

Zoological Society of Milwaukee

Building Community Responsive
Empathy for Wildlife

End of Grant Presentation
February 16th, 2024

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Mission

The Mission of the Zoological Society of Milwaukee is to **conserve** wildlife and endangered species, **educate** people about the importance of wildlife and conservation and to **support** the Milwaukee County Zoo.

Grant Details

April 1, 2022 – September 30, 2023

\$249,998.37

Funder: **Woodland Park Zoo**

ACE for Wildlife Network

ACE (Advancing Conservation through Empathy) for Wildlife

Empathy best practice: Framing –
using an animal's name



Lou Ferrigno
Emerald Tree Monitor, Male

Grant Objectives

1. Develop evaluation processes
2. Engage community in empathy for wildlife
3. Build staff capacity



Objective 1 Overview

By May 2023, ZSM will build internal capacity by designing and hiring for new evaluation and empathy positions, and developing strategic tools - including a logic model, evaluation tools, and outcomes roadmap - to guide organizational operations towards community-relevant empathy for wildlife best practices.

Evaluation Tool: Emotion Wheels

Currently used in Animal Ambassador – Animal Connections Continuum programming

Practice – emotional management before an animal encounter

The image shows three emotion wheels and a worksheet. The first wheel, labeled 'Before', has a central circle divided into 'Uncomfortable' and 'Comfortable'. The outer ring contains 12 emotions: Sad, Happy, Loved, Brave, Playful, Embarrassed, Mad, Scared, Overwhelmed, Shy, Anxious, and Disappointed. The second wheel is more detailed, with a central circle divided into 'Uncomfortable', 'Comfortable', and 'Neutral'. The outer ring contains 24 emotions: Disappointed, Hurt, Lonely, Kind, Grateful, Excited, Respected, Valued, Accepted, Confident, Hopeful, Proud, Creative, Curious, Nervous, Guilty, Left Out, Sorry, Frustrated, Embarrassed, Playful, Jealous, Mad, Bored, Overwhelmed, Shy, Anxious, Disappointed, Sad, Happy, Loved, Brave, Confident, Hopeful, Proud, Creative, Curious, Nervous, Guilty, Left Out, Sorry, Frustrated, Embarrassed, Playful, Jealous, Mad, Bored, Overwhelmed, Shy, Anxious, Disappointed. The third wheel is identical to the second. Below the wheels is a worksheet with the text: 'Before meeting this animal, I feel: _____ because _____'.

Listening Sessions

- Adults and children invited
- Questions:
 - Relationship with nature
 - Programming goals and interest
 - View on Zoos
- Outcomes included:
 - Additional languages solicited for World Languages Day
 - Return of programming for homeschool families.



Objective 2 Overview

By April 2023, ZSM will form the Empathy Program Advisory Committee and host focus groups to incorporate participant input at the start of the program development process to increase meaningful community engagement

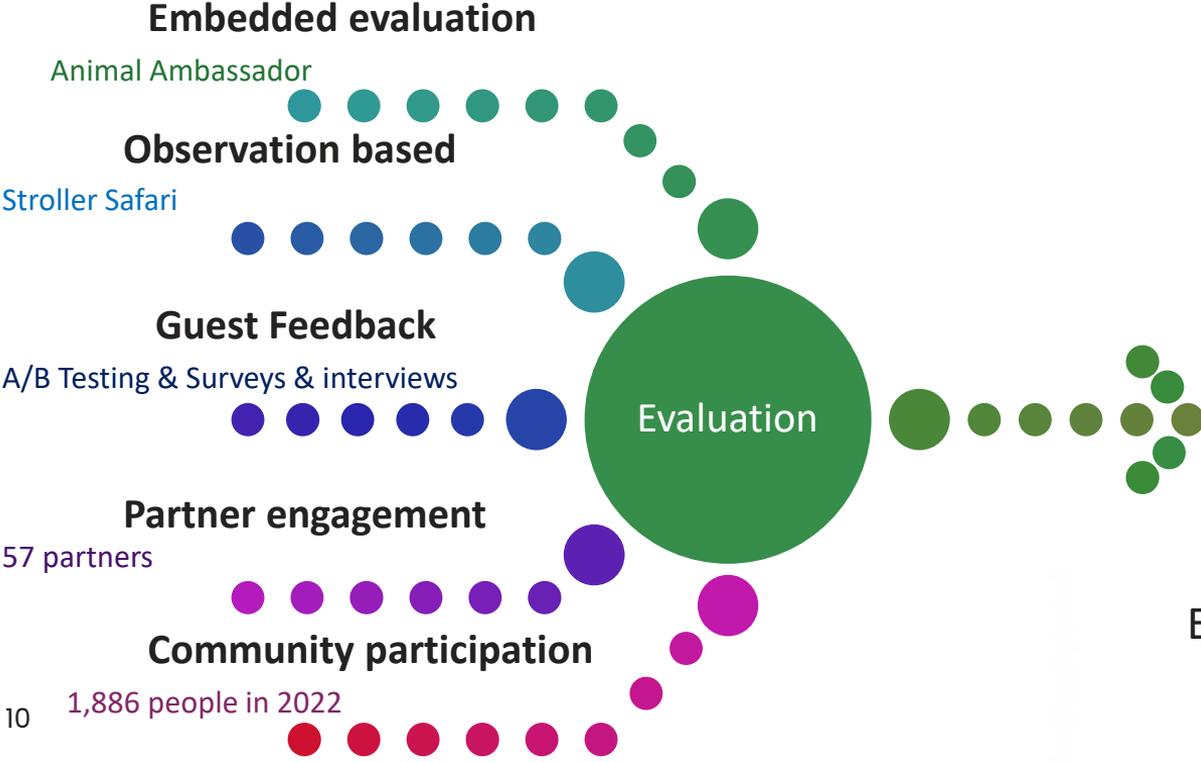
Empathy Program Advisory Committee Summary

- Multi-language and accessibility resources
- Empower youth voice
- Intentional connections
- Career exploration
- Show Up!
- Queer representation



Empathy Program Advisory Committee
Includes representatives from: MPS, Hmong American Friendship Association, Indian Community School, Milwaukee Area Homelearners Association, La Causa, MCZ

Participant Input



Empathy based programs

57 Partners Engaged includes:

Youth Serving

- Milwaukee Public Schools
- West-Allis West-Milwaukee School District
- Our Next Generation
- Boys & Girls Clubs
- COA Youth & Family Services
- Big Brothers Big Sisters

Conservation Focused

- Wisconsin DNR
- Schlitz Audubon Nature Center
- Wisconsin Humane Society
- Urban Ecology Center
- Mequon Nature Preserve
- Mitchell Park Domes
- Reflo Sustainable Water Solutions

Zoos & Aquariums

- Shedd Aquarium
- Lincoln Park Zoo
- Brookfield Zoo
- Henry Vilas Zoo
- Racine Zoo
- International Crane Foundation
- NEW Zoo

Community Responsive Programming

Home Learners Programming | World Languages Day | Black Birders Week

Class Info



OWLS Creature Features

Wed Oct 4th - Wed Oct 25th 10:00 am - 11:00 am
\$50

Which features help animals survive? Learn about adaptations animals use to their advantage.

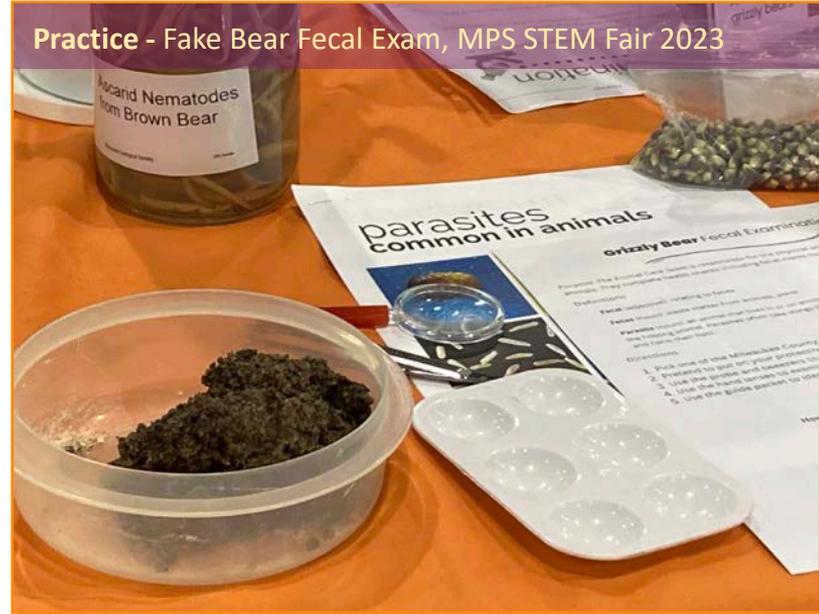
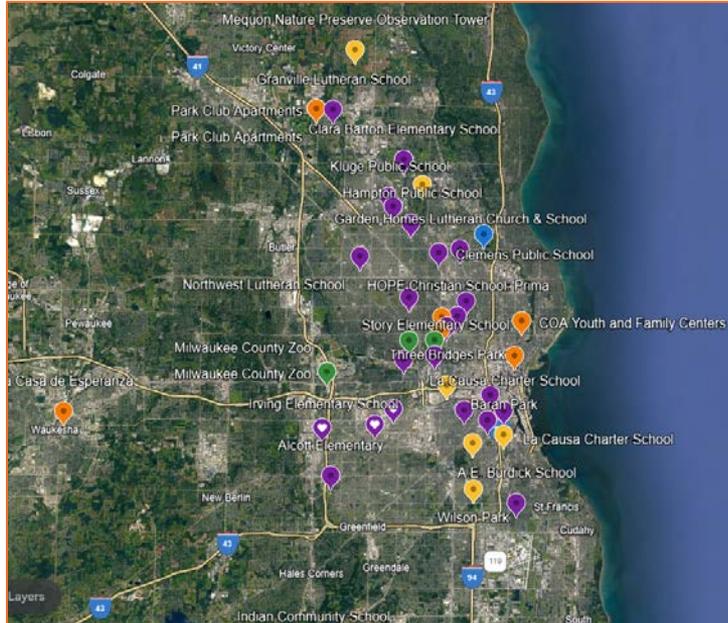
What to expect

- This all Wednesdays class is for ages 5 - 10.
- Exceptions on age are only made for children with special needs.
- An adult must check the child in and confirm the following information:
 - emergency phone number
 - allergies/medications
 - names of adults authorized for pickup (only authorized adults with valid identification may pick up children).
- Please do not send your child to zoo class if they are feeling unwell or exhibiting any symptoms of a respiratory illness (cough, runny nose, fever).
- Check in for this class at the Conservation Education Center.



Community Outreach Events

- Met more than 6,500 people in 2023 at 30+ events across MKE



Objective 3 Overview

By the end of the summer 2023, ZSM will develop cross-departmental resources and lead professional development around best practices for empathy for wildlife and culturally-affirming offerings across the organization

Across the Zoo

Animal Division

- **Modeling** – field research
- **Providing Experiences** – animals in our care



Guest-Facing (ZSM, SSA, MCZ)

- **Framing** – names and pronouns



Operations

- **Increasing knowledge** – special exhibits
- **Opportunities to practice** – giraffe feedings



Grounds

- **Activate imagination** – dragon prints



Area	Resource <i>Italicized is planned work</i>
All	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Seattle Aquarium Empathy for Wildlife Training 2. Local mini empathy summit 3. Action planning sessions 4. Empathy Roundtable & Office Hours 5. Preferred vocabulary guide 6. Integrated empathy examples: <i>empathy for wildlife dashboard</i>
Conservation Education	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Facilitation Guide 2. Quick tips 3. Direct training and facilitation 4. Outreach bin 5. Curriculum cover sheet
Creative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Signage examples 2. <i>Signage audit</i> 3. <i>Comparative evaluation</i>
Membership & Events	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Direct collaboration time with Education staff using the above resources 2. A/B testing results for preferred vocabulary 3. Collaboration on events to increase conservation and empathy messaging

Empathy Infrastructure

Staff Training

- Diversity Trainings
- Empathy for Wildlife training
- Conferences

Curricular Checks

- Cultural connections
- Empathy best practices

Table 3: One Word Description of Workshops

Much Needed	A Start	Thoughtful
Important	Collaborative	Engaging
Educational	Beginning	Enjoyable
Expertise	Enlightening	Worthy
Inspirational	Impactful	Eye Opening
Helpful	Good intro to subject	
	Informative	Important
Encouraging	Relevant	Great - Inspiring
Interesting	Safe	Thought provoking

(Blanks p.7, 2022)

Cross-Departmental Projects



THE POWER OF PERSPECTIVE: A LOOK INTO THE EMPATHY MOVEMENT

A mirror typically reflects the face in front of it. In a Zoo Class, children often look into mirrors and see a fish, a zebra, an alligator or some other animal looking back! This fun activity called perspective-taking, which involves children making animal costumes and reflecting on their reflection, is one of the ways the Zoological Society helps young people look at the world through the eyes of an animal. It also reflects the recent shift to empathy-centric education that's becoming increasingly common across the country. Empathy, or the ability to perceive, understand, and care about the experiences of another, is one of the most impactful ways humans develop connections to animals. But how influential can the power of sharing an animal's perspective be? In 2015, an anonymous donor funded a collaborative project between three Pacific Northwest

organizations (Point Defiance Zoo and Aquarium, Seattle Aquarium and Woodland Park Zoo) to help answer this question.

The funding was specifically intended to explore the use of empathy to inspire conservation action. "Getting people to the point of taking conservation action is a complex process," says Darci Larson, the senior manager of community engagement and inclusion at Seattle Aquarium. "We know it's not as simple as 'knowing, caring, doing'. It requires many internal and external motivations. We believe that the intentional use of empathy can be a foundational piece of the conservation work we do."

The premise is simple. The more empathy a person feels toward a specific animal, the higher chance they will support conservation on behalf of that

animal's wild counterparts at some point in their life. The three organizations put this theory into practice through the Measuring Empathy Collaborative Assessment Project (2015-2018). During this time, the organizations developed questionnaires, observation tools, and gamified assessments that could be used to collect data on the impact of intentional empathy education.

The Seattle Aquarium identified six best practices for fostering empathy: framing, sharing knowledge, modeling, activating imagination, direct experience and practice. Instead of saying the species name, staff called an animal by its given name. Instead of explaining a certain behavior, they asked their audience to think about why the animal made that choice and what it was feeling in that moment. Instead of listing a species' IUCN conservation status and moving on, they explained what everyday decisions people can make to help save that species.

The data was powerful. "Evidence strongly suggests that when empathy strategies are intentionally used, participants showed a greater frequency and intensity of empathy-related outcomes," says Sarah Brenkert, principle evaluator at Seattle Aquarium. "Informal learning experiences, like at a zoo, aquarium or nature center, can offer powerful experiences that inspire feelings of connection and motivate people to take action for conservation."

Research also demonstrated how empathy is a cognitive ability that can be strengthened. "I really love to think about zoos and aquariums as empathy gyms," says Larson. "They're places where people can go to strengthen their empathy muscles." In 2018, encouraged by MECAP's positive data, the Pacific Northwest empathy contingent set out to create more "empathy gyms" across the country, and in 2022, the Zoological Society was awarded a grant from the Woodland Park Zoo to infuse more intentional empathy education into its programming.

Lessons learned in Zoo Classes will hopefully help create a generation of youth who spend more time thinking about an animal's experience, and more time thinking about how they can help those species persevere in the wild. While the Zoological Society is just one of a handful of organizations doing this work, the movement is continuing to grow. This past February, the Association of Zoos & Aquariums featured a module about empathy in its yearly conservation education training for the first time ever. "This is a significant milestone," says Larson. "It's really growing in acceptance and popularity, and it's popular because the research has shown how effective it is."

[Take our EMPATHY FOR WILDLIFE Quiz >](#)



5 WAYS TO BUILD EMPATHY AT THE ZOO

1. **Read a Habitat Sign** – Almost every animal at the Zoo is featured on an informational sign near their habitat. These signs typically share where the species is from, their conservation status, what they eat and more.
2. **Learn About Animal Care** – Zookeepers work hard to maintain the wellness of their animals and keep them engaged. See if you can spot some examples of their work!
3. **Act Out an Adaptation** – Flap your arms like a bird! Waddle like a penguin! Mimicking an animal can help you see the world through their eyes.
4. **Watch an Animals in Action Talk** – Zoo Pride volunteers hold daily talks during the summer season at select habitats to discuss animal care, personalities, species conservation and more.
5. **Ponder an Animal's Behavior** – Whether they're looking for food or lying down, Zoo animals are always making an intentional choice. Spend some time observing an animal and think about why it has chosen to behave in a specific way in a given moment.



Grant Outcomes

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1. ZSM program design and development will feel collaborative to program participants resulting in relevant and empowering program offerings and meaningful community partnerships
2. Successful co-creation of CREW programming that is both culturally-responsive and identity-affirming will result in an increase of students' empathic behavior towards animals and people.
3. ZSM will engage a broad and more diverse audience as a result of reflective, intentional evaluation and engagement processes

How confident do you feel in applying empathy best practices to your work?

Before and after the Seattle Aquarium training

Before

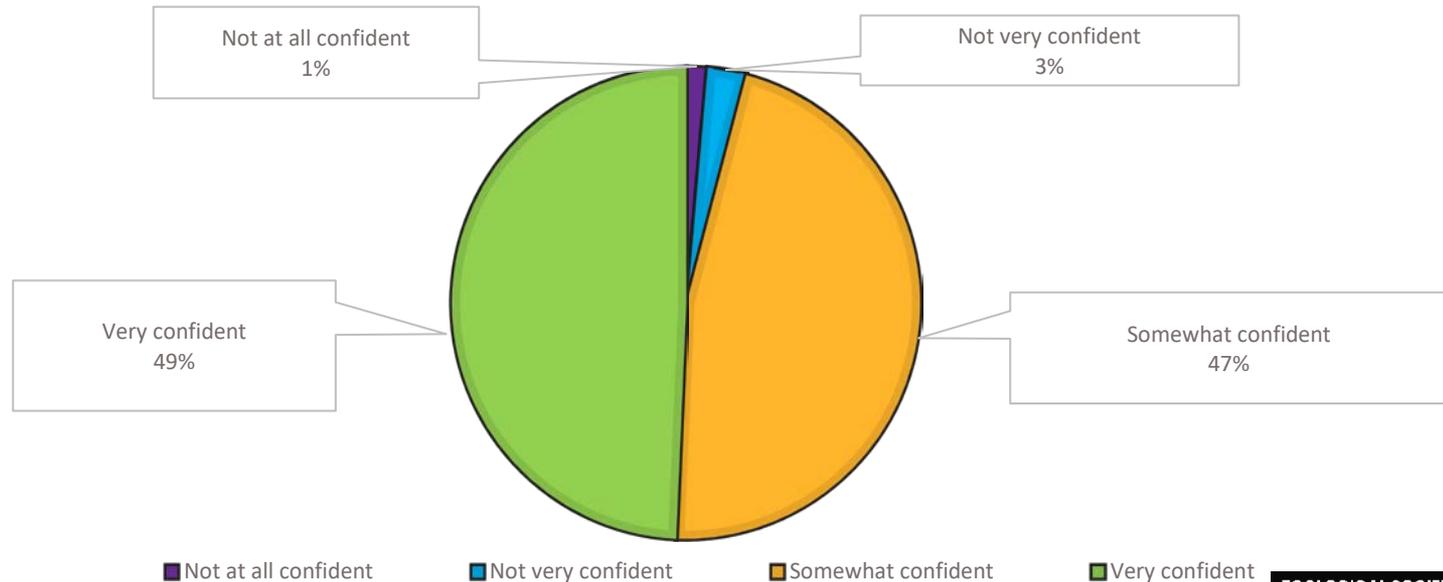
- 30% very confident
- 85% somewhat to very confident

After

- 52% very confident
- 92% somewhat to very confident

End of Grant Celebration Survey

HOW CONFIDENT ARE YOU USING EMPATHY BEST PRACTICES IN YOUR DAILY WORK?



Potential Future Projects:

- Empathy for Wildlife dashboard
- Biofact collection maintenance and interpretation
- Signage database
- Continued collaboration



CONSERVE



Providing Experiences



Modeling



Modeling

EDUCATE



Increasing Knowledge



Activate Imagination



Framing

SUPPORT



Increasing Knowledge



Opportunities to Practice



Providing Experiences

Thank you!

zoosociety.org



CONSERVE



EDUCATE



SUPPORT