



EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER

JULY 2022



WELCOME TO OUR NEW MONTHLY NEWSLETTER!

Based on feedback, we have decided to close out the Google Group to focus all conversations on the discussion board and to publish a monthly newsletter called **Empathy Matters**. We will share Network updates, highlight empathy tips and feature Network Members. As always, we are happy to hear suggestions to make it even better!

First, a few updates from the Network staff. Starting in April, we began site visits to Network Partners. Our plan is to visit all 20 partners by next spring. This spring, we started with 12: Zoo Boise, ZooMontana, Seattle Aquarium, Racine, Henry Vilas, Lake Superior, Como Park and Minnesota Zoos, the International Crane Foundation, Northwest Trek Wildlife Park and Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. Everyone has been so welcoming, and we have enjoyed getting to know folks. We have had great conversations about evaluating empathy projects and Network involvement, and we observed guest programs, interactions with exhibits, and signage using empathy tools developed in earlier empathy projects. We are learning so much from everyone and look forward to sharing great examples of empathy in action soon!



its, and signage using empathy tools developed in earlier empathy projects. We are learning so much from everyone and look forward to sharing great examples of empathy in action soon!

EMPATHY IN ACTION: THE GIFT SHOP



I don't know about you, but we love a Network Partner gift shop! On our recent site visit to ZooMontana, we saw a great way to continue the empathy messaging beyond the zoo visit. After getting to know Pabu the red panda, I

bought this sweet token to remember him when I left. This souvenir reinforces his name and my connection to ZooMontana every time I grab a piece of chocolate from this refillable box. They also have postcards featuring their animals with their names included. Nice work ZooMontana!

How are you using empathy practices in your gift shop? We would love to hear more examples of ways to build empathy tie-ins. And pins. We love to collect Partner pins!

Best wishes for a successful summer season!

Marta Burnet

“WADDLE YOU COME UP WITH NEXT?” EMPATHY RESOURCES!

As part of the Zoo Boise capacity-building grant, they have developed a series of empathy training videos for staff and volunteers. Check them out below!



Featuring Tierney Ball and Austin Reich, these two to seven minute videos divide the empathy content into shorter modules to keep the trainings manageable. The four videos:

- Introduce what empathy is and why it is important for zoos (<https://youtu.be/yCxG78E9nug>),
- Provide an example for a presentation (https://youtu.be/CRsk_6NVY5A),
- Give suggestions for informal storytelling (<https://youtu.be/zbuMxDm-OSQ>), and
- Share tips and tricks for quick interactions with guests (https://youtu.be/x5WQC_MdP-l)

“I have seen many staff...utilizing agency and choice language as well as sharing personal stories.”

If you have any questions about the videos or want to learn more about their experience in developing these, Tierney is happy to speak with folks and can be reached at tball@cityofboise.org.

UPCOMING EVENTS

Attending the AZA Conference in Baltimore? Please join us for a 1-hour meeting on Sunday, August 28th from 3-4 pm. We will also be arranging other meet up opportunities during the conference, so stay tuned!

[Register](#) for our upcoming fall All-Network Meeting on October 13th from 10-11:30 am Pacific. Have a suggestion of topics to discuss? Please let us know!



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

You may recall Courtney Cordova at Henry Vilas Zoo from the tremendously popular empathy fact sheets she shared at the virtual Summit in February. She is a true zoo educator of many talents, including ukulele playing!

Last fall, Courtney launched a fun, guided tour at the zoo called ***Stroller Safari***. It is for caregivers and little ones 2 and under. She repeated the program this spring and we got to see her lead families around the zoo while she played ***Henry Vilas had a Zoo*** on her uke! Each week she adapted a nursery song to introduce specific HVZ animals by name, helping over 200 guests learn about the animals in a fun and engaging way using empathy!

“One thing that struck me the first time we did it was a parent explaining that this was the first-ever program they were able to do with their child due to COVID and being so young.”

With that young age group, structured activities can be tough, so the idea of touring around the zoo and singing songs felt like the perfect balance of structure, learning level and program. Learn more [about the songs and program themes here!](#)

Which animal is she most drawn to? HVZ’s Aldabra giant tortoises! “I think it would be great to just mosey around eating grass, and lounge neck-deep in the pool. It would be nice to just take it slow for a while. I am drawn to being a reptile as I love sitting in the sunshine.”



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ACE FOR WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER

OCTOBER 2022



HAPPY FALL, EVERYONE!

The ACE for Wildlife team has just returned from another amazing set of site visits in North Dakota. We met new friends and observed several great programs at Red River, Dakota and Roosevelt Park Zoos. We will share more about those visits in the next issue once we have had time to digest those experiences.

We have [results to share from our third Rapid Inquiry Cycle](#) on Diversity, Equity, Access and Inclusion (DEAI) initiatives at our Partners. These results will help inform our DEAI + Empathy series this fall.

Next week we will be hosting our fall all-Network meeting. We hope you will be able to join us. We will hear from Dr. Julie Ernst, a professor at U of Minnesota - Duluth and Network Affiliate, about her research with Lake Superior Zoo's nature pre-school program. Committees will share out about all of their projects and we will do some brainstorming about conservation event planning for 2023!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Outcome Mapping Session, October 12th, 10-11:30 am PT. [Registration](#).

All-Network Meeting! October 13th, 10-11:45 am PT. [Registration](#). Happy hour 2-3 pm PT. [Registration](#).

Conservation Calls to Action Learning Group, October 28th from 12-1 pm PT. [Registration](#).

EMPATHY IN ACTION: WILD DRIVES!

A "COVID innovation" for Northwest Trek Wildlife Park was the creation of Wild Drives, where folks caravan in the safety of their own cars around the park's 435-acre free-roaming area, while listening to live narration from a naturalist. They have worked this past year to train the naturalists to infuse more perspective-taking and other empathy practices into their narration.

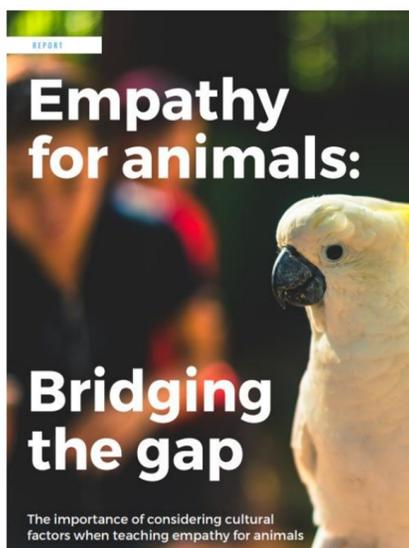


This grant-funded project began with a baseline assessment of the tours and then a hands-on training focused on areas for growth. The naturalists really liked how tailored their training was to their distinct role. They are still analyzing guest surveys, but informally guests have noted that the naturalists are more engaging which increased guest enthusiasm for helping wildlife. We experienced the Wild Drive and were impressed with the range of empathy practices and calls to action interwoven into the program. And such a lovely spot! To learn more, reach out to [Craig Standridge](#) at NW Trek.

EMPATHY RESOURCE: LIT REVIEW!

As part of their grant-funded culturally responsive empathy programming project, Minnesota Zoo contracted Dr. Sara Konrath, Director of the Interdisciplinary Program on Empathy and Altruism Research at Indiana University, to develop a literature review called “Empathy for Animals: Bridging the Gap.” Minnesota Zoo wanted to understand how to most effectively combine culturally responsive teaching and empathy best practices to create a high-quality virtual program for students. [The full report can be accessed here.](#)

According to Liz Gilles, Education Curator, “The lit review provided a filter of things to try to reach our end goals of creating community within a virtual space where all could participate. We wrote those practices into our lesson plans and trained our teachers on them.” They held 62 virtual programs for K-3rd grade last spring, reaching 696 students. Liz noted, “The majority of the learning happened when we began to



teach these programs. We saw what worked, what didn't work for each group of kids and were able to continue to improve our practice as we went.” In a survey, teachers reported the highest strongly agree score (4.9/5) with the statement, “My students felt comfortable sharing their per-

spectives and experiences,” surpassing “My students learned new things about animals and wildlife,” with a score of (4.6/5). E-Learning Specialist May Vang shared:

“It was really powerful to be able to connect with our participants throughout the whole process and create a space for them to feel comfortable showing up how they want to.”

They are continuing to blend these practices as they rebuild their other outreach programs, hoping to bring a more meaningful experience to all of their programs. This means placing students at the center. May stressed, “Participants need to know that you are invested and that they matter for these types of programs to be successful.” **Learn more [December 13 at 9:45 am PT.](#)**

MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



Melanie Michaels, Education Programs Manager at Lake Superior Zoo, is the focus of our spotlight this month. She has worked at the zoo since 2012 and with their ambassador animals since 2013. While she had begun to work on training the animals using choice and control, much of that work was derailed by COVID when animals were no longer participating in programs. Last fall, she began in earnest to use choice and control in training and she has noticed a massive change in animal behavior. “The guinea pigs are totally different and very willing to participate in programs...Our hedgehogs used to bite, now they are super calm during programs.” Training volunteers to work with the animals has been more complicated than in the past, but:

“Volunteers are willing when seeing how comfortable the animals are. They are having a good life, enjoying themselves—they want to go on programs!”

The impact on guests has also been exciting. “It blows people’s minds that you can train an animal other than a dog. When they see animals are capable of learning to target or to willingly go back into their carrier at the end of a program, it helps them to see animals in another light. That is part of the empathy work.”

When asked what animal she would want to be, she chose a house cat. She mused, “My cats seem to have a lovely life. They don’t have to worry about predators and someone else feeds them every meal. Sounds pretty wonderful!”

Learn more [December 8 at 10:15 am PT.](#)



EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 2022



REFLECTIONS AND SHARING

The past month has been a time of deep reflection for the ACE for Wildlife staff. With the whirlwind of initial site visits over, we have been able to think about what we have learned from everyone. The biggest “aha moment” is that the empathy work we are all engaged in is not simply a beginner/intermediate/advanced path. We all have areas where we are experts and other areas where we have more room to grow. And each of us has chosen a different path for our empathy infusion. While that may seem complicated, it means we all have something to share, and all have something to learn. What a wonderful opportunity for a learning network!

As promised, we have some insights and data from these our site visits and check-in calls. [The first report](#) focuses on Partner perceptions and feedback on the Network. We are using this data to guide the development of the empathy training toolkit and shape future programming to reduce barriers and meet Member needs. It also led to the decision to do our second Rapid Inquiry Cycle on keeper engagement. Stay tuned for those results next month!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Attending the AZA Conference in Baltimore? Let [us know here](#), so we can keep you in the loop about Network meet ups! Also join us Sunday, Aug 28th from 3-4pm for the official Network meeting.

EMPATHY IN ACTION: DESCRIBING SSP

While it may be easy to share things like an animal’s name, age and favorite foods, it can be a bit more complicated to talk about the more complex features of zoos like a Species Survival Plan (SSP). I have heard several talks where the SSP is mentioned and even tried to explain it to friends and family not familiar with this role of zoos. It is easy to get bogged down in details about genetics and logistics. So this was something I have been particularly interested in tracking during our site visits.

My favorite explanation was during a Keeper Talk with Asian elephant Suki at Point Defiance Zoo & Aquarium. To explain why they hadn’t had success with pairing her, Piper said, “Imagine you have a match.com account, but it is run by your mom. She picks out who **she** thinks would be best for you, but that doesn’t mean you are going to agree.” I thought it was great perspective-taking and took a complex topic and made it easier to understand. Plus it’s something most could relate to! How do you describe the SSP to audiences?

We are all (elephant) ears!

Marta Burnet



EMPATHY THROUGH PUPPETS: THE SALISH SEA TAKES CARE OF ME

The Seattle Aquarium recently launched *Catastrophe by the Sea*, a puppet show based on a book they created with Brenda Peterson and Ed Young in 2019. Lost on the Washington shores, Catastrophe is befriended by a musical cast of tidepool creatures. The story teaches Catastrophe and the audience that these animals have feelings and needs too, helping foster connection with tidepool invertebrates and promote careful tidepool etiquette. In an interview, Aquarium puppeteer Sam Shafer explained:



“Some protagonists in the show don’t have a face, yet you can relate to them as alive...It shows there can be different kinds of aliveness worthy of respect.”

She also loves that the development of this show focused both on the empathy messaging and artistic quality. “A show can take abstract values and make them concrete and playful, centered in joy and art.” To learn more about empathy in conservation theater, [watch this Empathy Café](#) on the topic from May 2022.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Let’s meet Ryann Stacy, Racine Zoo’s Empathy Program Evaluator! Ryann joined the zoo in September 2020 in the AmeriCorps program, then moved into a seasonal position before becoming Racine’s evaluator. Like many of us, she wears many hats in her role. She realigned summer camp curriculum to include empathy practices; developed customer service and empathy training for staff, interns and volunteers; infuses empathy into social media posts for the zoo; and evaluates programs, keeper chats and Community Outreach Zoo Initiative (COZI) program. Funded by the local United Way, the COZI program brings animals from the zoo to homeless shelters and housing for families escaping domestic violence.

She is proud of how much she has grown in the past year as an evaluator. A year ago she knew only the basics of evaluation and last month she took all she has learned and developed an evaluation tool from scratch for their COZI program. “We know anecdotally that this program is meaningful to our community, but being able to measure that we are making a difference is exciting.”

She has collected notable comments from her observations. The children quotes are her favorite.:

“That’s so nice of Miss Myrtle [the desert tortoise] to dig homes for other animals!”

Though it depends on the day, she is most drawn to birds of prey and would be one if she had to choose. She highlighted their strong social bonds and ability to fly. She has always thought that it would be amazing to fly. Plus, no one really messes with them. We look forward to hearing more about Racine Zoo’s results in the coming months!



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ACE FOR WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2022



GEARING UP FOR FALL

It was wonderful visiting with so many of you at the AZA conference in Baltimore! I hope folks have stayed healthy or are recovered. We enjoyed seeing many of you present and having the chance to build deeper connections. We also handed out a bunch of Affiliate postcards and look forward to including more folks in this exciting empathy work.

As summer winds to a close, we have published the [results of our second rapid inquiry cycle](#) and the [inventory of conservation action across the Network](#). We also have a lot to look forward to! We have several events coming up (see below) and the ACE for Wildlife staff will be visiting our three North Dakota Partners at the end of the month. We look forward to seeing what they have been working on. Planning is also underway for our fall all-network meeting on October 13th and we have an exciting agenda. So much to look forward to!

UPCOMING EVENTS

September 7th, 1-2 pm PDT Empathy Training Toolkit Listening Session, Part 2. [Register here](#).

September 12th, 1:30-2:30 pm PDT Empathy in School Programs Learning Group. [Register here](#).

September 13th, 10:30-11:30am PDT first DEAI Learning Group (introductory session). [Register here](#).

EMPATHY IN ACTION: ENRICHMENT

This summer, Woodland Park Zoo created a new program that taps into all the steps on the empathy bridge well and is a very popular, free program. Guests spend about 15 minutes learning about the importance of enrichment (animal welfare) with lots of great stories about our animals' favorites (introducing our animals, informing the audiences). For example, Azul (Malayan tiger), adores the scent of Obsession for Men perfume. She has expensive taste! This day's focus was our keas, Teptep and John Luc. Learning Coordinator Karen Ofsthus talked about how highly curious and intelligent these birds are. They love puzzles, so enrichment is critical to their welfare!

Then she encouraged guests to think about what would appeal to our animals (perspective taking) while providing materials to create enrichment (taking caring action). And then comes the neatest part – the group walked over to the kea habitat and observed the keas enjoying the enrichment! Guests had an empathy-rich experience, and the animal keepers appreciated time saving in making enrichment. Wins all around! How do you use enrichment to build connections?



Marta Burnet

EMPATHY RESOURCE: CRANE CARTS!

The International Crane Foundation (ICF) piloted an exciting project this summer—interactive whooping crane carts at Milwaukee County and Henry Vilas Zoos. ICF had a grant to purchase and equip carts and then train volunteers at partner zoos to staff them. Stephanie Schmidt, ICF's Outreach Coordinator, led the project. As you can see in the picture below, the carts had a magnet board with questions to draw kids in, such as “Where do whooping cranes live?” Volunteers talked about the importance of wetlands and other animals that live there. Carts also have biofacts for guests to touch and feel—a crane egg, feather and bones. Stephanie said they would compare human and crane anatomy. Using perspective taking, they encourage guests to put on the crane puppet and mimic both the cranes and the biologists who hand raise crane chicks.



The carts are used to tell the conservation story of whooping cranes and then guests are encouraged to pledge to take actions to benefit cranes. Stephanie said:

“The carts have been effective. Almost 2,500 people have interacted with the carts this summer.”

Survey results are showing increased confidence in identifying birds, motivation to protect and positive feedback on cart content. They are hoping to secure additional funding to provide crane carts to the 10-15 other zoos with cranes in the flyway. What a great way to share their expertise and scale an effective program! For more details, email sschmidt@savingcranes.org.



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

This month, our spotlight is on Alexa Swan, Learning Experiences Specialist at Como Park Zoo and Conservatory. For the past year, she has worked 100% on Como Park's Tier I Capacity Building Grant, building tools and systems to last for staff to use to foster empathy with visitors. She loved having time for reflection with zoo staff. “It is so common for us to be in the hustle bustle at the zoo. It was really special to have time and space to explore education practices and help colleagues decide how to utilize empathy.”

Alexa felt their project has been effective because of her previous work mentoring and training staff in all departments on effective education practices before beginning to explore empathy. She explained:

“Empathy wasn’t the only topic of the work. We focused on what they were excited about sharing with visitors and then empathy was one of the tools to achieve that.”

When asked what animal she would want to be, she chose a snow leopard. They are super agile, elusive and adorably fluffy. Like them, she prefers to be behind the scenes, watching and learning, only acting when and how it makes sense. “They are sort of cat evaluators—if they are doing their job, you won’t notice they are there.” For someone interested in evaluation in informal learning spaces, that sounds like the perfect animal representative!



EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER

NOVEMBER 2022



HAPPY NOVEMBRRR!

Welcome to the November issue! October was an exciting month for ACE for Wildlife. We had a great [All-Network Meeting](#) with about 45 attendees representing 16 Partner organizations and two Affiliates. Members approved the expansion plan to include AZA-accredited organizations outside of our seven-state region, so look for more information about that in the coming months!

The [first video in our empathy training series](#) is ready to share. There will be four more coming out in the next few months, so look for those. We hope they will be useful in your empathy training efforts. We also have the [results from our formative survey](#). It was great to see so much positive sentiment for the Network and we are working with Committees on our plan to address areas for growth. If you have any questions or suggestions, please let us know.

In other news, the Steering Committee approved the creation of the Conservation Action Working Group, which will start meeting this month. If you are interested in joining this or any other committees/working groups, please reach out to empathy@zoo.org. According to our bylaws, some members on committees are supposed to rotate off at the end of the year and we would love to have more get involved. It is only a one hour per month commitment and a great way to help shape the future of our Network!

EMPATHY IN ACTION: CHEERIOS!

When we think about motivational empathy, we often focus on the compassion side of this concept: wanting to take action to ease someone's suffering. However, this can also include motivation to act to extend someone's joy and wellbeing.

Jennifer Kleen, from Roosevelt Park Zoo, has a great example of this! They have done a lot to highlight Akili, the okapi in their care and he has become quite the celebrity. (You can see how handsome he is in his picture!) Well, at a program, the animal keeper shared that his favorite treat is cheerios. A little boy and his grandmother, who visit the zoo regularly and always go straight to see Akili, started bringing him a box each time they came as a result!

What a great example of caring action Roosevelt Park Zoo guests were inspired to take! Have you seen similar responses in guests?

- Marta



EMPATHY TOOL: TRADING CARDS

As part of their Round 3 grant project, Dakota Zoo is developing animal trading cards to hand out at animal keeper chats. Allison Malkowski, Assistant Director, said that the idea had come from keeper staff who were interested in finding ways to engage more with visitors. They talk about empathy and conservation, but they wondered:

“Are we giving guests specific take-aways that they can do here, locally, in their day-to-day life that can impact wildlife and conservation? If we're not, they're not going to get that messaging from anybody else.”

The cards will provide guests with “something real that they can do even in a small way that's going to make an impact.” Dakota Zoo will be starting with eight to 10



animals, highlighting key zoo residents. One is George the penguin, “curious George.” Each card will contain individual quirks and fun facts about the animal and tie into a related conservation message such as sustainable palm oil, using Seafood Watch, helping pollinators, etc. They plan to start using them next summer,

when keepers have lots of opportunities to connect with the public.

Allison is excited about this project because it lends itself to expansion in many ways. They may sell a card collecting book or offer limited-edition cards for specific animals and special cards that you can only get on certain occasions (e.g., International Tiger Day). Stay tuned for updates on what they come up with!

UPCOMING EVENTS

Empathy and Social Media Learning Group, Nov. 9 at 11am PDT. [Registration](#).

Empathy Training Toolkit Listening Session #3, Nov. 10 at 11am PDT. [Registration](#).



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Isabelle Herde Bieser, Manager of Innovation & Community Engagement for the Zoological Society of Milwaukee (ZSM), has only been at the ZSM for a little over a year, but has very quickly become an empathy champion at her organization and within the Network, where she is co-chair of the Strategic Learning Committee.

In the above picture, Isabelle is participating in a park clean up—the capstone event to their flagship empathy program for 4th graders. They talked with students about birds and migration and trash. You can see the child's wonder as she shows a hatched robin's eggshell on the tip of her finger. Amazing picture!

With their Tier I grant, ZSM is expanding their empathy work across the zoo. They hosted a Seattle Aquarium Empathy Workshop and now are working department by department to highlight what folks are already doing and then leading action planning on ways to enhance empathy practices in a range of departments. When faced with skepticism, Isabelle embraces it and welcomes the discussion. Her response?

“We're applying research and empathy to meet community needs. That is what matters.”

She points out that we all could use empathy and social emotional support right now and “animals are a gentle way to help people to build those skills.”

If she could be any animal, she would want to be a cat so she could spend all day with her cat, Sylvester. 🐾



EMPATHY MATTERS

ACE FOR WILDLIFE NEWSLETTER

DECEMBER 2022



HAPPY HOLIDAYS!

It is hard to believe it is already December. It was great seeing Network friends participating in the Seattle Aquarium's Developing Empathy for Conservation Outcomes Conference in November. Over half of our Partners participated. The event gave us a lot of great ideas for our Empathy Summit in February, which will also be hybrid! We are excited to announce that Dr. Jennifer Atkinson, Associate Professor of Environmental Humanities at University of Washington, Bothell, will be speaking about eco-grief and moving from angst to action. We will share updates on the full agenda in January.

We hope you are able to have some time off this month to relax, reflect and enjoy time with friends and family. And we look forward to reconnecting in the New Year.

Best wishes this holiday season!

The Advancing Empathy Team

UPCOMING EVENTS

Capacity Grant Webinar: Lake Superior Zoo and Zoo Boise, Dec. 8 at 10:15 am PST. [Registration.](#)

DEAI & Empathy Learning Group: DEAI Committees at your zoo/aquarium, Dec. 9 at 10 am PST. [Registration.](#)

Capacity Grant Webinar: Minnesota Zoo and Lake Superior Zoo, Dec. 13 at 9:45 am PST. [Registration.](#)

EMPATHY IN ACTION: IT'S YARN!

Red River Zoo has taken connecting with animals in their care to a new level! After visiting (and maybe even feeding!) Hops, Rudy and Drekker, the zoo's alpacas in the Children's Zoo Farm, you can purchase yarn from their last shearing in the gift shop! Then you can make a sweater or scarf keeping the memories of your visit with you.

Ten Seven Acres farm, a local partner, loans the alpacas to the zoo long-term for engagement with guests, shears the alpacas, cleans and spins the yarn and then returns it to the zoo gift shop for sale. The yarn is 100% alpaca and comes in a 200-yard skein in both tan and brown. It says right there on the label whose fleece you are purchasing so you can choose by color or by alpaca. Do you sell any products in your gift shop from your animals? If so, do you name the animal source?

-Marta



INSPIRING CONSERVATION THROUGH EMPATHY MODEL

“Does utilizing empathy impact our conservation messages? Does it encourage people to perform conservation actions after they leave our facility? Does it help people remember our education messaging better?” These are the questions Idaho Falls Zoo (IFZ) is seeking to answer with their Tier I Capacity Building Grant. Sunny Katseanes, IFZ Public Engagement Curator, recently presented a poster at AZA’s annual conference about the first stage of this work.

The grant’s goal is to incorporate empathy within the zoo’s exhibits to promote conservation efforts with visitors. The plan was to implement and test an innovative model for empathy development called the *Inspiring Conservation through Empathy Model (ICE-M)* using a new exhibit at the zoo slated to open in late 2022. Unfortunately, many outside factors set the exhibit opening back. Initial testing of the model was still done using general zoo visitors, but at existing zoo exhibits rather than in the new space. Their baseline data suggests:

“Guests who interact directly with a zoo representative demonstrate more active empathetic responses.”

“The response appears to also increase when the guests meet an animal up close, even an animal which some may find hard to personally connect with such as a reptile or invertebrate,” says Sunny.

IFZ is extremely excited by the first-cycle findings and cannot wait to continue the study next spring!



MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Tut Fuentevilla is the Education Curator for the Grizzly and Wolf Discovery Center (GWDC), where he has worked for the past eight years. Tut developed the interpretive messaging for their new building featuring otters, native trout, and reptiles and amphibians, with new views into existing wolf habitats. They are using immersive views into multiple adjacent habitats, and engagement with animals and the habitat itself to encourage a deeper connection and support the development of empathy for wildlife. The layout of the space and interpretive displays encourage visitors to feel like the habitats are inter-related, but:

“The biggest strength is in the in-person conversations. We try to interact with every guest during their visit.”

The goal of the building is to broaden the experience visitors have from a single-species focus to placing animals in the context of the wild spaces they inhabit and rely on. This connection then enriches their visit to neighboring Yellowstone National Park.

When asked about an animal he’d like to be, he responded, “I feel like bears have a pretty good life. Sure it is hard to be a wild animal, but they are so smart and curious. They explore and are so good at making themselves comfortable while making time to relax even during the peak season.” Sounds pretty great!

