




Midpeninsula Regional
Open Space District

Memorandum

DATE: August 10, 2016

MEMO TO: MROSD Board of Directors

FROM: Shelly Lewis, Public Affairs Manager

THROUGH: Stephen E. Abbors, General Manager 

SUBJECT: Vida Verde Nature Center Grant Report

In September 2015, the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District (District) awarded Vida Verde Nature Education (Vida Verde) a \$10k grant to support its outdoor education program for inner-city, low income youth. This grant was aligned with the Board of Directors' Fiscal Year 2016-17 Strategic Plan Goals and Objectives for the engagement of diverse communities and enhanced public education programs.

The following attachment is a grant report from Vida Verde highlighting services provided and outcomes. According to the report, the District's grant specifically enabled a 5th grade class from East Palo Alto Charter School to attend a three-day outdoor education program.

Vida Verde is a unique outdoor education program that is specifically designated to ensure success and long-term positive impacts for urban, low-income youth. The non-profit organization is located in San Gregorio, California adjacent to the District's La Honda Creek Open Space Preserve. They serve youth from the entire Bay Area including those who live within District boundaries.

Attachment: Vida Verde Nature Education Grant Report.



Vida Verde Nature Education

Educational Equity in the Outdoors

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2015-16 Grant Report

In September of 2015, Vida Verde was pleased to receive a grant in the amount of \$10,000 from the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District to support our outdoor education programs for inner-city, low-income youth. The following report outlines the impact of the grant and the project, and our success in meeting the goals set forth in the initial proposal.

Who We Served

During the 2015-16 school year, Vida Verde provided free programs for 774 4th-6th grade students from the Bay Area, along with their teachers and parent chaperones. 99% of the students were minorities, over 85% qualified for free/reduced-price lunch programs at school, and none would otherwise have had the opportunity to participate in a similar program due to the costs. The MROSD grant specifically enabled a 5th grade class of students from East Palo Alto Charter School (EPACS) to attend an unforgettable three-day program at Vida Verde on September 22-24, 2015.

Activities and Services Provided

Vida Verde served 31 classes of students during 2015-16. Each class, including the 5th graders of EPACS, was provided with lessons and activities that address California state educational standards, and with myriad opportunities to learn, explore, and adventure in the outdoor classroom of the rocky coast, redwood forest, and on our educational farm. Each student participated in five core activities:

- (1) Nature Hike in the Redwoods,
- (2) Goat Milking & Cheese Making,
- (3) Tidepool, Beach & Marsh Exploration,
- (4) Night-time Hike and Trust Walk, and
- (5) Organic Farm Tour & Taste.

Throughout the trip, focus was placed on science standards, personal responsibility, teamwork and leadership, environmental awareness, public lands, and healthy food choices. In addition, the students enjoyed cooking, eating and cleaning up as a class, teambuilding games, exercise, a campfire, camping out in our magnificent teepees and more!



The activities were “first-time” experiences for the majority of children served. To ensure the students’ success, the trip was carefully structured with eye-opening, fun activities coupled with clear and attainable expectations, consistency, and opportunities to recognize and reflect upon successes. With this foundation in place, the programs positively and powerfully impacted the students’ academic performance, character development, and connection to the outdoors.

Outcomes

Vida Verde utilizes a multifaceted approach to evaluate progress in achieving programmatic excellence:

1. On a weekly basis, we analyze both quantitative and qualitative results of post-program evaluations from teachers.
2. We read and review letters from each student detailing his/her experience.
3. We conduct ongoing, internal instructor evaluations which include observation in the field, both peer-to-peer observations and observations by our Head of Program and Executive Director.

Through these evaluation processes, we measure our success, as well as make changes and improvements where needed.

We set four main objectives, with a goal of receiving the highest possible ratings in each category from at least 80% of teachers in post-program evaluations. Outcomes from the 2015-16 school year are as follows:

- 82% reported **A Marked Improvement** (*highest possible rating*) in students' classroom learning and science test scores.
- 97% reported **A Marked Improvement** in students' teamwork, self-confidence and personal responsibility.
- 85% reported **A Marked Improvement** in students' overall experiences when they return to school.
- 94% reported **A Marked Improvement** in students' awareness of and interest in environmental issues.

In addition:

- 98% rated the overall benefit to students **"Exceptional"** (*highest possible rating*).
- 98% rated student enjoyment **"Exceptional"**.

Teachers had the following to say after their trip to Vida Verde this year:

"Children's curiosity + fresh eyes to learn + camp = life changing. I love watching children play in the dirt, develop their teamwork skills and laugh with one another - priceless! Sometimes children just need one experience to change their global perspective."

– Brittney O'Brien, 5th Grade Teacher, East Palo Alto Charter School

"Vida Verde is one of the strongest outdoor education programs in the state! Not only are they weaving in instruction throughout all the engaging lessons, they are teaching sustainability which is what the next generation needs most."

– Katie Doyle, 4th Grade Teacher, Daly City





"Students love Vida Verde because Vida Verde connects them with a part of their world they are disconnected from for most of their life up to this point. They enjoy the exploratory education, the challenge of doing new and maybe unusual or unimaginable things like standing in a burned out Redwood, kissing a banana slug, or taking a solo hike at night."

— Andrew Aguilar, 4th Grade Teacher, San Jose

Looking Ahead:

We feel extremely positive about Vida Verde's future! Scheduling for the 2016-17 school year will be completed in the next several weeks, with returning teachers and principals eager to bring their students to Vida Verde and an already growing waiting list. We plan to serve another 750 students in the coming year. Alongside our programs, Vida Verde is currently focused on the following organizational goals and activities:

- Increasing staff diversity.
- Re-designing staff professional development in order to significantly reinforce and capture the model and culture of Vida Verde.
- Enhancing the organization's ability to recruit, support, and retain highly effective staff through the revamping of our HR policies and the creation of a new Employee Handbook.
- Executing a capital campaign to purchase and fully develop our home site.

The future looks bright and we're excited about the positive changes and improvements to come. The support of the Midpeninsula Regional Open Space District made a significant impact on our overall success, and on the lives of the urban students we served together. We're grateful for this fruitful partnership, and we hope it will continue into the future as we work towards educational equity in the outdoors.

