

Wildlife in Need Center

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Innovative Education Project Funded by Oconomowoc Area Foundation *Connecting People and Wildlife through Learning, a new collaborative effort for the Wildlife In Need Center and The Little Environmentalists, to become a reality*

When it comes to connecting the community and wildlife through education, the Wildlife In Need Center (WINC) in the Town of Ottawa likes to do things by the book.

Recently, Rebecca Mattano, author and founder of The Little Environmentalists and Lake Country writer, Rebecca Seymour, approached WINC with the idea of creating a book that could be used in conjunction with the wildlife rehabilitation center's educational programs.

Through a grant from the Oconomowoc Area Foundation, that commitment to wildlife education will now continue in the form of an educational book featuring WINC's eight animal ambassadors.

A little help from their friends

Since opening its doors in 1994, the Wildlife In Need Center has taken care of over 30,000 animals, representing over 140 species of wildlife. In addition to providing rehabilitation to native Wisconsin wildlife, WINC's staff and many volunteers, with the help of eight animal ambassadors, reach out to over 8,000 children and adults annually - visiting schools, churches, scouting groups, libraries and civic organizations in an effort to build support for the area's wildlife and nature conservation.

WINC's animal ambassadors include Dakota, a Great Horned owl; Raenah, a Red-tailed Hawk; Indigo, an American kestrel; Daphne, a Muscovy Duck; Jewel, an endangered Ornate Box Turtle; Maize, a Corn Snake; Slither, a Fox Snake; and Waldo, a Woodchuck.

Most of these animals came to WINC or other rehabilitation centers with injuries or other restrictions preventing them from being successfully released back to the wild. As animal ambassadors, they now help illustrate up close and personal the importance and possibilities of living in harmony with wildlife.

"I've been to so many Wildlife In Need educational programs throughout the community with my family and my daughter donates a portion of her allowance each year to the center. The kids in the audiences become entranced with the animal ambassadors. They listen to their stories and then ask a ton of follow-up questions," said Seymour.

"But how do we continue that conversation about the importance of these animals going after the program is finished? We thought a children's book about WINC's ambassadors could be a wonderful tool to bring that message home and back into the classroom," she added.

Little Environmentalists

The Little Environmentalists in Hartland is committed to developing and publishing children's environmental education materials to promote environmental awareness, appreciation, knowledge, and stewardship. They believe that parents and educators want to teach children about nature and the environment, but may not have access to the tools and information to make learning about the environment exciting and simple.

"The book about Wildlife In Need's animal ambassadors and books we have published through The Little Environmentalists provide valuable resources for that nature connection and environmental appreciation, both at home and in the classroom," said Mattano.

Collaborating for wildlife

Education boards across the country are pushing for an increase in programs teaching environmental awareness for youth. At the same time, however, the funding isn't readily available to implement new programs.

Educational programs, like those provided by WINC and The Little Environmentalists help fill some of the missing pieces in this puzzle. Additionally, through the use of their educational animal ambassadors, WINC provides a tangible way for individuals of all ages to make a personal connection with their environment.

The two non-profit organizations have joined efforts to create and publish the educational book telling the amazing stories of these unique ambassadors of the natural world. The connection made by meeting one of these ambassadors during a group program can be continued, passed around, given as a gift and ultimately touch many more people than their current outreach programming can.

"We believe that this project will enhance the visibility of the quality programs we already provide and will also help us to reach a whole new audience as well," said Sheryl Cummings, WINC marketing coordinator.

Even with the grant awarded from the Oconomowoc Area Foundation, additional funding is still needed to cover printing costs of the book. For more information about donating to the project, Wildlife In Need and its education programs, call (262) 968-5075 or visit, www.helpingwildlife.org.

For more information on The Little Environmentalists, their products or programs, contact Rebecca Mattano, (262) 367-2038 or visit www.thelittleenvironmentalists.com.

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