.

RESULTS

By fostering connections to Allentown’s parks, trails, and ecosystems and broadening awareness of conservation career pathways, LGNC’s Conservation Career Explorations seek to provide impactful learning opportunities that lead young Allentown residents to become conservation advocates – whether through the pursuit of a conservation career or as environmental stewards and conservation ambassadors within their community. This grant supported a collaboration that benefitted over 650 students at 18 Summer Playground Program sites over the course of two summers. LGNC has received overwhelmingly positive feedback from the students and parks staff, and the City of Allentown is eager to continue this partnership.

Many of the youth who participated in these programs experienced nature in their community for the very first time. Such connections can have a life-long impact. Indeed, several former Allentown and Bethlehem students credit LGNC as a major influence on their career interests and professional growth. We hope the Conservation Career Explorations have similarly inspired future conservation leaders.

Contact



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