

Bridge Chattanooga / Tennessee River Gorge Trust Dalewood Middle School Afterschool Program

Summary

During the Spring of 2017, Ryan Keller and Clark Brewer of Bridge Chattanooga ran two months of afterschool programming at Dalewood Middle School during two separate four-week sessions. They operated Monday through Thursday from 2-7 p.m. and provided transportation, food, and experiences – including many outdoor experiences - for 22 sixth and seventh grade students (with 10 and 12 students in each session respectively). Tennessee River Gorge Trust is serving as the umbrella organization for this programming by providing infrastructure support and the capacity for fundraising while Clark and Ryan focus on the day-to-day operation of the program.

What is the value of this program for Students?

The target audience of this program includes many students who are disruptive to the classroom environment. The program allows students to:

- Participate in activities all over Chattanooga including many outdoor venues such as the Tennessee River Gorge, Stringer's Ridge, Missionary Ridge, Crabtree Farms, Chickamauga Battlefield, and Greenway Farms. Other stops included Hunter Art Museum, Rondell Crier's art studio, and several service projects.
- Learn how to shift their excessive reactions to stressors within the context of new environments. The opportunity to get out of their comfort zones and explore Chattanooga and surrounding areas provides a new perspective for our students while also challenging them to meet certain behavior expectations that are outlined explicitly at the beginning of each program session. Our hope is that students will learn new skills in our program environment and that these skills will transfer to the classroom environment.



J.D. lit up when he found out he had been selected to participate in the partnership program. He said, "I always wanted to see the world, but I never thought I would."

What is the value of this program for Parents?

Parents appreciate the program and our partners for several reasons:

- We welcome their high-energy students, feed them, take them on field trips that give them new experiences, drain their energy, and return them at home by 7 p.m.
- Happy kids equal less stress at home. Parents trust our staff as a result of the positive experiences the kids have had during our program time. We see the ability for our program staff to serve as intermediaries between home and school in the future.

What is the value of this program for School?

- This program develops students that are skilled and practiced at resolving conflicts in a verbal, non-violent manner. Our hope is that we can build this skill-set in a number of the school's social leaders, that they transfer their new skills to the school environment and exercise their ability to help shift school culture.
- Our program allows students to change how they view themselves – and how others view them – by giving them a new social environment that supports positive group interaction. Over the last three months Clark and Ryan have developed positive relationships with several key administrators who see the value of this work in the school. The Administrators hope to work with Bridge and the Trust in the fall to shift school culture in a positive manner.

What is the value of this program for the Community?

Chattanooga's name as the Best Outdoor City may be recognized by magazines, but the majority of the Chattanooga community is still unaware of the incredible natural resources that the city has to offer. Several organizations have attempted to correct this major disparity by developing youth programs to begin engaging more young people in the wilderness. This can be challenging, though, especially when ¼ of our young people live in poverty and do not have access to many of the natural resources and amenities in our town due to lack of knowledge, transportation and cultural connection. Our program is an effective model that is capable of being replicated at middle schools across Chattanooga. Work through programs like the Bridge/Trust partnership is necessary for the City of Chattanooga to fulfill its name as Best Outdoor City in America.

What is the value of this program for TRGT?

*"The Trust's mission is preserve the Tennessee River Gorge as a healthy and productive resource for our community through land protection, **education, community engagement,** and good land stewardship practices."*

This program significantly increases the Trust's capacity to engage in a formal educational initiative that reaches a diverse audience in a deep and meaningful way. Without a doubt, the Trust did not have staffing capacity to implement a program like this prior to our partnership with Ryan and Clark. Our donors – both corporate and individual – have shown us that they are willing to back a program like Bridge Chattanooga. The two-month pilot showed us that we can be successful – that the model can work. We believe that continuing the program for a full academic year (2017-2018) will help our constituents see the relevance of the work the Trust is doing for our community.

Where do we go from here?

The Board of the Tennessee River Gorge Trust recently voted to continue to serve as the umbrella organization for Bridge Chattanooga for the 2017-2018 academic year. They also voted to commit \$25,000 that was raised in 2016 to leverage funding for the school-year programming.

Preliminary numbers show that we will need approximately \$65,000-\$75,000 to run the program for 2017-2018. A detailed budget will be developed this summer. We believe that TRGT can help raise this funding via grants, corporate partnerships, Giving Tuesday 2017, and individual donations.

Healthy land and healthy people will help us build a stronger community – Thank you for valuing this fact.



Clark Brewer (L) and Ryan Keller (R) make great leaders for our students.



Leroy learned to ride a bike with the help of Ryan, Clark and Outdoor Chattanooga staff members.

