Empowering Youth to Create Change

August 4, 2016

A unique Traverse City youth program, “The Quest,” uses creative expression to help youth connect to the local food movement and find their voices for change.

SEEDS is a nonprofit organization located in Traverse City, MI. The collective develops holistic design solutions to solve complex ecological problems within their community. The diversely talented staff at SEEDS offer a variety of services including water treatment and conservation, greenhouse gas analyses, and ecological restoration.

Another major focus of SEEDS is youth development and education. One unique youth program that embodies the organization’s core values is called The Quest. The Quest is an annual music program that, according to current program organizer Chelsea Spencer, “nourishes bodies, minds and souls through creative expression.” The Quest began as a humble summer camp to bring more high quality arts education to local students and to engage creativity in order to explore other important concepts. Many studies have found creative expression to be a key factor in academic and life-long success. The brain works differently when it uses music and the other arts, and this can make learning more approachable and fun.

Dovetailing with SEEDS’ academic enrichment programs, The Quest programming starts in the after-school environment at specific schools and then intensifies during summer camps. During the spring, artists from the Earthwork Music Collective and Blackbird Arts provide instruction and help SEEDS staff make The Quest’s theme come alive for youth within a broader and creative context. Students go on field trips, do research, create art and are inspired by the promise of a big public performance!

The main goal of The Quest is to empower youth to create change. Empowering youth means helping them tap into their own sources of power and supporting them as they find their own voices. The program achieves this by focusing on a theme and exploring that theme through three types of activities:

- Increasing the knowledge and accessibility of arts and cultural resources.
- Connecting the creative arts with rich outdoor experiences.
- Improving access to good food by connecting students and their families with northwest Michigan’s burgeoning local foods network.

Past performances have included the following:

2013 Resilience Rock Out
The Resilience Rock Out camp encouraged youth to explore personal resilience, a practice and concept locally championed by Bob Russell of the Neahkahnie Research and Education Center.

2014 Celebration of Community
In 2014, The Quest partnered with the Library of Congress to celebrate the 75th anniversary of Alan Lomax’s Michigan folksong recordings. Students spent a semester exploring local history and used the tunes recorded locally in 1938 to inspire new lyrics and songs about their place.

2015 Quest for Something Fresh
The Quest for Something Fresh revisited an early collaboration between SEEDS and Earthwork Music to use music to celebrate fresh food and cooking from scratch. It was a delicious and nutritious community event!

This year, in celebration of the 100th Anniversary of the National Park Service, SEEDS and Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore are partnering for The Quest to Find Your Park. Local students will be exploring parks all over the region, watching the seasons shift and gaining a deeper appreciation of the natural features all around us.