



EARTH ADVENTURES IN THE NATURAL WORLD: 2016 AT THE MORTON CENTRE

A summary of the Environmental Education Programs
on Heckman's Island, Lunenburg County, Nova Scotia



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INTRODUCTION

This report provides a brief summary of the 2016 Morton Centre environmental education programs. Included are a description of the site, a summary of each program, next steps, acknowledgements, and a number of photos. These programs are the result of a partnership between Acadia University and the Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation. Primary funding for these programs has been provided by Michelin North America (Canada) Inc.

THE MORTON CENTRE

The Morton Centre is located on Heckman's Island, near Lunenburg, Nova Scotia. Originally an active farm, the 99-acre property is comprised of secondary-growth mixed coniferous and deciduous forest, two large hay fields, freshwater ponds, a salt marsh, and nearly two kilometers of shoreline. There is a cottage, with amenities to accommodate summer staff and retreat visitors. There are a variety of outbuildings, as well as a 17-foot yurt which provides further programming space in the summer months. A network of trails run across the property.

The Morton Centre was gifted to Acadia University by Dr. Harry and Rachel Morton in 1995. Their wish was to see the property protected and used for environmental research and education. Since then, the Centre has been used primarily as a field station for Acadia student research. In the past few years, Acadia has shifted the purpose of this site to become a place for public environmental education, as well as a professional retreat centre for Acadia faculty and affiliates.



OVERVIEW OF PROGRAMS

The Morton Centre environmental education programs deliver environmentally-themed camps and events to engage and educate local children and families. Building off the successes from previous seasons, a similar but slightly expanded suite of programs was offered this year. The six programs delivered in 2016 included Trailblazers, Cycle Savers, Junior Leadership Program, Pirates' Cove, Wild Adventurers, and a family campfire night. A total of 249 participants attended (31% increase from last year). All of the programs took place outdoors and were designed to provide participants with opportunities to enjoy experiential learning, science, discovery, and being active in nature. Each day included games, stories, creative projects, exploration and physical activity, as well as hands-on learning related to the theme of the camp.

Members of the 2016 Morton Centre program team included:



Brooke Nodding



Cate de Vreede

Brooke Nodding (Bluenose Coastal Action Foundation Executive Director), oversaw program management and administration; Cate de Vreede (Environmental Education Consultant) assisted with program design and development.



Clare Kellock



Emma Beaton

Clare Kellock and Emma Beaton (on-site Program Coordinators) were responsible for program development, implementation, and facilitation.

Twenty local youth were trained as volunteer leaders for some of the programs (not all are pictured).



Volunteer Leaders - Junior Leadership Program



Volunteer Leaders - Cycle Savers (Spring 2016)



Volunteer Leaders - Cycle Savers (Fall 2016)

CYCLE SAVERS



Cycle Savers is an intriguing, hands-on, earth education program for grade four students based on a mystery code and club theme. It was successfully delivered in both the spring and fall this year. Two classes from Bridgewater Elementary participated in both seasons (May 25 and 30; October 7 and 14), and one class from Centre Scolaire de la Rive-Sud participated in the fall (October 24). We also had sixteen high school students who completed the leadership component of this program. In total, Cycle Savers reached approximately 176 children and youth.

Students deciphered the lost manual of the Cycle Savers Club, which launched them on an intriguing adventure to appreciate, understand, and respect the cycles of life through an action-packed field trip at the Morton Centre. Throughout the day, students completed activities in a natural setting which addressed grade four science curriculum outcomes. They returned home to complete the final code and discover how their household is affecting the environment and what they can do to make a difference.



This program also incorporated a leadership component for high school students. High school students were given two days of program and leadership training, and then led the groups of grade fours in pairs supervised by the on-site program coordinators.



The program received positive feedback from participants, teachers, and the high school leaders. Grade four students were frequently heard exclaiming "This is so much fun!" throughout the program days, and teachers relayed many positive comments. Many of the student leaders expressed interest in volunteering at the Morton Centre again next year.

CYCLE SAVERS

Cycle Savers is a well-received program. Participants - as well as leaders, teachers, and chaperones - have much to say regarding their experience at the Morton Centre.



"There wasn't a day when I didn't have fun!"
High school student leader

"Can I bring my Mom and Dad here to show them this place?" **Participant, age 9**

"The leaders are great! You would never know that some of these kids are very shy." **Chaperone**



"Spending time in nature made me happy, relaxed, and peaceful" **High school student leader**

"This is such a great place to have a program like this, especially in the fall when the forest seems so alive! It's beautiful." **Chaperone**

"The activities are fast-paced; the kids don't have time to get bored! They're focused on the task at hand."
Chaperone



TRAILBLAZERS

This is our first year offering Trailblazers, an all-outdoors after-school program for students in grades 6-9. At Bluenose Academy, thirteen students participated during spring 2016 and nine students participated during fall 2016; while at Bayview Community School, seven students participated during fall 2016.



Two leaders meet the group at the school at dismissal time, and then walk to a nearby "wild" area once a week for approximately 10 weeks. We play active, heart-pumping games, prepare and eat a nutritious snack, and spend structured and unstructured time playing and building skills in the forest. The program is offered free of charge and runs in all kinds of weather. There are several Trailblazers programs across the province now and all share the overall goals of connecting kids to nature, stimulating outdoor free play, and building outdoor leadership skills.

Trailblazers received positive feedback from both participants and parents and some of the participants from the spring returned for our fall program!

"I loved making bannock and learning to make a fire and playing games and dirt time!" Participant



JUNIOR LEADERSHIP PROGRAM



The Junior Leadership Program was one of the new additions to our summer programming in 2016. Six local youth (ages 10-16) were given two days of program and leadership training (July 14 and 15). During this training, they were acquainted with the program site and staff, introduced to the principles of earth education, as well as to the benefits of leadership and team-building. The youth also practiced leading games and activities and then assisted the on-site program coordinators during our two summer day camps, Pirates' Cove and Wild Adventurers.

Many of these youth volunteers had never before worked in a leadership role with children, and expressed an appreciation at having the opportunity to build and grow their leadership skills. This Junior Leadership training was a successful pilot program; we hope to improve its efficacy and continue to offer it in future years.

Many of these youth volunteers had never before worked in a leadership role with children, and expressed an appreciation



"I had a lot of fun and it improved my leadership skills!" Participant



PIRATES' COVE



A perennial favourite, Pirates' Cove was a half-day camp where children were immersed in a week of exploration and investigation to reduce their impact on the natural environment, reuse old materials in up-cycling efforts, learn proper recycling methods, and rethink the ways we use resources and materials. This year the camp took place July 18 to 22 and had 10 campers ages 6-8.

Campers of Pirates' Cove joined our merry band of buccaneers in exploring and discovering nature treasures and finding out what it takes to be a modern-day, earth friendly pirate! Participants spent the week burying treasure, creating maps, and discovering the four 'Rs' (Reduce, Reuse, Recycle, and Rethink), which make up the Pirate 'Arrrrgh'.

The program received great feedback from both participants and parents. By the end of the week many campers expressed disappointment over the camp being over for the year.



"I love taking my sons to a program where they are excited to go, have a ton of fun PLUS they learn to respect the world a little bit more. Thanks so much to the amazing coordinators and to those that help fund projects like this."

Parent of Pirates' Cove participants



WILD ADVENTURERS



Wild Adventurers was a week-long full-day camp for youth ages 9-12. This year was the second time we successfully delivered this program, taking place from August 8 to 12. We engaged 15 enthusiastic participants, doubling the number of participants from last year.

Campers became “Wild Adventurers”; adventure-seekers that learned from wild creatures about how to explore and survive in the natural world, and how to live in harmony with our environment. All

week long, campers learned valuable survival skills like knot tying and compass navigation, and at the end of the week, they used the knowledge they gained to represent their creature at the mysterious ‘Council of All Beings’. The week culminated in an overnight stay where campers put their wilderness survival skills to the test by sleeping out in the great outdoors!

The program received great reviews from both participants and their parents. Many participants expressed interest in coming back for a similar experience in future summers.



“I loved the idea of magic spots! BRILLIANT! Most kids just run through the forest and don’t appreciate or pay attention to what is there.

This may make it difficult for them to care about preserving it or be observant to things around them, which may be useful for survival or recreation! It is very important to feel that connection with nature and I think they really enjoyed that!”

Volunteer at Wild Adventurers



FAMILY NATURE EVENTS

This year we held our second Family Nature Event on Sunday, August 21 from 7:00pm-9:00pm. It was a great success, with thirteen local community members joining us for our "Campfire & Nature Walk" event. The Morton Centre staff led a tour of the property, guided by letters left by the Gnomes of the forest! We walked through the forest and meadow to the beach, just in time for the sunset. In each location there were nature activities prepared for the families to enjoy. We returned to the Morton Centre and came together around the campfire for a fun-filled evening of stories, songs, games, and snacks. We had two other Family Nature Events planned for July and August with approximately 15 registrants for these events; however, we were disappointed to have to cancel them due to poor weather and the severe drought conditions experienced this year. We look forward to hosting many more of these events in the coming years.



"We enjoyed the scavenger hunt and campfire very much. I'm so glad we "discovered" you and the Morton Centre this summer!"

Participant



MORTON CENTRE FAMILY PICNIC AND OPEN HOUSE

In its third year, this fun, community-building and awareness-raising event was held on Saturday, July 23 from 12:00pm - 3:00pm. We were pleased to have approximately 35 people in attendance, many of whom were families or individuals from the local area. There was a free BBQ, informational displays, nature activities and crafts for kids, a walking tour of the property, and ample opportunities to chat with those involved with the programs at the Morton Centre. This event proved to be a great way to share what's happening on-site with the community.



LOOKING FORWARD

Overall, we celebrated many successes in the 2016 season. We offered two new programs, both of which went very well. Participant numbers increased by 31% and the feedback from participants, teachers, and parents continues to be overwhelmingly positive and encouraging. We noticed a number of participants returning from last year, and in many cases, those who were new had been encouraged to attend by one of those returning campers. We expect many of those who participated this year to come back again in 2017.



Looking forward to next season, the plan is to re-offer the most successful programs from 2016 and expand our programming again. Our hope is to enroll 5-6 classes of grade 4's in the Cycle Savers program, and expand our school programs to include two new pilot programs for elementary schools called "The Minpins Forest Quest" and "Learn-to-Grow". Building off the success and interest of our Family Nature Events, we hope to offer 5-6 of these and/or other nature-themed events for families. We will plan to offer three day camps next year, expanding from the two offered in 2016. We also plan to continue to offer Trailblazers at both Bluenose Academy and Bayview Community School.

With four years under our belt, Coastal Action has learned a great deal about the interest in the Morton Centre Environmental Education Programs, as well as the challenges and opportunities involved with running environmental education programs in this way. There continues to exist an appetite for these nature-based, adventuresome experiences for children in Lunenburg County, and we will continue to adapt our program offerings to better meet the demands and opportunities available.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you to all those who continued to support us in this fourth year of programming at the Morton Centre. We especially appreciate Michelin North America (Canada) Inc. for the foundational funding that made these programs possible. We also thank our other funding partners, TD Friends of the Environment Foundation, Nova Scotia Youth Conservation Corps, Acadia University – the Morton Centre Endowment Fund, Lunenburg County Community Health Board's Wellness Grant, Kitchener-Waterloo Community Fund, Thrive After School Program, Eco Canada Youth Internship Program, NS Dept. of Health and Wellness Regional Development Program, and 100 Bluenosers Who Care for their support. Thanks also to Michelin Bridgewater for providing equipment and supplies. We acknowledge and appreciate the curriculum materials shared with us by the Halifax Adventure Earth Centre. We appreciate the training and advice provided by Drs. Alan Warner and Ian Spooner. We thank the Bridgewater Atlantic Superstore for their contribution to our Annual Open House and BBQ. Thank you to the 16 local high school students who volunteered as Cycle Savers program leaders and the six local youth who volunteered during our camps. Thank you also to Kirk Symmonds and Region 6 Waste Management, Suzanne Lohnes-Croft, Parker Muzzerall and the Mi'kmaw Conservation Group, Julie Lohnes, Wendy Page, Jamie Mason, Yari Msika, Quinn Stewart, Lindsay Welsford, Blaine Beaton, and Alexander Kelly for their volunteer contributions.



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