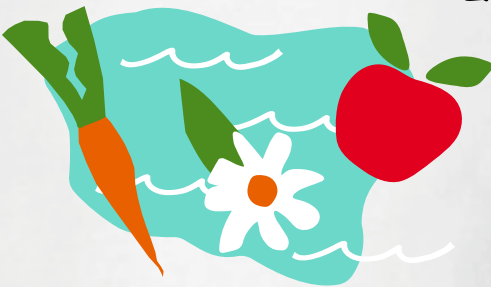




swim, plant, grow
camp!



north bennington
2021



A
Summer Camp
Success
Story!



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Creating community via a village campus summer camp

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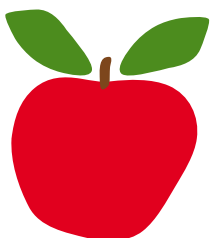
Introduction

An overview of the community
as a campus summer camp program



The North Bennington community wished to enrich recreation, education, and fun social programming for area youth this past summer of 2021. In response, Paran Recreations (Lake Paran) led four partners (Hiland Hall Gardens, the Fund for North Bennington, Bennington College, and Meals on Wheels) in offering a school-aged, outdoor camp that utilized a variety of community locations as a campus.

The camp partners were dedicated to outdoor community-based programming that was both accessible and fulfilling for all families of the larger Bennington community. Camp partners effectively teamed up to share each organization's unique resources. The camp hosted 75 children during the 8 week program. Campers were aged 5-12. One out of five campers attended camp on a full scholarship provided by funds from the Vermont Children's Trust, United Way of Rutland County, and the Agnes Lindsay Foundation. The majority of the program was funded through the public-private partnership of Afterschool Vermont's "Summer Matter's for All" grant. With this grant we were able to fully fund camp staff, consultants, transportation, and supplies/equipment for each camper."





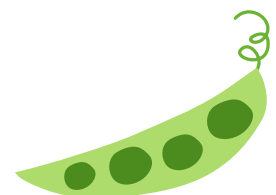
The Community Creates the Camp

The following partners, both private and public, were part of the unique “community as a campus” initiative in making the summer camp series so effective.

Lake Paran: Paran Receptions (known as Lake Paran) is a community-supported not-for-profit that has been in operation since 1960. Managed by a board of 10 community volunteers, it has 2 full time staff and several seasonal employees including lifeguards, program, and concessions staff. Their mission is to be a steward of the local environment and bring the natural beauty of Southern Vermont to everyone, while providing healthy, outdoor fun!

Meals on Wheels: Meals on Wheels (MOW) of Bennington County, Vermont, a 501(c)3, offers healthy, nutritious and tasty meals to eligible seniors over 60 years old, and to disabled adults under age 60. Hot meals are delivered to seniors in their homes or served at our meal sites, located throughout the county. Once a week, campers would travel to MOW to process food that they had grown in Hiland Hall Gardens and give back by preparing food for Meals on Wheels.

Bennington College: This four-year liberal arts college has been part of the Bennington community since its founding in 1932. The summer camp enabled a Bennington College student to complete a field experience as an environmental educator and a science faculty member who conducted research focusing on ecology that will benefit the numerous conservation efforts of the community.



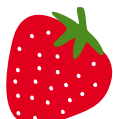
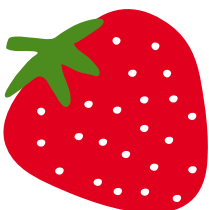


The Community Creates the Camp Cont'd



The Fund for North Bennington: The Fund for North Bennington is dedicated to enhancing community life in and around the Village of North Bennington, Vermont. It seeks to maintain and strengthen the special physical character and social fabric of the community. The Fund supported the camp's training of the next generation of citizen scientists through partnership with a Bennington College faculty biologist and intern. The camp's "nature hours" consisted of accompanying a field scientist to learn about and help with surveying local bird populations plus activities in field biology, zoology, botany, and natural history (all STEM education activities).

Friends of Hiland Hall Gardens: Started in 2007, the purpose of the Hiland Hall Gardens is to restore, re-build and sustain the historic Hiland Hall Gardens and the unique Victorian-style Grapery to their original splendor. Through garden education programs they are committed to creating a garden where community grows alongside flowers, grapes, herbs and pumpkins. Ultimately the goal is to improve the overall quality of health in our community. Each week they oversee approximately 150 students to grow, harvest, weigh vegetables to be sold at a farmers markets housed at the local school. Here, the students are able to share their knowledge of healthy eating and teach their parents recipes for healthier meals. The campers spent half of their day at Hiland Hall, working and learning in the community garden establishing an education in food systems.





Needs Assessment

Respondents of various community-based assessments identified needs for childcare, environmental education, recreation, and food insecurity solutions.

Our collaborative program was the perfect host for youth development, including social emotional learning, farm to table experiences, water activities, hiking, and conservation field experience. Our program integrated academic learning, place-based experiences, and pure fun.

Environmental Education: In a Lake Paran survey of community members, 94% confirmed they would use out of school programs if they were available and 100% confirmed they would send their children to a program that focuses on environmental education. The camp registration form asked parents why they were signing their child up for this camp. Respondents answered because “environmental education is important for my child’s development.”

Food Insecurity: Child poverty rates in Bennington’s Supervisory Union’s region range from 35-91%. Bennington County is the second poorest county in the state. At least 83% of public school students qualify for free and reduced lunch. Not only was the camp a site for free lunch distribution, but efforts were also made to introduce nutrition and food preparation skills via our partnership with Meals on Wheels and daily gardening at Hiland Hall Gardens.



1. https://education.vermont.gov/sites/aoe/files/documents/edu-nutrition-2020-free-and-reduced-eligibility-report_1.pdf
2. <https://www.bennington.edu/news-and-features/20000-awarded-local-organizations-addressing-food-insecurity-bennington-county>

Needs Assessment Cont'd

Recreation: A Citizen Survey issued by the town of Bennington was distributed to the community in 2018. 40% of the respondents did not believe the recreation services in Bennington met their expectations, and 60% believed the quality of recreation did not meet their expectations. Recognizing that our community needed better recreational assets, we developed an exciting and diverse program that engaged area youngsters in quality outdoor activities

Childcare: In the same 2018 Citizen Survey, a need for youth programs and childcare was clearly stated. Programming for youth did not meet 46% of the respondents' expectations. The availability of childcare services was rated only a 3/10.

Our program ensured that we had plenty of scholarship funding for families who needed assistance.



3. (https://www.health.harvard.edu/newsletter_article/a-prescription-for-better-health-go-alfresco)

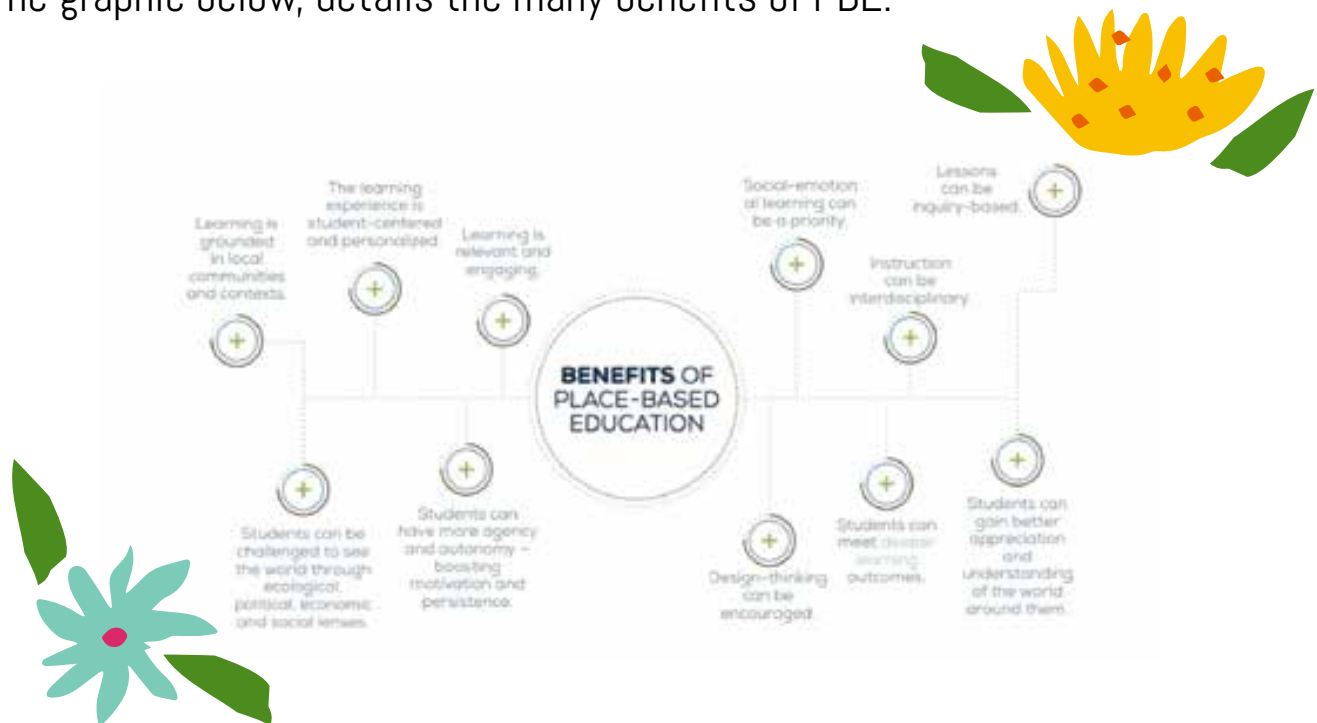
4. <https://benningtonvt.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/survey-response-summary-for-website.pdf>.

The Benefits of Place-Based Learning



Our summer camp was rooted in the principles of “place based education (PBE).” Place-Based Education is defined by the Center for Place-Based Learning and Community Engagement as an immersive learning experience that “places students in local heritage, cultures, landscapes, opportunities and experiences, and uses these as a foundation for the study of language arts, mathematics, social studies, science and other subjects across the curriculum.” Using the PBE model as a foundation, campers had opportunities to explore their own village, thus translating their understanding of a local place to making real world decisions, meeting community needs, and learning more abstract concepts. PBE not only impacts learners by increasing student engagement, boosting academic outcomes, and promoting an understanding of the world around us, but it impacts societies as whole from the families of the campers to the organizations that are involved in the education.

The graphic below, details the many benefits of PBE.



Infographic via What is Place-Based Education and Why Does it Matter by Getting Smart in partnership with edulnnovation and Teton Science Schools.

5. <https://www.gettingsmart.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/02/What-is-Place-Based-Education-and-Why-Does-it-Matter-3.pdf>

6. <https://www.tetonscience.org/getting-started-with-place-based-education-step-by-step/>

Testimony and Success



We saw many improvements in our camper's well-being as well as their connection with their local environment. We aimed to intersect the need in



Bennington for affordable childcare, nature-based programming, food insecurity relief, and recreation. The feedback from parents and the community was positive in that we can continue to foster this intersection for the benefit of our community and especially our children.

100% of the camp satisfaction survey respondents said they would send their children to camp again.

Camp parents:

"Thank you for being there for our children, educating them and taking on a bigger task than normal(post-covid). This summer was a bit crazy and so were our children with them being locked up for a long time. Thank you for providing them with something to do every week of the summer. This was hugely needed for our community and greatly appreciated."

"Great camp, wonderful people, lovely lake setting. Great for kids, thank you!"

"I would like to thank you all for giving my child a new experience and for helping me with the financial assistance so he could attend."





Camp Staff and Partners



"The Lake Paran summer camp provided an opportunity for the youth in the greater Bennington Community to grow their knowledge about the outdoors, ranging from gardening, physical health, and nature conservation. The campers also had the unique opportunity to learn about food insecurity through fields trips to Meals on Wheels. Here, the kids helped to process vegetables which were later used by the Meals on Wheels kitchen."

-Elizabeth Schumacher, Garden Coordinator, Hiland Hall Gardens

"My experience with the Lake Paran Summer Camp was one of a kind! The unique atmosphere of the lake and its employees creates a memorable experience for anyone that goes there! I thoroughly enjoyed working with all my fellow camp counselor and everyone else around the lake!"

-Kyla Kaczowski, Environmental Educator



Photos

