

# Introducing AmeriCorps at the Racine Zoo

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**Racine Zoo AmeriCorps Program Member**

The Racine Zoo has a new group on campus, the AmeriCorps Educators team! Members have come from near and far to help serve the community here in Racine County. AmeriCorps is a national service organization that provides aid, education, and service to the communities in which they are based. AmeriCorps efforts at the Racine Zoo will be used to educate our community's youth about animals, ecology, and the ecosystem. Racine Zoo AmeriCorps Members started on August 19, 2019 and have hit the ground running, learning about the Zoo, AmeriCorps, Racine and all the educational programs they will be teaching. The Racine Zoo AmeriCorps Program (RZAP) is a great way to engage our community's students through impactful yet fun educational experiences.

RZAP educational programs will focus on grade levels K, 3, 4, 7, and 9 in public school districts within Racine County. These programs will be new to the students and give them every day applications to help promote environmental stewardship within their life and community. In their programs, RZAP Members will also be utilizing the education animal ambassadors at the Racine Zoo to promoting conservation initiatives within our youth. Each one of the programs will provide our community's students with an unforgettable experience with animal ambassadors or with nature found around them. For example, the 4th grade course, Beginning Birders, will get students outside and looking for birds at their schools and in their own backyards. Whereas for our Kindergarten class, Classification Cadets, students will learn about different animal classifications, such as mammals, by interacting with ambassadors like Lenny the long-tailed chinchilla. These hands-on activities will create a more meaningful memory and create a lasting impression.

The Members also are gaining invaluable experience working with the animals here at the Racine Zoo. Throughout their term of service, Members will be able to shadow Racine Zoo keepers and gain first-hand knowledge on what daily tasks are performed to make sure the Zoo runs smoothly. They will also get to work on positive reinforcement with the educational animals. The AmeriCorps program is providing

both the community and its Members with incredibly valuable information and experiences. The Members are extremely excited to be here and provide this needed service. Orientation has been very fun, and the team is becoming closer every day. Each member has a different background and strengths, making one very strong team that can lean on and learn from one another. All of us have come from a science or education background and have a passion for conservation education. Bringing these passions to younger generations is incredibly rewarding and important for solving large scale conservation issues. Member Hailey Isaac says, "I am excited for AmeriCorps at the Racine Zoo because it will help me grow as an educator and further explore my passion for working with animals."

Experiential learning is something that is very important to the Conservation Education Department at the Racine Zoo, and providing educational experiences to Racine County's school districts is not always easy. In Racine Unified School District (RUSD), 14 out of 20 elementary schools are considered Title One Schools, receiving extra federal funding due to the increasing number of students under the poverty line. Hands-on learning is one of the most effective forms of education, but can often be expensive and time consuming, preventing many schools and teachers from providing experiences such as Racine Zoo educational programs for their students. That's where the Racine Zoo AmeriCorps Program steps in: to provide a form of invaluable education with animals, outside activities and interactive projects.

Our Members are very excited to be at the Zoo and help everywhere they can. If you see someone in a powder blue/gray uniform, don't be afraid to say hello and ask any questions about the Racine Zoo AmeriCorps Program. This is a new and exciting program, and we are just as excited to share facts about it as you are to ask questions! If you or someone you know is interested in joining the AmeriCorps team for the 2020 – 2021 service year, please reach out to Racine Zoo AmeriCorps Program Coordinator Elise Olmstead at [eolmstead@racinezoo.org](mailto:eolmstead@racinezoo.org) for details!