

Introduction

The BLESS Summer Nature Centre has enjoyed a very successful 2006 summer season. The Visitor's Log Book supports this; all comments are happy and appreciative! The following report supplies more specifics on this success.

Statistics

The following chart includes the numbers of children and adults who visited the Centre on a weekly basis. As well, the number of Young Naturalists who signed up for the program per week, and in total, is included. All numbers increased this year!

Theme	Children	Adults	Total	Young Naturalists
Nature Science	70	57	127	22
Lovin' the Earth	112	82	194	39
Bugs n' Butterflies	207	123	330	31
Water Birds/Critters	161	87	248	13
Trees n' Plants	133	68	201	2
Backyard Birds	138	79	217	10
Mammals	138	118	256	0
Best of '06	158	92	250	0
TOTALS	1117	706	1823	117

City Of St. Albert Related Issues

Early in the summer, the City of St. Albert replaced the hot water heater in the Centre. As well, they provided me with a key for turning on the outdoor water source, located on the SW corner of the Cabin. A window in the Centre was broken this summer; all windows are now plexi-glass

I have a few recommendations for the City in relation to the Summer Nature Centre:

- As per the recommendations of Sarah Pearson, the hole, located on the east side of the Cabin in the primary outdoor activities area, should be filled.
- The bushes located just outside the front door of the Cabin should be pruned throughout the summer. They were pruned early in the summer (not by the City) and they had become quite overgrown by the end of the program.

Expenses

The following is a chart containing a list of my expenses, divided into receipt-by-receipt.

	4.28
	10.87
	10.7
	25.88
	52.43
	5.3
	11.13
	31.03
	19.05
	6.42
	23.32
	12.17
	33.39
Cell	
phone	140.28
TOTAL	386.25
Advance	-150
Owing	236.25
Received	-236.25
TOTAL	0

Based on a \$500.00 budget for supplies, I spent a total of \$386.25. This total includes a substantial amount of prizes purchased for the Young Naturalist Program (at a maximum of \$1.00 per Young Naturalist), craft supplies (some of which have extras that can be used for next season), operational supplies (washroom supplies, Kleenex, hand sanitizer, laminator sheets), and coverage of my cell phone bill (the Centre's contact number for the summer).

In addition, there were minimal expenses from other BLESS Board Members that have not been accounted for here.

The \$500.00 budget was more than enough to provide for the needs of the program this summer. It will, in fact provide some supplies and prizes for the next season.

Advertising

Advertising is imperative to the success of the Summer Nature Centre. I cannot count the number of times I heard, "I read about this program in the newspaper!" from parents this summer.

At the beginning of the summer, I suggest contacting the newspapers in St. Albert and Morinville. Providing a small write up to those groups about the Nature Centre and its goals can peak their interest. In 2006, the St. Albert Gazette and St. City News both did write ups on the Centre (can be found on the bulletin board in the Centre

I also created a poster that was put up throughout the community. It can be found in Appendix B.

As well, the weekly “What’s On!” calendar in the St. Albert Gazette is a valuable resource. By simply providing the editor of said calendar with as small write up of themes, dates, and highlights, each week advertisements can be found about the Centre. Providing pictures is also a nice way to bring more attention to the ad, and can showcase kids that have come to the Cabin.

A poster with the different sponsors of the Summer Nature Centre was created and posted throughout the Cabin. Please refer to Appendix D.

Young Naturalist Program

The Young Naturalist Program enjoyed its most successful year to date with a whopping total of 117 children enrolled, with 49 having graduated by closing date and ___ being 5 or less points away from graduation. In addition to that, 6 children managed to work extremely hard and complete the program twice during the summer.

The Young Naturalist Program changed this year as I arrived to find the requirement of 9 activities completed over a minimum of 3 Themes to be a bit too easy. I increased the requirement to a minimum of 21 activities, which, if one worked hard enough, could also be completed in 3 weeks.

This change, as demonstrated in the numbers, was quite successful. I also decided that instead of using passports or logbooks to track the number of activities completed, charts would be created where children could mark the number of activities completed per theme next to their name. The number was clarified by me and marked by a sticker. This allowed a healthy competition between visitors to see who could complete the most activities.

Under no circumstances would I remove the Young Naturalist Program; it provided regular visitors and created excitement. The certificate used can be found in Appendix C.

Volunteers

Volunteers were imperative to the success of the Summer Nature Centre. I was very lucky to have Kelsey volunteer every Thursday from 10-3:30. She was very good with the children and helped in any sort of task I had that needed to be completed. She was very interested in the live specimens and often helped by taking care of them (ie: feeding, tank cleaning).

In addition to Kelsey, three members of my Youth group made 4 visits to the cabin for full days of volunteering, and Ben and Jaques Bellamy, family members of mine, helped out at least once to twice a week. Their personal information will be provided to Board members in the hopes that letter of thanks be sent to them.

Program

In addition to activities used from last year, I created/designed quite a few activities for this year's Summer Nature Centre. Appendix A is a "crash-course" in each one. The supplies are easily found in the program crate I left in the Centre.

Live Specimens

The most challenging, yet successful and rewarding, part of the summer for me was learning about the live specimens that are provided for the children to see/interact with.

- Aquatic Invertebrates

These were, by far, the most challenging of the bunch. Instead of spending a lot of time researching these on the internet, I would just suggest referring to the sheets provided to kids to identify the creatures with. (They can be found by the leader's desk – in the big clear tubs) Future leaders may want to have a few extra facts up their sleeves, but it is not necessary. These creatures go in the white plastic tubs and should be released/restocked every 2-3 days. Kids should be warned that they need to be gentle.

The invertebrates are collected by taking a net on a stick down to the river and dipping. Further training is easily received by having someone who has been pond dipping before accompany new leaders to the river.

- Crayfish

An easy favorite! Crayfish live in the fish tanks found in the Centre. They can be caught from Lacombe Lake. They look like small lobsters and eat algae and aquatic invertebrates. A fun activity is releasing minnows into the tank for children to watch how the crayfish eat them. Crayfish are tough creatures; they do not require a lot of care. Make sure you cover the tank – crayfish like to try climbing the aeration tubes in order to escape!

- Tadpoles/Frogs

A difficult but exciting project. There is a small pond behind Walmart that has many tadpoles. Catch lots; they are cannibals! Algae from the water source from which the tadpoles were caught is an important food source. Tadpoles/frogs are touchy creatures. Do not be surprised if many do not survive.

Once tadpoles form hind/fore legs, you will need to reduce the water level in the tank and add rocks for them to sit on. Make sure you cover the tank – they will gain leg strength and try to escape!

- Ants

This was a big bust. For some reason, I couldn't keep an ant farm alive – but with further research/better luck, it would be an amazing display. For the days that I had the farm running, the children totally loved it!

Thanks

I thank BLESS sincerely for providing me with the opportunity to run the Summer Nature Centre. My skills as a future educator were certainly further developed, and my science-based knowledge was definitely increased!