

Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures

Canoemobile 2016

Evaluation Brief

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Program Description

The Urban Wilderness Canoe Adventures program (UWCA) provides a continuum of experiences for youth and families. These experiences are designed to engage participants in a lifelong relationship with the outdoors, foster leadership and skill development, and encourage environmental awareness. The UWCA seeks to achieve these goals through efforts and activities designed to reach and engage underserved low and middle income urban youth and families.

The Canoemobile program is an outgrowth of the original UWCA program. Canoemobile, in collaboration with federal, state, and local partners, serves thousands of youth and adults of all backgrounds and abilities on local waterways. The Canoemobile consists of six handmade, 24-foot Voyageur canoes that serve as a floating classroom. Staff members lead participants in fun and engaging, water-based activities that also provide participants with important environmental, cultural, and historical content. Canoemobile connects urban youth to the natural world through hands-on, outdoor learning in cities across America.

The Canoemobile program seeks to:

- Engage thousands of underserved urban youth in the outdoors.
- Increase academic achievement through place-based learning.
- Connect youth to educational and career opportunities across the outdoor sector.
- Provide resources, curriculum support, and professional development opportunities for teachers.
- Inspire the next generation of citizens to enjoy, explore, and protect public lands.

KEY FINDINGS

The Canoemobile program serves as a floating classroom that provides fun and engaging, water-based activities to connect urban youth of all abilities to the natural world through hands-on, outdoor learning on local waterways in cities across America.

- Between April and May 2016, over 1,000 participants from five states completed the post-trip survey.
- The majority of participants (96%) were from California, Minnesota, and Colorado.

There were high levels of agreement across all survey items and the most frequent response for all nine items was *strongly agree*. To highlight:

- 94% agreed that trip leaders were knowledgeable;
- 92% agreed that contributing to their community was important;
- 91% agreed that they had learned new skills; and
- 88% indicated they felt like they belonged on the trip.

In addition, respondents agreed that, as a result of the trip, they: were more interested in protecting the environment (86%), had a stronger connection to nature (86%), will think about the environment more often (85%), had learned about outdoor jobs (80%), and were more aware of their personal strengths (79%).

Survey results were also analyzed comparing the 14 Canoemobile trips open to people of all abilities to the 4 trips open only to people with disabilities. Although the two groups were very similar, respondents in the “disabilities groups” were more likely to agree with the statements that related to an awareness of their own personal strengths and the importance of contributing to their communities.

Methods

The program staff who led the Canoemobile trips also administered the post-trip survey to all participants near the end of each trip. The survey consisted of nine items that asked participants to reflect on the effects that the experience had on them. Respondents were asked to indicate their agreement to each statement using a four-item scale ranging from *strongly disagree* to *strongly agree*. The surveys were administered to participants on Canoemobile trips that occurred in five states—California, Colorado, Michigan, Minnesota, and Texas—between April 5, 2016 and May 13, 2016.

Findings

Participant Demographic Data

The survey responses of 1,065 participants from 18 Canoemobile trips were collected and analyzed. The majority of survey respondents (71%) were between the ages of 8 and 14 years of age. The median age of all survey respondents was 11 years of age. Fourteen percent (14%) of the respondents did not provide information about their age (see Table 1).

Table 1. Participants by Age Ranges

Age range (<i>n</i> =1,065)	Percent
8-14	71%
15-19	8%
20 and older	8%
Missing	14%
Total	100%

The largest percentages of survey responses were collected from three states: California (43%), Minnesota (41%), and Colorado (11%). These three states made up 95% of the surveys collected. The survey responses from Michigan (*n*=26) and Texas (*n*=22), combined, made up 4% of all responses. Less than 1% of the respondents either did not provide information related to residency or lived in a different state (e.g., Ohio) (see Table 2).

Table 2. Participants by State

State (<i>n</i> =1,065)	Percent
CA	43%
MN	41%
CO	11%
MI	2%
TX	2%
Missing	<1%
Total	100%

Trip Outcomes

There were high levels of agreement across all survey items. The most frequent response for all items was *strongly agree*, and more than 75% of the respondents slightly or strongly agreed with all nine items.

There was some variation in the percentages and strength of agreement across items. For example, 82% of respondents strongly agreed with Item Q9, “Trip leaders were very knowledgeable,” and another 12% selected *slightly agree* (94% agreement). Similarly, 92% agreed that it was important to contribute to their community (Q7), and 91% agreed that they had learned new skills on the field trip (Q1). Sense of belonging on the trip had the next highest level of agreement with 63% selecting *strongly agree* and 25% selecting *slightly agree* (Q8). Respondents also indicated that, as a result of the trip, they were more interested in protecting the environment and that they had made stronger connections to nature (Q5 and Q2, respectively; 86% *slightly* or *strongly agree*). Eighty-five percent (85%) of the respondents agreed that the trip made them think of the environment more often (Q4; for all results see Table 3).

Table 3. Response Frequencies by Item

Survey Items	Strongly Disagree	Slightly Disagree	Slightly Agree	Strongly Agree
Q1. On this trip, I learned new skills. (n=1,054)	5%	5%	33%	58%
Q2. Trip activities helped me make stronger connections to nature. (n=1,046)	5%	10%	34%	52%
Q3. Because of this trip, I am more aware of my personal strengths. (n=1,046)	7%	14%	32%	47%
Q4. Because of this trip, I will think about the environment more often. (n=1,045)	6%	10%	33%	52%
Q5. Because of this trip, I am more interested in protecting the environment. (n=1,051)	4%	10%	32%	54%
Q6. During this trip, I learned about jobs in the outdoors. (n=1,046)	9%	13%	30%	50%
Q7. It is important to me to contribute to my community. (n=1,050)	3%	6%	29%	63%
Q8. On the trip, I felt like I belonged. (n=1,049)	5%	7%	25%	63%
Q9. Trip leaders were very knowledgeable. (n=1,054)	3%	3%	12%	82%

Analysis of Responses Based on Group Type

The previous section presented survey results for all 1,065 respondents combined across all 18 Canoemobile trips. In general, Canoemobile trips are open to all people, regardless of disability or other status; however, four of these 18 Canoemobile trips included only participants with disabilities (n=43). Thus, one additional analysis was performed comparing the responses of the respondents in the four “disabilities groups” to those in the “open groups” (the other 14 Canoemobile trips, n=1,022

respondents). When the responses of individuals in the “disabilities” and “open” groups were compared, we found a similar percentage of agreement on most items (see Table 4). There were, however, larger percentage differences on three of the nine items. For example, respondents in the “disabilities group” were more likely to agree with survey item 3, “*Because of this trip, I am more aware of my personal strengths*” (88% agreement in the “disabilities groups” vs. 79% in the “open groups”) and item 7 “*It is important to me to contribute to my community*” (95% agreement in the “disabilities groups” vs. 90% in the “open groups”). In contrast, respondents in the “open groups” were more likely to agree with item 9 (“*Trip leaders were very knowledgeable*”; 94% agreement in the “open groups” vs. 88% agreement in the “disabilities groups”). The total number of participants on these four trips was relatively small ($n=43$); thus, it is important to exercise some caution when drawing conclusions from a sample of this size.

Table 4. Comparing Percentages of Agreement for Two Groups

Survey Items	% Agreement Disabilities Groups	% Agreement Open Groups
Q1. On this trip, I learned new skills. ($n=43, n=1011$)	91%	91%
Q2. Trip activities helped me make stronger connections to nature. ($n=41, n=1005$)	88%	85%
Q3. Because of this trip, I am more aware of my personal strengths. ($n=43, n=1003$)	88%	79%
Q4. Because of this trip, I will think about the environment more often. ($n=43, n=1002$)	88%	85%
Q5. Because of this trip, I am more interested in protecting the environment. ($n=43, n=1008$)	84%	86%
Q6. During this trip, I learned about jobs in the outdoors. ($n=42, n=1004$)	81%	79%
Q7. It is important to me to contribute to my community. ($n=42, n=1008$)	95%	90%
Q8. On the trip, I felt like I belonged. ($n=42, n=1007$)	88%	88%
Q9. Trip leaders were very knowledgeable. ($n=43, n=1011$)	88%	94%

Conclusions

The Canoemobile program serves as a floating classroom that provides fun and engaging, water-based activities to connect urban youth to the natural world through hands-on, outdoor learning on local waterways in cities across America.

Between April and May 2016, over one-thousand participants from five states completed the post-trip survey ($n=1,065$). The majority of participants (96%) were from California, Minnesota, and Colorado. About four percent (4%) were from Michigan and Texas. The median age of Canoemobile survey respondents was 11 years of age.

Responses to questions regarding outcomes from the UWCA Canoemobile trip indicated that the trip met goals of engaging youth and young adults across the entire range of objectives. There were high levels of agreement across all survey items, and the most frequent response for all nine items was *strongly agree*. Participants agreed that they had positive outcomes as a result of the trip. For example,

- 94% agreed that trip leaders were knowledgeable;
- 92% agreed that it is important to contribute to their community;
- 91% agreed that they had learned new skills; and
- 88% indicated they felt like they belonged on the trip.

Most participants indicated, that as a result of the trip, they: were more interested in protecting the environment (86%), had a stronger connection to nature (86%), will think about the environment more often (85%), and had learned about outdoor jobs (80%). In addition, 79% of respondents indicated they were more aware of their own personal strengths after the trip.

When the responses of individuals in the “disabilities” and “open” groups were compared, we found a similar percentage of agreement on most items. However, respondents in the “disabilities” group were more likely to agree with the statements about an awareness of their own personal strengths and the importance of contributing to their communities.

Participants’ survey responses strongly suggest that the Canoemobile is reaching a wide range of participants and having a positive impact on those participants. The results suggest that Canoemobile is meeting its primary objectives of engaging thousands of underserved urban youth in the outdoors; connecting youth to educational and career opportunities across the outdoor sector; providing resources, curriculum support, and professional development opportunities for teachers; and making great strides to inspire the next generation of citizens to enjoy, explore, and protect public lands.