

## Into the Parks Adventure Club

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This year, Philadelphia Parks & Recreation received a grant for \$10,000 from the US Forest Service that allows children from recreation centers, surrounded by concrete, to explore the forests and waterways of Philadelphia's parks. Throughout the year, the environmental education staff, supported by the US Forest Service field station staff and other PPR staff, is working with children ages 8-12 from Palumbo, Waterview and James Wright Recreation Centers. Beginning with an introduction to nature in their neighborhood, the 23 children then took their first trip to either Wissahickon or Pennypack Parks. A series of six trips are scheduled for one Saturday each month. Children are picked up at 10 a.m. and returned by 3 p.m., traveling by bus and van to their adventure.



In November, children from Palumbo discovered the meadows of the Andorra Natural Area and played hide and seek in the tall grasses. They tasted frozen icicles from a recently cut grape vine and made their own healthy lunch to enjoy out in the woods. The day finished with a campfire, and one girl exclaiming, "This was the best adventure EVER!"

January's trip began in 15 degree temperatures, but not one child complained about the cold! They were treated to a hot meal of oatmeal, homemade soup and biscuits made by Pennypack's staff. A short lesson on map and compass reading led to an outdoor adventure into the fields and forests. To complete the day, the children tried out snow shoes, and went sledding down a forested hill, dodging brambles and logs.



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Future trips will take the children to the Wissahickon to enjoy Maple Sugar Day, fishing and exploring life in the Wissahickon Creek, and birding at the John Heinz National Wildlife Refuge. The year will conclude with a trip the USFS field station in NJ to help seine for fish, participating in an actual science survey.

This pilot program allows us to look at the challenges our department faces in getting the children from Philadelphia's neighborhoods into our parks. While this grant pays for the transportation to get the children to the parks, we are discovering that staffing the program with both recreation center staff and Environmental Education staff may challenge the growth of this program.

One thing we are sure of is that the children are having a wonderful time and experiencing new adventures, and that is what we're all about.



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