

End of Program Report:

BLESS Summer Nature Centre 2004

DATES AND HOURS OF OPERATION

This summer the BLESS Nature Centre was open Tuesday through Saturday from 10am to 4pm. The first official day open for the nature centre was on June 29th and the nature centre is scheduled to remain open until the 28th of August where it will be briefly closed for the week of August 17th-21st. During the weeks prior to the official opening however, a few visitors dropped by nature centre while preparation of the nature centre and testing of some the activities was being done. In addition, during its official days open, the nature centre was occasionally kept open an extra half an hour or so when a high volume of visitors arrived late in the afternoon.

STAFF AND VOLUNTEERS

During our hours of operation, one staff member was always on hand at the nature centre. Throughout the summer, generally twice a week, we also had a volunteer come in and help out during the afternoons. In the end, Jonathan, our volunteer, ended up working a total of 20.5 hours at the nature centre over the summer. The approach that we used in recruiting such volunteers included many different strategies. First of all, we sent out email notices to some local high school councilors and teachers and did a follow up presentation at one of the interested high schools. This particular strategy seemed to be the most beneficial as that is how we came in contact with Jonathan. Secondly, we also forged a connection with the St. Albert Community Information and Volunteer Centre. Through them, we received a few potential volunteer referrals. The dilemma with these referrals from CIVC however was that they tended to be younger youth, generally 12-14, which may have been a little young to handle the tasks typically designated to volunteers at the nature centre and which may, because of their age, have required more supervision from our staff than we could provide. Finally, we also had a few younger youth simply drop by the nature centre and indicate that they were interested in volunteering. In these cases, the kids often left their contact information but never followed up sufficiently.

PUBLICITY AND MEDIA COVERAGE

Prior to the official opening of the nature centre, we tried to promote the nature centre and its summer program by visiting local elementary schools and either dropping off small handouts or doing brief in-class presentations. The exact extent that this approach had on drawing visitors into the nature centre isn't exactly clear. At least a couple of kids that came by the nature centre over the summer though had said that they had come because of the information that they had received at their school. During the first week that the nature centre was open for the summer, we were also lucky enough to have stories and pictures printed in the St. Albert Gazette and the Saint City News. This publicity seemed to create a real buzz around our Young Naturalist program as we had a great influx of kids sign up for the program after the stories were run in the newspapers. Once the nature centre was up and running for the summer, we mainly relied on our large sandwich signs as well the word of mouth of our visitors to draw in more visitors to the nature centre.

PROGRAMS

At the nature centre this summer, we had two main categories of programs, the general program and the Young Naturalist program. These two programs were not mutually exclusive by any means. Any given visitor to the nature centre could participate in the activities set up in both of the programs. The difference between the two however is that they required different amounts of commitment from the participants and they targeted different members of the public.

A) Program descriptions

General Program

The general program at the nature centre was for the most part made up of simple activities and demonstrations of live specimens that could easily engage all members of the general public, both young and old. Simple activities in this program included such things as the beanbag toss and the memory game (Appendix B). The live specimen demonstration portion of the general program included such things as the river sample touch tanks and the aquariums housing charismatic critters from the river (Appendix B). Both the live specimen demonstrations and the simple activities of the general program were set up in and around the nature centre for the duration of the summer. They were rotated periodically throughout the summer though.

Young Naturalist Program

The Young Naturalist program at the nature centre was an educational program geared towards elementary-school aged kids. Children involved in the program had to come down to the nature centre anytime during our open hours and sign up. Upon signing up, they received a Young Naturalist logbook which was stamped throughout the program when they had successfully completed designated tasks within different themes. These tasks were categorized into 6 separate themes (mammals, aquatic bugs, fish/amphibians/reptiles, plants, terrestrial bugs and birds) where each consecutive week supported a different theme. In order to receive their stamp for any of the given themes, the participants had to complete at least one of the designated crafts or activities within that theme (Appendix B). If a child completed at least 3 of the 6 themes, they successfully completed the program. The children that successfully completed the program received an official St. Albert Young Naturalist certificate as well as a Dairy Queen treat coupon at the end of the summer. In addition, each time that a child completed one task within a theme, they had the opportunity to put their name in for the draw that occurred at the end of each of the 6 weeks.

B) Program outcomes

General Program

Over the course of the summer a total of 1464 people visited the nature centre. An unrecorded but evidently substantial portion of these visitors simply participated in the general program during their visit to the nature centre.

Similar to previous years, I found that the general program at the nature centre seemed to be a good way to draw in visitors and then keep them entertained for a short while.

Young Naturalists

At the completion of the Young Naturalist program, a total of 48 kids had signed up for the program. Of those that had signed up, 24 had successfully completed the

program by the end of the summer and 63% of this graduating class attended more than the mandatory 3 weeks.

Based on these numbers, I think that we had a pretty successful inaugural year with the Young Naturalist program. Overall, it seemed as though this program was a good way to get visitors to return to the nature centre as well as a great way to get them more involved and excited over the long term.

C) Program evaluations

In order to evaluate both our general program and our Young Naturalist program, we used a couple of different tools of assessment. First of all, we set up a comment book in the entryway into the nature centre. This comment book provided us with up to date feedback on the aspects of the nature centre that our visitors enjoyed the most. With this information, we could easily alter our programs to improve them throughout the course of the summer. Additionally, we also took note of any verbal comments that our visitors made to the staff in terms of the nature centre and its programs. Likewise, we used these comments to determine whether our programs were being well received by the general public.

COMMUNITY IMPACT

Over the course of the summer, the nature centre had a total number of 1464 visitors and thus directly impacted this portion of the population either visiting or residing in the St. Albert area this summer. However, an even greater proportion of this St. Albert population may have been impacted by the BLESS Summer Nature Centre by hearing about us from friends, reading about us in the newspaper or seeing our outdoor signs. Consequently, some people may have been indirectly impacted by the nature centre without even having ever stepped through our doors.

VISITOR INFORMATION

A) Age

This summer we had a large variety of different-aged people visit the nature centre. The age range of our visitors spanned from babies all the way to grandparents.

B) Days of the week and times of the day

Overall, it seemed as though Saturday was our busiest day of the week down at the nature centre this year. The crowd of visitors on Saturdays however mainly consisted of people quickly passing by the nature centre on their way to the farmer's market and such people were often one-time visitors to the nature centre. On the weekdays however, we typically saw more regulars drop by the nature centre and such people often spent a greater amount of time at the nature centre during their visit. In contrast, our slowest days at the nature centre this summer were those days where we had extreme weather. Both incredibly rainy and incredibly hot days tended to keep the visitors away from the nature centre.

Unlike previous years, it seemed as though there was no distinct time of the day when we were the busiest at the nature centre this summer. The only real observable trend was that we tended to have the least amount of visitors during the lunch time hour.

C) Time spent

As previously mentioned, the one-time visitors to the nature centre tended to spend less time during their visits than our regular visitors to the nature centre. Typically,

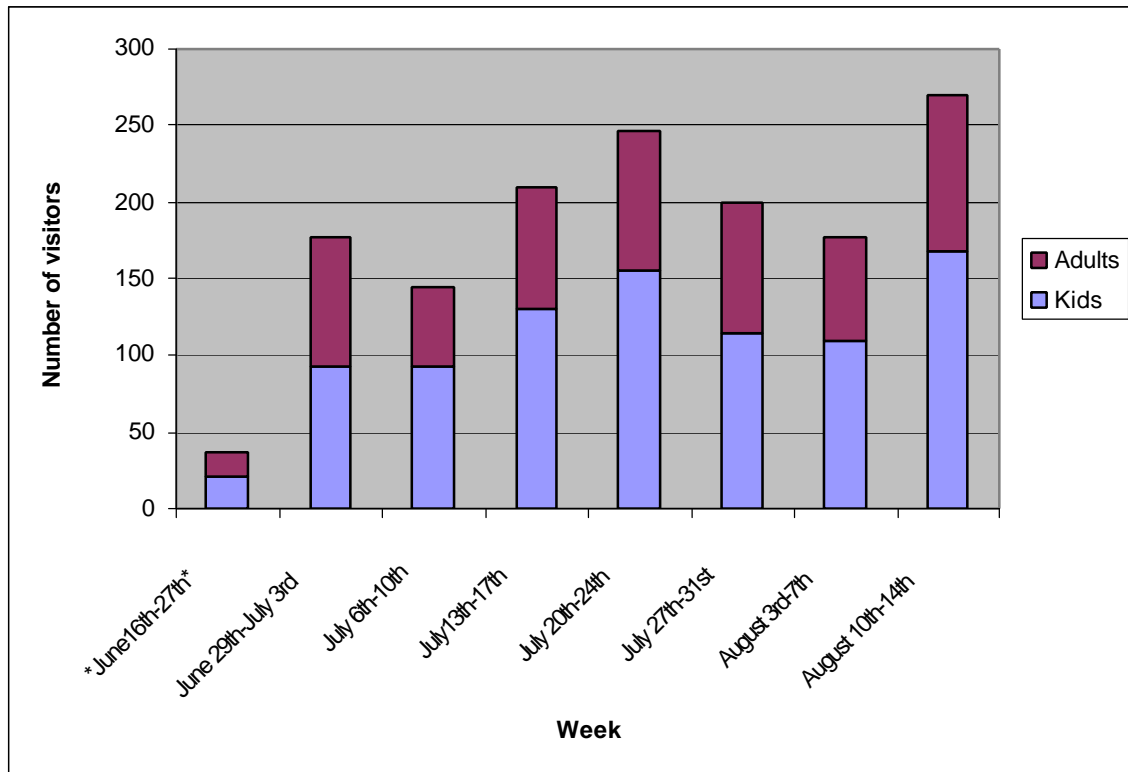
one-time visitors would spend 30 minutes or less at the nature centre while the regular visitors would spend upwards of 45 minutes at the nature centre on each visit.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT

By offering fun and interactive educational activities that teach about the local flora and fauna, the BLESS Summer Nature Centre attempts to instill a greater environmental awareness within the residents of St. Albert and surrounding area. It is our hope that by gaining greater knowledge about the local environment, the public will more greatly value it and as a result want to respect it and protect it even more.

Appendix A- Visitor numbers

	<u>NUMBER OF KIDS</u>	<u>NUMBER OF ADULTS</u>
June 16th-27th	21	15
June 29th-July 3rd	93	85
July 6th-10th	93	52
July 13th-17th	130	80
July 20th-24th	155	92
July 27th-31st	115	85
August 3rd-7th	110	68
August 10th-14th	168	102
Total	885	579



Appendix B- List of Activities and activity analyses

General Program

Simple activities

List: memory game, sensory testing, feely bags, bean bag toss, migration ball game, hungry heron game

Analysis: These simple activities seemed to be beneficial since they really only required basic human skills and so almost any visitor to the nature centre could do them. Equally, simple modifications could be made to them to cater to a wide variety of skill levels. These activities however didn't really stretch a visitor's nature knowledge but ultimately served the purpose of getting visitors involved.

Live specimen demonstrations

List: pond study, aquatic bug (ex: giant water bug, leeches, dragonfly larvae) aquariums, terrestrial bug (ex: ants, caterpillars, grasshoppers) tanks, frog tank, ecosystem in a bottle, bird nests

Analysis: These demonstrations always seemed to be very popular with the public. One-time visitors and the regular visitors alike seemed to be drawn to the live specimen demonstrations.

Young Naturalists Program

Mammal-themed activities

List: mystery mammal puzzles, mammal specimen parts + functions association games, stand-up deer craft, mammal tracks match up game, mammal fit the facts, mammal crossword puzzles, mammal herbivore/carnivore/omnivore match up game, mammal coloring

Aquatic bug-themed activities

List: critter countdown live specimen game, caddisfly puppets, pond bug fit the facts, which nymph is which puzzles, pond drop fact + drawing activity, pond bug coloring

Fish, amphibian and reptile-themed activities

List: frog jumping flip booklet, frog to food mazes, frog lifecycle worksheet, computer paper snake craft, origami frog craft, slimies + wiggles fit the facts, slimies + wiggles coloring

Plant-themed activities

List: muffin cup flower craft, leaf rubbing art, plant word unscramble, tree true or false fact activity, unusual "plants" match up fact activity

Terrestrial bug-themed activities

List: stained glass butterfly craft, spider puppet, bug biodiversity specimen activity, mini-beast safari, land bug herbivore/carnivore/omnivore match up game, land bug coloring

Bird-themed activities

List: red-winged blackbird + nest puppet, dabbling duck craft, bird herbivore/carnivore/omnivore match up game, bird fit the facts, bird feet specimen activity, bird identification task, bird coloring

Analysis: Within these themed activities, there exists three approximate categories of activities; the specimen-based activities, the fact-based activities and the craft activities. The specimen-based activities (ex: mammal specimen parts + functions association games, critter countdown live specimen game) were always the most popular of the three categories. Besides being really appealing to the public, these activities were also effective because they incorporated straightforward aspects of nature theory. The fact-based activities (ex: bird fit the facts, unusual “plants” match up fact activity) tended to be not as popular though since they required more time commitment from a visitor and possibly more of a knowledge base. Accordingly, these activities were most commonly completed by the more hardcore nature enthusiasts of our visitors. The craft activities were also one of the more popular categories of activities. Both younger and older visitors enjoyed doing the crafts. The craft activities however incorporated less nature theory than the other two categories.