

# SEEDS Loves Benzie County!

By Elizabeth Dunham

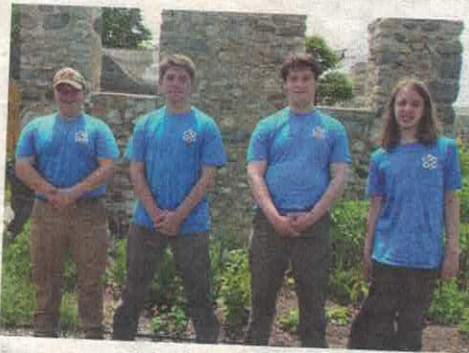
**S** EEDS After School and the SEEDS Youth Conservation Corps programs are blooming in Benzie County. Benzie area youth have already been hard at work as members of the SEEDS Conservation Corps completing projects within the region and earning while they learn as SEEDS summer employees. More good news: come fall, SEEDS After School will serve three schools in Benzie County with free after school programming four days a week.

SEEDS was recently awarded 21st Century Community Learning Center grants by the Michigan Department of Education for daily after school enrichment activities at Betsie Valley Elementary, Benzie Central Middle School, and Benzie Central High School and Academy. The High School program has already completed one school year with the program; the other two schools will begin this fall.

"It is so exciting to be able to expand our partnerships within the Benzie community," said Nicole Heffelfinger, After School Program Director. "We love nothing more than opportunities to connect youth with great mentors and the great out-of-doors." Over the last academic year, Benzie youth have had opportunities to participate in a range of hands-on projects, such as cooking classes, outdoor survival lessons, small construction projects like bluebird houses, and beach cleanups. Students also got to explore the John Ball Zoo in Grand Rapids, Tahquamenon Falls in the Upper Peninsula, and Mackinac City.



**SEEDS After School Benzie students learn about water quality on a field trip to Inland Seas. Pictured left to right: Emma Heinz, KaLee Boorsma, Hannah Kistler.**



**Four of six SEEDS 2019 Benzie Corpsmembers at Historic Barns Park in Traverse City. Pictured left to right: Caden Teichman, Nick Costales, Alex Myers, Isaac Lemmen. Not pictured: KaLee Boorsma, Cody Lewis.**

## COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

said Jennifer Flynn, Youth Conservation Corps Program Director. "What they have in common is an interest in working in the natural world and bettering their communities. We are so honored to work with these individuals and we can't wait to see where their futures take them."

SEEDS After School sites will have access to free programming four days per week and during the summer. They prioritize STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) lessons while placing a heavy emphasis on making learning hands-on and rooted in ecology. That means getting students out-of-doors and active. The two new Benzie school sites will join seven other SEEDS After School sites which, in past academic year, served over 350 unique students with nearly 30,000 hours of academic and cultural enrichment.

As youth approach adulthood, participating in the SEEDS Conservation Corps becomes an option. This program provides hands-on training and skill development for 21st century "green collar" jobs. This season, Benzie Corpsmembers have already constructed and raised bed gardens at Paul Oliver Memorial Hospital for horticulture therapy, constructed a tool shed and helped maintain the SEEDS Farm at Historic Barns Park, and worked with the US Forest Service along the Manistee River. They also reconstructed a boardwalk at the Trapp Farm—a Grand Traverse Regional Land Conservancy property in Benzie—and constructed new stairs for visitors.

"This year, our Benzie Corpsmembers bring a diverse set of interests ranging from economics to skilled trades to filmmaking,"

Since 1999, SEEDS has been actively implementing local solutions to global challenges in the NW Michigan region, creating jobs and finishing projects that are good for people and for planet. "We work with people of all ages, from municipal directors and facility managers to kindergarteners," says Executive Director Sarna Salzman. She adds, "Investing in youth is a particularly good investment in the future—our collective future. A student's success is a community success and organizationally we can think of no better response to the challenges we all face than providing high quality educational opportunities."

SEEDS exists to foster healthy, vibrant communities filled with clean food, great kids, and helpful neighbors. Learn more at [www.ecoseeds.org](http://www.ecoseeds.org) or find us on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram by searching @SEEDSTC.



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*Elizabeth Dunham is SEEDS' Outreach Coordinator. Originally from Kalkaska, she has a B.A. in International Relations from Michigan State University and a passion for building sustainable communities that live in harmony with the environment.*