

Zoo Interns are Future Leaders

Program provides mentored work experience

Now in its 21st year, the Oregon Zoo's Animal Presenter (ZAP) program presented by First Tech Federal Credit Union, is older than some of its graduates.

The three-year, paid internship program primarily serves youth of color and youth from low-income families by introducing them to wildlife conservation with mentored work experience.

"Paid internship opportunities can be hard to come by in any year, and this year has been more difficult than ever for youth to find and employers to provide safe, engaging and enriching programs," said Nicole Frisch, senior director of community engagement at First Tech. "We're so proud to continue our partnership with



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE OREGON ZOO.

A local high school student gains valuable work experience talking to kids from Vestal Elementary in northeast Portland as part of the Oregon Zoo's Animal Presenter program, a three-year paid internship to serve youth of color and youth from low income families.

the zoo on another year of the ZAP program, supporting access to STEM-related skills, career exploration and long-

term mentorship."

Since 1999, ZAP has employed 236 teens or about 10 new teens each year.

"The ZAP program offers formative experiences for youth to connect with the natural world," said Pam McEl-


wee, ZAP program coordinator. "And at the same time, it helps strengthen the zoo's ties to our community. It offers young people job skills and support to grow and learn while they educate others. Alumni have gone on to do some incredible things, with some pursuing careers in education, conservation and even comedy."

First-year ZAP members provide animal-based outreach programming for children and families around the community. The following year, members work as counselors with the Urban Nature Overnight program, teaching children ages 8-11 recreation skills and basic environmental concepts while camping overnight at local natural areas. Third-year ZAP members help mentor peers entering the program and engage in internship placements at the zoo's veterinary medical center and butterfly conservation lab.

For additional information about the ZAP program, visit oregonzoo.org/zap.


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