

# A Case for Supporting Environmental Education

*Inspiring lifelong appreciation of watersheds*

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The Quidi Vidi - Rennie's River Development Foundation (QVRRDF) through education, advocacy and stewardship inspires the protection, conservation and enhancement of freshwater ecosystems of the Northeast Avalon region of Newfoundland and Labrador. The QVRRDF operates the Suncor Energy Fluvarium as a public centre of environmental excellence located in Canada's largest urban park.

The QVRRDF began as a grassroots initiative in 1985 with a group of citizens concerned about the health of Rennie's River; a freshwater river that runs through the heart St. John's. As a result of their hard work, the Rennie's River eco-system was rehabilitated, enticing wildlife to return to this freshwater resource. The City of St. John's also gained a green space, with boardwalks constructed around Quidi Vidi Lake and a trail the length of the river system. Many of the founding members continue to provide the QVRRDF direction today through our volunteer board of directors.

Water is often an underappreciated resource, yet all life depends on it. The QVRRDF believes that educating and engaging youth on the importance of freshwater ecosystems helps ensure the health of tomorrow's water resources. It is through educating the next generation that we are making a significant contribution to the preservation of our freshwater environment. The words of Baba Diom reaffirm our mission; "For in the end, we will conserve only what we love, we will love only what we understand and we will understand only what we are taught."

Research has shown that this lifelong engagement with the natural environment also provides many mental and physical health benefits. For example:

- Munoz' literature review found that there is a positive correlation between children's time spent outdoors and physical activity, health development and overall well-being. **Munoz, S.A. (2009). Children in the outdoors: a literature review. Sustainable Development Research Centre.**

- In Dr. Kellert's original research and synthesis he proclaims there is a positive correlation between play in nature and the development of a child's capacity "for creativity, problem-solving, and emotional and intellectual development."  
**Kellert, Stephen R. "Nature and Childhood Development." In *Building for Life: Designing and Understanding the Human-Nature Connection*. Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 2005.**
- Faber Taylor, Kuo and Sullivan's original research found that ADD symptoms in children are more manageable with increased activities in green areas.  
**Taylor, Andrea Faber; Faber E. Kuo; and William C. Sullivan. In *Environment and Behavior*, Vol. 33, No. 1, January 2001. Sage Publication, Inc.**
- Dr. Kellert's earlier research indicated participation in outdoor education programs resulted in increased self-esteem, independence and initiative among teenage youth. These results persist through many years.  
**Kellert, Stephen R: with the assistance of Victoria Derr. "A National Study of Outdoor Wilderness Experience." New Haven: Yale University, 1998.**

### **Services and Programs Offered:**

The QVRRDF's multi-faceted services and programs are directed towards raising our community's eco-consciousness. We achieve this through offering curriculum related environmental education programs to over 10,000 K-12 students in the province, offering youth and adult adventure programming for local extra-curricular groups, as well as providing quality environmental day camps and birthday parties, expanding eco-consciousness in youth from early ages to foster a lifelong appreciation of nature.

The Foundation operates the Suncor Energy Fluvarium as a public centre of environmental excellence 7 days a week for individuals and families to explore our exhibits and learn from our environmental educators. With 3,200 square feet over two exhibit levels, visitors learn about how water is an essential powerful resource that shapes our world extensively as well as have the unique opportunity to get up-close with brown trout, minnows and other river fauna passing by the Fluvarium windows which look into the natural ecosystem of Nagle's Hill Brook.

Throughout the year there are also a variety of events that entice the public to seek out more information to help be more environmental friendly. Some of these events are collaborative efforts with other environmental non-governmental organizations, such as hosting an outreach fair annually for Earth Day as well as events that get families outside experiencing the Rennie's River trail.

### **Population Served:**

The QVRRDF serves a broad and varied population as a public centre for environmental education. Specific groups include:

- K-12 students from across the province including Labrador, with the majority residing in the Northeast Avalon.
- University students specializing in education and/or environmental issues.
- Extra-curricular community groups including but not limited to Girl Guides, Scouts, senior social clubs, athletic teams visiting the region, and environmental non-governmental organizations.
- Local families interested in being environmental stewards in all facets.
- Tourist groups of both those visiting from abroad and vacationing at home.

### **Financial Need:**

The QVRRDF through the Suncor Energy Fluvarium offers over 25 environmental educational programs that reach approximately 10,000 students annually. The centre's programming aligns with specific curriculum objectives while fostering a lifelong appreciation of nature. Funding our environmental education programs is an ongoing project which costs approximately \$142,000 per year. Please consider donating \$1,000 to help expand our environmental education department's programs and services.

Additional funding would help the QVRRDF's education department:

- Develop new environmental education programs.
- Develop an outreach program, allowing our educators to teach students while exploring local watersheds in their own neighborhood.
- Develop teacher in-services to increase the abilities of educators to connect students with nature within a learning environment.
- Subsidize the cost of travel for schools outside of the Northeast Avalon region.
- Offer free programs to schools in historically low-income districts.
- Expand program resources to enhance the students' learning experience including materials needed to upgrade our outdoor classroom.
- Obtain the supports required to maintain a greater diversity of live exhibits.

Current revenue sources include:

- Visitor admission fee to the Suncor Energy Fluvarium to view our exhibits and participate in our environmental education programs.
- Fundraising campaigns and events throughout the year that engage the citizens of the Northeast Avalon.
- Corporate project sponsorships.
- Grants and wage subsidy programs are sought from all levels of government, nongovernmental organizations and foundations.
- An in-house catering service for retreats, business conferences, weddings and other events. During the summer months we also host a lunch time Deck Cafe.

# **Environmental Education**

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With your support, the QVRRDF can enhance the health of our community and continue to meet its mission of education, advocacy and stewardship to inspire the protection, conservation and enhancement of freshwater ecosystems. Please contact us for more information on how we can work together to foster eco-consciousness. Thank you for your consideration.

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