

Volunteering & Engagement Report 2021

Date: January 28, 2022

To: Board of Management

From: Senior Director, Strategic Communications & Guest Experience

Wards: All

SUMMARY

This report will update the Board of Management on the activities of the Volunteering & Engagement Unit for the year 2021. The volunteer team regularly consists of Year-Round Volunteers, Summer Volunteers, Volunteer Hosts, Wildlife Health Centre Volunteers, and Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The Senior Director, Strategic Communications & Guest Experience recommends that:

1. The Board of Management of the Toronto Zoo receives this report for information.

FINANCIAL IMPACT

There is no financial impact resulting from the adoption of the recommendations in this report.

DECISION HISTORY

There is no decision history available for this item.

COMMENTS

In 2021, Volunteering & Engagement operated our Year-Round and Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteer programs, and combined the Summer and Host programs into one due to reduced volunteer opportunities and safety concerns as a result of pandemic restrictions. All volunteers support the Zoo's educational objectives by interacting with

guests, helping to raise public awareness and involvement in conservation, interpreting the zoogeographic and ecological relationships of the animal and plant kingdoms, and enhancing the experience of each Toronto Zoo guest with whom they come in contact. In 2021, a team of 225 Year-Round Volunteers, 27 Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers, and 19 seasonal volunteers (Summer and Hosts) donated 16,733 hours of their time to the Toronto Zoo reaching an estimated 439,176 people.

Zoo Ambassador Student and Seasonal Volunteer Programs Returned

The Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteer program returned in 2021, allowing new and returning Zoo Ambassadors from 2020 to begin re-training and assisting on-site once again. A total of 27 Zoo Ambassadors joined us in 2021. Seasonal (Summer, Host, and Wildlife Health Centre) volunteers from 2019 were also invited back to assist when the Zoo re-opened in June. It was wonderful to see 19 of these returning seasonal volunteers back in action. Recruitment of new volunteers was put on hold for 2021 due to the uncertainty of when the Zoo would re-open after the pandemic-related closure. We plan to resume recruitment again in 2022.

Interpretive stations adapted to offer a safe, high-quality guest experience

Similar to 2020, we altered our traditional interpretive station model to continue to provide a high-quality guest experience while managing the constraints of COVID-19. In addition to our wayfinding stations, we continued and expanded on our offering of “roam zones” where volunteers circulated in specified areas of the Zoo to maximize opportunities to interact with small groups of guests. To ensure their safety, as well as the safety of Zoo guests, volunteers were required to complete COVID-19-specific training before returning to the Zoo site and additional processes were put in place to keep everyone healthy and safe.

Toronto Zoo Volunteer Pam Paterson is awarded Canada’s Accredited Zoos & Aquariums (CAZA) Volunteer of the Year award

We were extremely proud when Pam Paterson, a dedicated Zoo volunteer for the past 11 years, was announced the winner of the 2021 CAZA Volunteer of the Year Award. Pam has been an active and engaged member of the volunteer team throughout her tenure, excelling in all regular volunteer duties and also going above and beyond to help us maintain an exceptional experience both for volunteers in the program and for Zoo guests. This includes obtaining her Certified Interpretive Guide credential, actively participating as a mentor for new volunteers, fulfilling the Day Captain role, being a team lead for her day of volunteers, and contributing to many of the Zoo’s fundraising and events initiatives. In her time at the Zoo, Pam has accumulated over 4,500 hours of service, more than five times the expected minimum contribution!

Zoo Camp returned with welcome support from Zoo Ambassadors

With COVID-19 protocols in place, Zoo Camp was able to safely operate in 2021 and Zoo Ambassador Student Volunteers once again assisted counsellors and engaged with campers to ensure a fun and engaging camp experience for all. With more safety measures needed, Zoo Ambassadors were a welcome addition to the groups. Overall nine Zoo Ambassadors assisted with Zoo Camp, donating 474 hours of their time.

Volunteers continued to expand and upgrade their skills

Volunteer monthly meetings provide continuing education and, since April 2020, have

been held virtually for health and safety reasons. The added benefit of the virtual format is that we are now able to reach volunteers who were not typically able to attend our in-person presentations prior to the pandemic.

2021 presenters included:

Beth Gilhespy, Toronto Zoo Wildlife Conservancy
Jon Spero, Wildlife Care & Welfare
Paul Hicks, Re: public urbanism and Manon Otto, Mandaworks
Second Harvest Toronto
Shawn Blackburn, Samantha Payne, and Rachel Klein, Learning & Engagement
Amorell Saunders N'Daw and Valerie Peticca, Human Resources
Kyla Greenham, Conservation Programs & Environment
Siga Lapinskas, Nutrition Science
Dr. Andrew Lentini, Wildlife & Science
Dr. Gaby Mastro Monaco, Dr. Liz Okruhlik, and Paula Mackie, Reproductive Sciences

Additionally, a series of Town Halls were hosted by CEO, Dolf DeJong, approximately every 6 weeks throughout the year, to keep volunteers informed and engaged and answer their questions.

Volunteers remained highly involved with the Zoo even during the lengthy Provincial lockdown by continuing to develop their skills and knowledge, both by taking advantage of external offerings and by initiating their own peer-to-peer sessions, including a virtual escape room! External learning platforms and courses were wide-ranging and included offerings from the TRCA, Oak Ridges Moraine Land Trust, and Ocean Wise, to name just a few.

The use of our volunteer management system was instrumental in expanding our online training capabilities again this year. Video recordings of the monthly meetings, Town Halls, and mandatory training were posted for volunteers unable to participate in the live session. Additional training was delivered through e-modules and included: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, Toronto Zoo Animal Welfare Program, De-escalation Training for staff/volunteers interacting with difficult guests, and updated Zoo Policies.

The Toronto Zoo continues to benefit from the dedication of long-service volunteers

To recognize volunteer milestones this year, we held a virtual celebration attended by 145 Volunteers. More than 30 volunteers received recognition awards for their dedicated service to the Zoo. This included six volunteers awarded for 15 years of service, one volunteer reaching 20 years of service, two at 25 years, one at 35 years, and one who reached a remarkable 45 years of service! We also recognized milestones in our hours-of-service program which was introduced to recognize and motivate volunteers who contribute a significant number of hours over a short period of time, or who show longstanding commitment in our seasonal volunteer programs. Ten Volunteers earned their 350 hours-of-service award, four earned awards for 750 hours, four for 1,150 hours, one for 1,500 hours, two for 1,850 hours, and one reached the 2,250 milestone. We also had one exceptional volunteer break the hourly recognition

record, achieving 4,000 hours of service over her 10-year (and counting) Zoo volunteer career.

The Toronto Zoo supports a variety of recognition events and programs for volunteers

Despite the continued challenges presented by COVID-19, we found innovative and meaningful ways to recognize our many valued volunteers in 2021. During National Volunteer week, April 18-24, we sent daily video messages from our management team to let the volunteers know how much we appreciate them. In June, we held a virtual volunteer appreciation event, in place of our annual Strawberries & Wine party, where 34 volunteers were recognized for their dedicated service to the Zoo. In December, we organized an evening of holiday cheer, inviting volunteers on-site for an exclusive visit to the Holiday Marketplace and tickets to the Terra Lumina Night Walk. Additionally, in 2021 nine volunteers were honoured for their service through the annual Ontario Volunteer Service Awards organized by the Ontario Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration. One of our volunteers was also nominated for a National Association for Interpretation Region 4 Outstanding Interpreter award and a group nomination was submitted for the Scarborough Heroes award to recognize the 15 volunteers who donated their time and materials to make cloth masks for the Scarborough Health Network. Volunteers are kept continually engaged and informed about important Zoo information and events via email, through our volunteer blog, and through the staff newsletter “Zoo Connections”, in addition to our various monthly professional development opportunities. Volunteers also receive uniforms partially subsidized by the Zoo and this year were thanked for their efforts with a new Zoo-branded lanyard and ID card holder to complement their uniform.

Partnerships with post-secondary institutions continue to help us strengthen our communication of messaging

We continue to partner with Centennial College, University of Toronto, Fleming College, and various other post-secondary institutions on various interpretive projects, including new and updated interpretive signage and materials. In 2021, students gained valuable experience while supporting us with various signage projects through classwork and internships. Toronto Zoo is a sought-after placement location for internships, demonstrating the success of the partnership.

Zoo Volunteer animal welfare assessment team launched

Volunteers have always been involved in assisting with animal behavioural and welfare observations, however these have been mainly on an ad hoc or impromptu basis. This year we tapped into the incredible skills and knowledge of our volunteers to more formally assist the Wildlife Care & Welfare team with animal welfare assessments. A small group of interested volunteers was provided in-depth training and then began performing regular assessments on site to provide the Wildlife Care & Welfare staff with a set of standardized and consistent data.

Volunteers show dedication in supporting our community partners and projects

Volunteers were also active in offering a helping hand and support to our community partners. Three volunteers donated 78 hours of service in support of Second Harvest programs which included packing food boxes for families in need or working in the kitchen preparing hot meals for delivery. In the fall, 10,000 Trees hosted a multi-day

tree-planting event at the Rouge National Urban Park. Three volunteers donated 14 hours of service planting trees in support of the waterfront restoration project in the park. In December, volunteers also provided wayfinding during the COVID-19 vaccination clinic for 5-11 year-old children, which was run by Scarborough Health Network and hosted in the Zoo's Special Events Centre.

Guided interpretive offerings for students and families continued

Zoo Expeditionz, fee-based, highly interpretive and interactive private tours of the Zoo's exhibits led by volunteers were created and launched in 2020. They allowed us to offer safe opportunities for students and families to enhance their visit and support out-of-school learning while also generating revenue for the Zoo. The offering was continued in fall 2021.

Volunteers host Virtual Field Trip chats on Zoolife.tv

The TorontoZooLife channel on Twitch TV underwent an evolution and was launched as a stand-alone platform called ZooLife.tv in the spring of 2021. As with the pilot project, volunteers continued to provide interactive chats with viewers connecting to the live streams from our animal exhibits (giraffes, gorillas, and penguins). With the birth of the Amur tiger cub "Mila", a new habitat was added to the Zoo experience, and volunteers delivered Nature Expert chats from the tiger exhibit in place of the penguin exhibit. Over the year, a team of 12 volunteers contributed 554 hours of presentation time and reached approximately 8,500 views. This included 81 school groups, as self-identified in the chat, tuning in as part of their school's virtual learning opportunity.

Volunteering & Engagement staff present at the virtual 2021 NAI Great Lakes Regional Interpretive Workshop

Over 100 interpreters from across the National Association for Interpretation's Great Lakes Region 4 attended the region's first virtual conference from March 23 – 25, 2021. The theme of this year's regional workshop was "Interpreting the Rapids of Change". Denise Hill-Fox and Karen Conway, Volunteering & Engagement Coordinators, shared with workshop participants how our team implemented a successful switch from a low-tech volunteer management system to an online system. Presentation highlights included describing the onboarding process of over 400 volunteers, how our internal processes changed, and how we used the new system to keep volunteers engaged during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Several on-going volunteer activities not possible in 2021 due to COVID-19

Again in 2021, the challenges and precautions related to COVID-19 paused many yearly programs and events that volunteers usually deliver or support. This included our involvement with the Toronto Public Library's Museum + Arts Pass Program and support for the Zoo's Species Awareness Days. We plan to resume these activities as soon as it is safe to do so.

Extended corporate/community volunteer activities at the Toronto Zoo

Outside of the activities of the Volunteering & Engagement Unit, the Toronto Zoo also engages corporate and community groups/individuals in various volunteering opportunities under the larger co-ordination of the Wildlife & Science Division. These activities include tree plantings and harvesting browse cuttings to support the health and nutrition of the animals. Unfortunately, due to the challenges of COVID-19 these

activities could not be safely completed in 2021. We are hopeful that they will resume in 2022, when it is safe to do so.

Performance Measurements:

Table 1: The chart below shows the trend of various volunteer activities on-site and off-site and overall volunteer hours for 2017 to 2021.

Toronto Zoo Volunteer Led Programs / Activities	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	% change vs. 2020
On-Site						
Number of people in groups toured	11,718	13,647	13,772	553	258	(53.3%)
Number of groups toured	476	586	725	71	28	(60.6%)
Off-Site						
Volunteer Led Outreach	18	16	23	1	1	0
Schools/Community presentations	13	11	9	0	0	0
b) Event Interpretive Tables	5	5	14	1	1	0
c) Number of people contacted	2,426	1,951	4,056	1,552	403	(74.0%)
Overall						
Total number of volunteer hours	29,210	34,106	39,088	17,856	16,733	(6.3%)

Notes on Performance Measures:

The pandemic had an obvious impact on many of our regular activities related to presenting to large groups, including outreach and guided tours. We were however, still able to connect with many guests in small family groups when the Zoo was open and volunteers on-site still contributed a relatively high number of hours given the constraints of being closed for more than six months.

It should also be noted that additional grant funded outreach programs are delivered annually by staff of the Wildlife & Science Division. In 2021, the Adopt-A-Pond program once again reached thousands of individuals across the province and beyond, including over 450 people through the Turtle Tally and FrogWatch Community Science initiatives,

and with approximately 13,000 views through social media on Facebook (both Toronto Zoo and Adopt-A-Pond pages), YouTube, Instagram, and through the Adopt-A-Pond Blog. Adopt-A-Pond also created and hosted its first Turtle Nesting Workshop for home/landowners in the areas surrounding the Rouge National Urban Park, and plan to expand on this range in 2022!

2021 was another highly successful and exciting year for the Great Lakes Program as well. The program was awarded the 2021 Significant Achievement Award from the Association of Zoos and Aquariums in the Education Award category. Additionally, the Great Lakes Program received the 2021 Partnership Award from long-time partners in aquatic conservation, Ontario Streams. We reached over 11,500 students through in-class virtual presentations delivered in English and French in over 30 different school boards. Livestreaming on platforms such as Facebook and Instagram resulted in over 80,000 views. The Great Lakes Program also reached 4,000 students during a livestream interview celebrating World Oceans Day. Finally, the freshwater mussel reporting and identification app, Clam Counter, received 67 reports of freshwater mussel sightings in 2021 following an annual trend of increasing reports since the app launched in 2017.

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