ACE for Wildlife - Looking Back at a year of distance learni...

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SPEAKERS

Jeff Dillon (Alaska SeaLife Center), Justin, Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo), Latoya Jackson (Woodland Park Zoo), Bekah Hanes, Katie Elam (ZooMontana), Laurel Abbotts, Dan & Alex, Sarah Witt (Zoological Society of Milwaukee), Liz Gilles (MN Zoo), Alexander

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D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 00:10

I think we are getting close to everyone we're expecting. I imagine we'll get a couple more folks trickling in as we go. But I'm happy to, to dive in. If you've just joined us feel free to change your name to include your institution and your pronouns. You can do that by, if you hover your mouse over your video, you'll see a little blue square with three dots. If you click on that, and you click on rename, you can then change it so you can add your institution and your pronouns after your name.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 00:41

Welcome, everyone. If you haven't been to a ACE for Wildlife event before, let me give you just a little bit of context. So the Advancing Conservation through Empathy for Wildlife Network, it's a network of 20, zoos and aquariums, you all are probably a part of or affiliated with one of those zoos, or aquariums. And essentially, we're all talking about ways that we can use empathy as a tool to get people to want to take conservation action. This particular conversation is going to be a conversation focusing on looking back at this past year of distance learning programs and all the kind of fun and crazy and difficult and engaging things we've done this past year. So that we have an opportunity to create space for people to to share some of the successes, to talk about some of the struggles, to to ask folks questions, and to kind of collectively build a better understanding and knowledge about what it looks like to do distance programming and what it looks like to do empathy in distance learning programming.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 01:46

We've got an hour on our schedule, I have this meeting set to recording, I would love to think about how to make the share the content that we talked about today is something that's

accessible and useful to other folks within the network who aren't able to make it today. So I'm recording at the moment, I'm not planning to just post this recording as a standalone thing. But I am hoping that we can share the recording alongside links, people share and some key takeaways and things like that so that people who aren't able to make it today are still able to join the conversation at a future time.

Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 02:21

So with all of that said, I know that lots of people have done kind of very cool things over the past year with their distance learning programs and have lots of different strategies and different institutions are at kind of different stages. And I was hoping that we essentially can do three things in order. So the first is I probably we'll take some time for folks to share a little bit about what they were doing, what they've done. And hopefully then we'll spend some time discussing what people's challenges were and successes and things like that. I hope we will spend some time reflecting and that is amazing. I hope this is the start of your show, which is a perfect segue because the first thing I'd love to do is just have people like jump in and share what did you all? What are your distance learning programs look like? What were some of the things you tried? What worked? What didn't work? And I would just gonna open that up for anyone who has a cool thing they want to share.

Jeff Dillon (Alaska SeaLife Center) 03:36

Daniel, I can go first. So the Alaska Sealife Center, we've got a long history of distance learning programming. But of course, the pandemic changed everything on site. So that focused us a lot more on what we could offer that was an alternative, like many of you, and so we knew that our traditional kind of one hour distance learning schedule with us we could connect to your group wasn't going to be the solution. So the first thing we did was we just kind of threw everything at the wall to see what would stick from short tours of the building; front of house/back of house, animal encounters, interviews with staff, to yoga with the animals, and Sunday fish sketch and you name it, we were just pumping things out every single day.

Jeff Dillon (Alaska SeaLife Center) 04:25

And I think we had a couple of motivations for that. First and foremost, I have to say, my motivation was to try to keep my staff busy or looking busy so that I could keep them employed. And so I know as a manager, that I have a couple of staff members here, one of which is showing an awesome live shot of king crab. I know that I pushed my team too hard. I was looking for them to be creative all the time. Like come up with new things constantly every day, because I'll be honest I was I was at a panic, I thought for sure we would be the first ones on the chopping block and wanted to see how we could secure what it is we do. Luckily, that settled out and we had an amazing fundraising campaign. And we were one of the fortunate institutions where we didn't lose any staff due to COVID cuts. And so the thing that came out of this, though, was the opportunity to change that kind of classic one hour connection programming, we still have that as an option, if that's what you want. But we now have, we transitioned to something where basically you bought a seat and a Zoom Room for five bucks.

And there's kind of drop in classes. And we tried that for a while. That's transitioned now that that's a fully sponsored program. So that was really helpful. So now there's a free [option] again, we starting those up in the fall.

J Jeff Dillon (Alaska SeaLife Center) 05:46

But the the one that I'm most proud of, and Luke most looking forward to is, we have a pre K class or pre K, classroom or program here in our town. And like every other town in America, we have very few options for caring for childcare, or pre K, preschool. And so something that the parents and caregivers in our town really depended on. And when we couldn't do that in person we transitioned to virtual and that was, you know, rough going, because that's not always best. I'm, I'm a father of preschoolers myself, and, and I know that they have short attention spans, and you have to have the right angle. And not everybody can be Mr. Rogers. But, or Daniel Tiger, I should say, it's not Mr. Rogers, my kids like Daniel Tiger. So not everybody can be that. So we went through, you know, kind of a learning curve there. And, again, we were successful enough that we were able to find a sponsor for that. So we'll be able to offer that kind of virtual program for preschoolers going forward. In addition to the in person one, hopefully, whenever that comes back, we thought it would be this fall, but then, you know, Delta showed up and whatever. Here we are, again. So I'm really proud of those programs that we, we found something when we threw everything into the wind, we found a couple of things that really stuck. And sponsors really took to it and all credit to our development department who went out and found that money for us, but it was really key. We were able to keep staff on board, we're able to keep doing quality programming. And so we're looking forward to a fall where we can get into that. We've had an unexpectedly crazy busy summer, despite no cruise ships to Alaska, we've seen record attendance. I think our ticketing folks are calling it revenge tourism. And so everybody's in Alaska right now. So we really haven't had time to kind of crack those eggs this summer. But we're looking forward to it this fall. So that's that's what, what's come out of the crazy for COVID, I think.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 07:40

Yeah, thanks. Thanks, Jeff, for sharing some of your experience, it's awesome to hear about doing virtual appreicate all these things, and that you're able to get it all sponsored and funded. That's amazing. And for folks who have just joined, we're just taking a moment for us to share examples of what their distance learning programs look like. And so, again, thank you, Jeff, for for jumping in and sharing yours. And I'm going to open it up again, for anyone else who has some cool things that they did this past year that they want to share what they're experiencing, like.

K Katie Elam (ZooMontana) 08:15

I can share, if nobody wants to jump in - oh, Liz, if you want to jump in.

L Liz Gilles (MN Zoo) 08:18

You go ahead.

Katie Elam (ZooMontana) 08:19

Are you sure?

Liz Gilles (MN Zoo) 08:20

I'll go next, then we'll have a little wine. It'll be awesome.

Katie Elam (ZooMontana) 08:23

Perfect. All right. So my name is Katie. I'm the education lead at ZooMontana. And prior to COVID, we had a distance learning program that had one teacher per year that reached out to us to do, maybe the occasional second teacher but it was not very well promoted or not very well not very connected to literally anybody in Montana. And then COVID hit and we were doing kind of similar to what Jeff was saying, trying to find any way we could to connect with people. My education department is currently two people and soon to be three, hopefully we posted that on the ACE board. But we currently have two people. And when COVID started, Emily has, Emily, my counterpart had just started like a week before the shutdown. So me and Emily and we were both mostly non essential staff. So we were working off site for most of every week. So our big push was to social media. And so we were trying to do like more social media posts to connecting to people and sending funny pictures and all that kind of stuff to the public.

Katie Elam (ZooMontana) 09:27

As we were able to go in more, we started doing distance learning through it was Skype in the classroom, which is through Microsoft, which allowed us to reach like, have an international reach, and it was really cool. You know, we could just put up our schedule. Teachers could just come on Skype in the classroom, find us and then schedule themselves. Really cool. And then Microsoft wasn't cool with the fact that Zoom was beating them so they just got rid of Skype in the classroom and became Flipgrid instead. Which Flipgrid does have its benefits but we lost the ability to connect with teachers that way. So we connected to all the teachers that we had previously through Skype in the classroom, I had everyone's email still. So we use Calendly to create a schedule of like, "hey, come in find when you want to talk to us". Our program[s], we wanted to do a free as much as possible. And we just thought we were lucky to get a sponsorship, I think with ExxonMobil. And so they covered it. Our programs are 30 minutes. We do like an adaptations program that can be kind of adapted to any grade level. So we do two or three animals, talk about their adaptations, and then do questions during that time. And just so it's just for 2021. From February through like the second week of June, we did over 160 programs, with two of us. So it was very popular, we were all over the States. And in 2021, about half of those were in Montana, which was really cool. Because during 2020, we only had a few that were in Montana. So our goal was to be a little bit more local. So we kind of met both, but it's been really cool to be able to expand that reach digitally, for virtually I guess, and this year, I'm intending to do the same, we just have to make more of them, or less of them free just because we have to make some money until we get sponsors. But yeah, it was a lot on both of us considering all the other things that we do. But it was also very cool to be able to reach kids all over the country and all over the world.

Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 11:25

Thank you, Katie for sharing. And it's it is very cool that this has been part of what you actually reach beyond our regular audience. Liz, in a moment, I'm going to invite you to share next, but let me tell everyone that if you have something that you want to share, well, we can just quickly build a queue is that if you click on the reaction button and zoom at the bottom, and you click on the word raise hand, then I will see that you have something to share. And I'm happy to then call on you next. So Liz, if you want to unmute and share some of your stories, but anyone who wants to go after that, if they want, just raise your hand, and I'll call you.

Liz Gilles (MN Zoo) 11:57

Awesome. I realized I just waved at Sarah, who has no idea. I'm waving to her Hi, Sara. Anyway, um, we actually at the Minnesota Zoo had had a distance learning program about four years before the pandemic started, which we had ended. That was unfortunate timing. And so we talked to some local stakeholders in the schools in March 2020, to try to figure out what to do to support them. And what we were told by the state and by our local stakeholders was that they really needed three tracks of distant learning, one, which was completely analog, a pencil and paper, you could drop it off at a bus stop, and kids could do science. One that was easy things, not YouTube. Easy videos that you could get to ease easily and just run that were pre recorded. And then a third kind of wave that was related to online platforms like Schoology, or the one I can't remember right now that's for K through 2 that you all know, you can just scream it at me, I know, you'll know what I'm talking about.

Liz Gilles (MN Zoo) 13:01

Anyway, so we created three different tracks, and was the paper and pencil one was called Operation Curiosity and Wonder. And then we had another one that had some pre recorded videos. And then we had some lessons that we uploaded onto those platforms. And then in May, 70% of the education staff at the zoo was laid off. And we all kind of stopped doing that for a while and refocused to what we could actually do with the amount of staff who were in our department. And what were the ways that we could leverage the amount of staff we had to connect to as many people as possible. And we were able to start up virtual camp in August. And we actually knew that empathy was one of the things we wanted to do. So we had one that was on animal care. And we had another one that was called The Science of Cute, that was literally talking about what makes animals cute, and if it mattered, with little tiny kids, which was super fun. And then we went into doing some schools out camp and continuing doing those to connect to our audiences. And then had a collaboration in January with the Minnesota Orchestra to do a really cool project where they came to the zoo and recorded some animals and then had pieces of music for a live concert with it. And as part of that we actually created a online activity where you watch the same animals with different music behind it, and see if your perception of what the animals are thinking or feeling changes as you listen to different music. So um, that was super cool. And then we've kind of geared up and we right now are ending our virtual camps right now and looking at doing both virtual and in person stuff going into the fall. So that's the really fast version. It's been a quite the year.

Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 14:45

Yeah. Well, thanks. Thanks, Liz for sharing and I see the chat Aszya asked if you would be willing to share some of the resources on Science of Cute so if you would, and you want to drop -

Liz Gilles (MN Zoo) 14:56

I would and we had interviews from experts Laur el being one of them. So she's in the camp in one of the videos, so just say and I, but I don't Laurel, did I promise not to share that with anyone else? I don't remember if I promised I will, whether I would share your video with other people or not. The campers loved it. By the way.

Laurel Abbotts 15:14

I haven't seen it. So I don't know. Can I see it?

Liz Gilles (MN Zoo) 15:17

I'll show it to you first and then you can decide.

Laurel Abbotts 15:19

I'm sure it's fine. Great. That's funny.

Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 15:25

Bekah, do you want to share what's happening over at Como?

Bekah Hanes 15:31

Yes, and I will figure out how to put my hand down. Small wins. Yeah. So when we hadn't really done any virtual programming at all, any distance learning, and then when COVID hit the entire education, visitor services or public engagement, departments were reassigned to essential services here at Como, or within the city. And so no programming was happening at all for a while. But our funding arm Como Friends had been funding a partnership with the city of St. Paul second graders for many years with in person field trips. And so they dedicated that funding this earlier this spring, to have a couple of us work on creating a virtual field trip for those second graders. And we explored lots of different options with like Zoom and live classes and all these kinds of things. And we had lots of conversations with teachers in the district. And what we heard from them was they wanted prepackaged, really easy resources. And so we ended up creating lessons through Seesaw. And so empathy was one of our outcomes. And we really wanted to focus on the individual animals, individual plants. We finally put googly eyes

on a plant, which has been our goal since we first had an empathy training many years ago, because we're also a conservatory. And so we started out with nine lessons for the city of St. Paul's second graders that we developed through Seesaw, they were like four or five, six minute videos with one of our educators, Ashley, and we use the same educator every time so that they built a relationship with her. And then put them on the district Seesaw library and the teachers had access to them whenever they needed it.

B Bekah Hanes 17:23

It went so well that we got another round of funding so that we could push it out statewide. So then we reached out to all the districts in the state. And we're able to create eight more, and released all of those lessons to second graders throughout the state of Minnesota. So it was a really crazy time, we did not know what we were doing, filming, editing, Seesaw. And wondering if we could actually have that empathy translate through that digital medium, like how do we make help students really connect with that individual animal, that individual plant? How do they how can we get them to connect with Ashley? And how do we do that through this virtual medium? And we really learned a lot and we feel like we were really successful. And the teachers are asking for more. Now if that actually happens, we don't know. Because again, we're not. We're not charging for it. It was free. And it was all based on funding. And we don't know what's going to happen this fall. But we feel pretty good about it. Because it was a big, big risk for us never having done anything like before. So.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 18:36

Well, thank you, Bekah. I think so thank you all to folks who have shared their examples so far. Latoya, are you raising your hand in real life, because you want to?

L Latoya Jackson (Woodland Park Zoo) 18:48

I don't have a hand emoji. So I just -

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 18:51

Perfect, yeah, you have a real hand, you can still, go ahead.

L Latoya Jackson (Woodland Park Zoo) 18:54

So hi, everyone. My name is Latoya Jackson. I'm with the Woodland Park Zoo in the distance learning department. I've been at the zoo for less than a year and in the time I've been there, from my understanding is we've never had any distance learning programs. So we spent most the second half of last year building a studio so that we can take programs that were traditionally held in our Zoomazium, our early childhood childhood programs like up close where you focus on topics like animal coverings, and animal care. And then we also have a series for Creature Feature, which are all original puppet shows with an animal interaction and

a Q&A at the end. And we took those models, which really did translate very well from in person to virtual. And the first thing we had to do is really to build the space to be able to do that.

L Latoya Jackson (Woodland Park Zoo) 19:46

Some of the other things that we did were start to work with teachers and the community to see what their needs were. So we had groups with just a wide range of time that they had to teach content in their classrooms. A wide range of of media that they prefer to use. So we we leaned towards creating an open source menu of offerings so that teachers could come in and take PowerPoint presentations and videos and curated resources and put them together in a way that made sense for their classroom. So that was a big change. For us at the zoo, I think traditionally, we've been very tight fisted with our content, like we don't release it all. And we're trying to make it all more available, and so that it's getting into the hands of people that need it when they need it. Another big thing that we did is we created a little learning management sites, which if you don't know the term LMS, it's basically just an online library of educational content. So we are slowly moving all of our content to that format and building in places for teachers to engage with each other and share resources they have found. We have ways for partners to share resources that they have created so that we're just creating this huge network of educational content.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 21:08

Thanks, Latoya. If you haven't shared your example from your institution yet, that doesn't mean you are precluded from doing in the future. But I would love to also just ask some some questions to get folks thinking a little bit about like, more sharing the details that might be interesting to other folks. And one of the things that I'm really curious about and I know a couple people touched on this a little bit when they were talking about their examples, that knowing that like right part of our goals, the network is thinking about how we can have empathy outcomes in our programming. Like what were some of the strategies that people are using to translate some of the empathy related outcomes into distance learning programs? I know Bekah, you mentioned some already but I'd be curious what folks have done to to hit some of the empathy outcomes through any of these virtual programs where we don't have an animal right in front of you.

B Bekah Hanes 22:08

If I could just build on the googly eyes. So we, and a lot of this of course we have we took directly from the best practices we've been learning from this network, right but we we focused in on individual animals and plants. We shared their names, we shared their personal stories and their personal experiences at the zoo. We did a lot of comparing and contrasting between the plant or the animal and the second graders and their lives and their experiences. We sort of in tandem with that, one of our goals was to just create a lot of fun and joy in our in our lessons and so we just kind of created that environment of like, you know, the students fell in love with Ashley and they fell in love with our plants and animals and they would actually come to the zoo when we opened back up to find Ashley she, she's famous. And they would come to find Anna the Banana plant in the conservatory and they would come to find Chloe this sloth and

they would bring their families. And so I think that really highlighting the animals as individuals with personalities and a story and you know zooming in up close and demonstrating Ashley's personal relationship with the plants and animals; she would talk to them do silly things with them she a little bit every every video she had a little funny bit she did. We invited them to come visit us after every video. So we really tried to do a lot around like the personal connection and using some of those really solid empathy strategies that we've learned from this network. And then we actually know because Ashley is so famous. We now have a social media series called Adventures with Ashley that was really building off of that connection this summer. So she goes around in the conservatory and does little things like helps the Woodstock keepers scoop poop and gets into the water gardens with our aquatics horticulturalist. And again we're just like building on that that connection that we made with our students and their families and our institution our plants and animals and our people.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 24:25

I love that community building. I also love that because they are empathy practices have grounded them like use people's names and they're like stories. It took me a moment to figure out that Ashley was a human and that's all right. Yeah, Ashley is the the facilitator of this. I'm gonna read Aszya comment because Asia shared earlier that her mic wasn't working. But she says that one thing that worked well for Racine Zoo, was that when the empathy programming moved to virtual was bringing multiple individuals of the same species on camera, and encouraging students to compare and contrast them to discuss their personalities. So in their case, using ferrets. Something they hadn't tried before focusing on empathy, but it worked well. So thanks for putting that in the chat. I'd be curious, we had other folks have other strategies for empathy outcomes or ways empathy showed up in their programming, or similarities with either Aszya or Bekah as examples.

K Katie Elam (ZooMontana) 25:28

Um, one thing we did at ZooMontana, that wasn't specifically a school program. But Emily also came up with this idea. We started up a series of videos that we put up on our Facebook and YouTube called ZooClues, where we were answering common guest questions to kind of help them feel more connected. So we would we were using the animals names and their pronouns were also like, telling them "hey, like, did you like this video, submit a question? And maybe your question will be the subject of the next video", we're just trying to do that. We paused it for the summer, but we're going to pick it up again in the fall.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 26:09

That's a cool example of like, it didn't occur to me, how much community building you can do through distance learning programs, because they're not on site. And so it's hard to do that community element. The other folks have community building strategies, things that they tried to do to connect folks more deeply with the zoo, or more deeply with each other.

S Sarah Witt (Zoological Society of Milwaukee) 26:27

We tried, and I don't know ifwe quite made it work. I'm Sarah from the Zoological Society of

we tried, and I don't know if we quite made it work. I'm Sarah from the Zoological Society of Milwaukee. We tried doing Flipgrids and having kids from different schools communicate to each other look at their videos, trying to make connections around Milwaukee. It didn't work quite as well as I would have hoped. But I think that, you know, trial and error after that experience that the more that we practice, and use Flipgrid, and maybe even a different website, that we could try and make those connections across the city in different areas and things like that. So that was something that we tried to do to make more of that community engagement.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 27:24

Thanks for sharing, and I will reiterate, I have more questions for you all because I find this kind of stuff fascinating, and you all have cool examples, but if you have questions for each other, or more things you want to share, please jump in and ask them or if you are worried about interrupting, please just raise the hand function and then I can easily call on you. But, Sarah, that the idea that the you you're not sure if it works or not raises an interesting question for you. For me, at least, which is I'd be curious, how do people measure the success of their distance learning programs? How did you know they were working? Or how did they know if they weren't working?

S Sarah Witt (Zoological Society of Milwaukee) 28:05

Yeah, for specifically that the Flipgrid, we did try and evaluate that. So we had an incredible ACE for Wildlife intern from the University of Washington who helped us with the castle and MECAP and Karen, as well Karen helped a little bit as well. But we kind of found that we you know, what's always important is like the the instructions, you give the kids specific, like maybe a specific animal, things like that we maybe had gone a little bit too broad when we were giving the kids instructions. And in the future, if we were to be a bit more specific, maybe we'd get the, the answers we were hoping to get. But yeah, that was something that we were trying to do is evaluating videos, which was very new for us.

L Liz Gilles (MN Zoo) 28:55

We found that I don't know if anyone else had this experience. But we we can evaluate the pieces that were like created like artwork sent to us, videos. During the pandemic, the response rate to surveys sent out about anything to any group of stakeholders that we tried to, took a nosedive in terms of participation. So even when we were we were working with the University of Minnesota to actually do some evaluation around that paper and pencil distance learning I talked about, and we were never we were never able to get very many people even to respond to the surveying or interviewing questions to really get a very robust sense of so we knew how many people downloaded it and who was talking about it, but to get people actually to answer a survey or to be able to engage on a deeper level to share some of their learning was especially hard it seemed like during the pandemic.

B Bekah Hanes 29:52

Okay, now I just reiterate like we, we definitely could assess based on the, the, the work that

the students were submitting through Seesaw. So the teachers invited us to, I'm not going to be able to use right terminology, but the teachers invited us to their class pages so that we could see the the work that the students were doing, based off the assignments from seesaw. So that was kind of a fun way to just kind of check in and see if they were doing that, like you were saying, Sarah, like understanding the directions and that kind of stuff. We did get a lot of feedback specifically from St. Paul public school teachers, just because we were so enmeshed and had a partnership with them already, about what we were doing and how we could make improvements and better the work we were doing for that second round that went statewide. So that was really nice. So we had this pre existing partner that, yes, even though they were running on fumes, we got enough data from them to make some good, important changes for statewide and we got some, we got some data statewide at the end as well. But again, I think that's just because we were targeting so many hundreds and hundreds of teachers and 1000s and 1000 students that we got, even if it was a small amount of people responding, we got, you know, a couple, like 100 responses. And that was, that was some good data. But yeah, it was hard to not like we wanted to get into the classroom and watch kids use what we were doing. And that's just, we just couldn't, we just couldn't do it. And that's what I thought was really lacking.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 31:37
Latoya I think I saw your hand.

L Latoya Jackson (Woodland Park Zoo) 31:40
I was just going to echo a lot of what's already been said is getting responses during the pandemic has been very difficult. So we could gauge you know, how how often our programs were selling, our presenters could watch the children during our programs and see how engaged they were, and try to come up with solutions to give them more opportunities to shake their wiggles out and things like that throughout. So we made constant modifications throughout our distance learning programs. Again, it was really difficult to get a lot of participation during the surveys. One thing that did work well was on a revamp revamp of a larger program. It's our Coexisting with Carnivores. It's a student, student driven inquiry program where they study carnivores in the area, they come up with an investigation question, they collect data, and then they make recommendations for their communities and how to better coexist with the carnivores that are in our communities. And to revamp that program, we worked with a small group of teachers where we have them review the content in its initial states, they gave us recommendations on what they needed, we had a few debrief meetings throughout the process. And then we had like pre and post surveys embedded throughout. And that was the only way that we were really able to get, you know, really in depth feedback. But we can't do that with every program. And even with that one, we didn't have as quite as many teachers participate as we would have liked. We had four really amazing teachers that had a lot of great input and gave us some great ideas. But it would have been nice to have, like 10 teachers, you know, just to have a wider sample and just to get more perspectives. But yeah, that is definitely a piece that we are constantly working to improve.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 33:30
Thanks Latoya. Jeff, I see your hand is up, feel free to jump in.

J Jeff Dillon (Alaska SeaLife Center) 33:35

Yeah. You know, one of the things that I had to tackle early on was, you know, suddenly, everyone else was interested in our distance learning program within the institution, right. And so, for example, we never really talked much to our marketing communications team prior to the pandemic, but then suddenly, they're part of the conversation. And I could go on and on about how important it is to have a good relationship with your marketing communications folks, and make sure that your outcomes and expectations are laid out there ahead of time, because boy, did we get a rocky start there.

J Jeff Dillon (Alaska SeaLife Center) 34:14

But what I did as a manager was I just completely threw our expectations for learning outcomes out the door. We knew we were going to be opening up to such a much wider audience, we were throwing a bunch of new programming out there that potentially wasn't going to be good or was going to be good. And we were going to take a regular measuring tape to any of that. And so, for me, it was just about providing the quality product and ability to connect to our facility. I apologize, I have a truck right outside my window. And give that opportunity to our audience as opposed to really like, are we getting our measurables? What are our essential questions, what are our outcomes, all that kind of stuff, and just know that this is a special time and take that pressure off of my team. Know that we're not going to get good responses for any sort of surveys. And then I just have to go to bat for them. When folks in the institution are like, "well, you only had 15 people watch your last program". Great. That's 15 people that didn't watch a program, you know what I mean? So that's 15, more than we had the day before. So I really just had to go to bat to say that it's not important. Now, we're providing a connection, people want to be connected to something, and they love who we are. And we can, you know, we can get all that kind of pedagogy and learning content later, when things calm down, people are back to normal, but just give ourselves a break, from having to do everything all the time. Content creation and connection was enough for us.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 35:46

Thanks, Jeff. I see there's a question that just got added to the chat by Alexander. Alexander, will you be up for asking your question out loud?

A Alexander 35:57

Yeah, I can ask, sorry I was also just doing a follow up. But I can speak my follow up, live, and then also re asked my question, but prior to the pandemic, Woodland Park Zoo was awarded a grant to look at our programs critically with a universal design for learning lens. And that was most of our on grounds programming, and then doing a rapid redesign of our programming for both accessibility and inclusion. And so, as we've you know, progressed through the pandemic, we've also now looked at virtual program, and how can we create greater access to our programming in the virtual space? But if you're, if you're familiar with universal design for learning, you know, providing multiple means of engagement or action expression are

increasingly difficult in a virtual space, and how do you interact with students and reach out through the computer to have them engaged and providing, you know, ways of interacting with them? So I was curious to the group is, have anyone come up with creative ways for students to, you know, provide the action expression? Is it a hybrid hybrid format, I've seen some, like print off documents, but is there anything else out there that people have used?

Bekah Hanes 37:28

Um, I'll just jump in and say that we, we didn't know what we were getting into with the Seesaw platform, which I don't know how familiar you all are with that platform. But basically, you know, we would post a video, and then we'd have the assignments or the activities that the students would respond to. And with a lot of support from the district and teacher feedback, we were able to layer lots of ways for students to respond. And so and I know that this, you know, this is just sort of low hanging fruit. But, you know, we always made sure that students could respond written, or audio or video, or draw, you know, like, we tried to have lots of different ways for students to respond, we tried to anything that was written was also audio recorded, so they could listen to the instructions, not only read it, but again, we were, we had to learn that that was something that was needed, and then learn how to do it and how to do it correctly and effectively. But Seesaw, that platform, seemed to have a lot of potential for that for lots of ways for students to engage, and lots of ways for students to respond based on. And that made it easier for teachers to right so depending on where their classes were at where the students were at, you know, they didn't have to do a lot of modification. They just knew that there was a lot of options built in for their students, no matter where they were at. We were also asked about doing some interpretation and offering it in different languages. And we just didn't have the funds and the time to do it this first round, but that's something we're also looking at for the future.

Justin 39:14

I guess this is one other follow up question too. I'm Justin, I'm the accessibility specialist at the Woodland Park Zoo. And so I'm also really interested in just general accessibility and if anyone provided closed captioning across the board, or other means in original programming, just to you know, create greater access also in terms of special education, and any programming that all of you might have provided for for that learning area.

Dan & Alex 40:15

This is Dan and Alex at the Alaska Sealife Center, we experimented a little bit with closed caption just using the Zoom option. And we tested it, it does not filter swear words, we tried to be careful, it was pretty decent. But honestly, the only time we actually used it was when we had a direct request. We had someone who was going to be joining one of those virtual visits that Jeff talked about, where you just pay five or 10 bucks to join it. And they had a participant who was not able to hear. So we used and it worked great, they loved it, they really appreciated it. So it was definitely good enough, not perfect. But there was another program called REV. It's like an online service that has a fee associated with it, but I think has a much higher quality, that we haven't used directly. But we've been participants in meetings that use that and it worked really well.

Bekah Hanes 41:24

We've done some social media, like Facebook Como Live. So this isn't my program. But I know the person who does that does so she'll record the video, even though it's called Como Live. It's actually not quite live, but she'll record the video, and then she'll spend, she'll caption it like type in the captions, which again, is more accurate, but it's so time consuming. And so I think that's they've been struggling with that is that they think it's important to caption all of the videos, but it's really time consuming to yeah, type everything in and make sure that it's accurate. And when everything is grant funded, and there's only so many hours dedicated to each project it gets it kind of sucks up a lot of time. So I think yeah, we would be curious to to hear about if there's any systems or software that makes that easier and, and is better at translating or better at captioning/auto captioning.

Justin 42:13

And I think Latoya has something to add from Woodland Park. But I would also just add to that an easy workaround currently right now is if you record a Zoom recording, as a pre recorded, you can have their auto AI, transcript, and then go in and edit it. So the amount or volume of work in editing and transcript post post performance is a lot easier. I'd also say if you have access to [Microsoft] Teams, their AI capabilities are increasingly substantial compared to Zoom. And then finally, towards the swear word concern is that Microsoft automatically takes those out. So if you had any comments on that, that was, that's an easy one to use as well.

Latoya Jackson (Woodland Park Zoo) 43:09

The swear words hasn't come up in our content yet. That's an interesting, I hadn't thought about it, to be honest. But we've been using Otter AI, it's not perfect, it's pretty good. You can build up the library. But an idea we have, because it is incredibly time consuming to go back in and you know, edit, in some cases, hours of words, is to work with our volunteer teams and use that as a project for them. Because that's one way for it to be really helpful for us. It gives us something to do. There's lots of volunteers that are comfortable coming on grounds. And that's a great way for them to be involved without having to take additional risks right now.

Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 44:07

Thanks, everyone for jumping in and answering this question there. I'd be curious. I feel like people talk a little bit about, like, which audiences they designed the programs for. And the examples they shared. It's about like, how did you choose which audiences? It sounds like some folks were working with school groups, and some folks were working with individual families that set up for the programs but like, how did you how did you decide what what audience you want to be designing you're distance learning programming for when you had to make that decision at the beginning?

Sarah Witt (Zoological Society of Milwaukee) 44:41

I think Jeff put a really great question earlier on in the chat about how it was really difficult. Sometimes people were Zoomed out like they had already been on Zoom for school. And so after school, they don't really want to also sign back in. And so before when we were designing the program, we designed programs for both families, but also for school programs. And it ended up being just school programs that really wanted us and that that's where all our funding came from our sponsors. The younger kids, again, Jeff kind of said this, the younger kids, we could sometimes get on to zoom K through second, the younger for five year olds. But really, even six, seven year olds, they weren't really signing up for those classes. And we ended up canceling them and really putting all of our focus on our school programs.

L Liz Gilles (MN Zoo) 45:35

Something I forgot to mention about audiences that I thought was really successful. And I hope we can we did through our scholarship fund, and I hope we can keep doing is we actually offered our virtual programs to head starts for preschool. And they love them. It was really fun. It was a fun group. And they were usually Head Starts were really geographically far from the Twin Cities and wouldn't in any wouldn't be able to physically come even if we hadn't been doing a virtual program. So I that was an audience that we hadn't originally thought of that, that enjoyed taking advantage of them. And we just, we didn't do any of the really young Head Start kids we did like preschool going into kindergarten. And it went really well.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 46:27

Can I ask as a follow up Liz, like how did that start, but you already have some Head Start partnerships or what like, how did y'all decide that was what angle to go?

L Liz Gilles (MN Zoo) 46:36

Yeah, we had a contact with the Head Start Association in Minnesota who had been we had a Head Start fund through for previous grants to bring Head Starts to the zoo physically. And then we had one group from that, who reached out and asked about virtual stuff. And then we created structures to be able to bring in all the rest of the groups. So the learning from that is right, like now that we know that there is demand for this virtual program, potentially, for this audience, how do we better focus the program to be something that's specifically for that age group, because they kind of walked into an already existing program and got to take advantage of it, but it wasn't really tailored to exactly the timeframes or the structure class. So I think I I'd like to do more with that in the future. But we just need to continue that partnership and be a little bit more thoughtful about structure.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 47:51

Anyone else wanna share anything on their audiences? How they decided?

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 48:05

So I would be curious, as a little bit of a transition. And let me caveat this by saying, so we have

So I would be curious, as a little bit of a transition. And let me caveat this by saying, so we have this, this format now to engage this conversation. And then again, on September 16, we are going to be having a similar learning group conversation focused on what are people's plans for their programs for like the 2021/22 school year, I just dropped the link in the chat to that if you aren't already signed up for that. And so that's good opportunity to think through to share fully baked ideas, half baked ideas, things that you are hoping to try out. Because we'll be September, there's lots of opportunities to already have things launched or to be still changing things around. But we'll be curious as we can near the end of the hour, if there's anyone who's had a who has thoughts about like, what's what's next for their distance learning programs, like are folks excited to continue doing them? Are they, is there gonna be a big evolution somewhere, do folks have an idea of what's next yet? Or is what's next, figuring out what to do?

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 49:27

Katie [in the chat] says "I want to work on figuring out how to evaluate outcomes of distance learning."

B Bekah Hanes 49:40

I just for us, like I see so much potential, like I didn't think that what we were creating was going to be as impactful or could be as impactful as it was. Because you know, it's like has to be in person. You know, that's where the quality is, and that's where the connection is and that you know, So this is a temporary measure, but to reach so many kids out of state and to see, you know, like, getting close up to a hedgehog with the camera versus having a hedgehog in a classroom of 50 kids, you know, there, there actually are some advantages to virtual. So we see lots of potential, we've only done second graders, there's lots of other grades. But the frustrating thing right now is, there's just no funding. And so if we're kind of sitting at that edge of like, there's so much we could do, we have all these ideas, we're getting all these ideas from you all. And we just got to wait. So that's kind of that's frustrating. So I don't know. And then I think we were ready, we were thinking we were about to transition back to lots of in person programming. Our education staff is finally coming back online. And now we have to reevaluate again. So I think it's, I think, probably are all in the same boat as we are, we just don't know what's going to happen even next month.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 51:02

Jeff, I see your hand's raised wanna go next?

J Jeff Dillon (Alaska SeaLife Center) 51:05

What I what I'm interested in doing next, well, I want to maintain what we've got. Now we've kind of narrowed it down. And we're not, like you said, throwing spaghetti against the wall anymore. We've got to focus now. But I really want to think now that we were potentially looking at another some form of hybrid school year that I think we had all hoped we wouldn't have our school started this week here in Alaska. And we've got kids who are at home and kids are in the classroom. So they're still doing this kind of messy back and forth, is I really want to

try to figure out how to find some time and carve out some time and just listen. I really want to listen to our teachers and our homeschoolers, and find out what you know, now that you've lived with this for a while, what really works? And what can we provide you so that we're not just again, throwing spaghetti at the wall? Like what? What can we zero in on that can really help provide content to your learners. And again, that's going to take a little bit of time. But I think we're we're there now, I think we might have that ability to have a little bit of breathing room. People are familiar with the technology. So we're kind of over that hurdle. We still have technology challenges, folks who don't have access to it. That's a whole nother thing that I'd like to look into as well. But but those who do have access to it, those who are familiar with it, what, what is it that we can do for you, that's better now? How do we get them to sit down and have that conversation? I'm not sure yet. But that's what I'm really interested in is not just coming up with ideas on our own and finding funding for it. But really figuring out what it is that is the need out there. And can we be part of the solution. And if we can't, that's okay, too, maybe we just sit back and we're here for you when you're ready for us. You know, we don't have to throw more content out there when everybody else is doing the same kind of thing to and, and realizing that you know, as important as, as empathy is, or conservation is, you know, kids need to learn maths as well. So that's, that's not our that's not our bailiwick. So

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 53:06

Thank you, Jeff, for sharing, I love that idea of of listening to what the audience needs, because at this point, it's been a long time, and they might have a much better idea of what they need. As we near the end of our time, I would love to do two things to help us wrap up. The first of which is that I would love for folks to think about, and I am going to put this in the chat. But three things. So an action that you might want to take based on these conversations, something that clicked. That could be something new, you learned, that could be something you already kind of knew, but it made a lot more sense. And then something you are mulling over. I encourage you all to spend a moment and think about something three things one that's in each of these categories. And when you have them, just pick one of those and toss in the chat. I'd love to know from folks. It doesn't need to be all three of those things, or any one of those things, what's the action you're going to take something from this conversation that's clicked or what's something to this conversation that you want to mull over maybe connect to someone more someone with someone about. Think through some more.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 54:23

See Aszya got an action in there. The need to evaluate outcomes. That sounds like it's already started happening and she's talking to Ryan in the background.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 54:42

Bekah loves creating volunteer jobs like typing closed captioning. We're just trying to bring back volunteers. That's a good idea.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 55:06

Mulling over partnerships with with other folks to joint programming to provide variety for

audiences and increase reach.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 55:46

Katie, we've got actually seeing what teachers actually need.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 55:56

From Jared, mulling over the idea of finding a site, really sorry. And what I'd love to do as we close out is I am going to take a lesson from Jeff in listening to my audience and thinking about what you all need. And I'm going to launch a poll, I would love to just understand for this format for this past hour, how engaging has this been, because we're gonna do this again, we've got another one scheduled for September, and I'll drop the link in the Zoom chat. And we're going to do other ones for future topics, connecting folks from institutions across ACE for Wildlife to talk about different things around the intersection of empathy and network. And so I'd love to just get a feeling for how engaging you found this.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 56:56

And while you all vote, I'm going to drop in the chat both the link to the next zoom event, I'm also going to say, and Katie dropped this in the chat earlier. But ACE for Wildlife has a discussion board. And what I hope to do is create a post in there where that's going to kind of recap some things we talked about via link to this recording and things like that. But I also encourage you all to jump in there and ask more questions, share more thoughts, maybe that's the place to make connections and find some joint partnerships. You all also have each other's emails from the ACE for Wildlife... I'm saying this while trying get the link for it. But from the member directory. If your email isn't there, you can let me know and I will add it. But that's also a great way to connect with folks as well. And let me just spend a moment and make sure I get that link to you all. It is right here. Perfect. And with that. Thank you all.

D Daniel Rother (Woodland Park Zoo) 58:15

Katie, I agree your stuff is amazing. Thank you all for joining this conversation. It's been really great. I'm excited to have the conversation. Keep on going on the website for folks to continue to connect with each other. And to see many of you on the September 16 learning group conversation and thinking about what we're gonna be doing in 2021/2022 for programming and what people are going to be trying and what people are going to be doing next time.