



Christodora

Annual Report

2006

Nature • Learning • Leadership

offering environmental science
education and leadership
training to motivated low-income
New York City public school students



Christodora's

Nature, Learning, Leadership

programs give low income inner-city youth a first-hand, sustained, experience of nature, providing environmental science education programs and building leadership skills through wilderness experiences. We work directly in New York City public schools, in after-school programs, and at wilderness camps outside the city, primarily at our 85-acre Manice Education Center in the heart of the Berkshire Mountains. Our Elliman Scholars program provides full scholarships for high school students in science and wilderness programs at premier partner institutions. In the past year alone, 2,410 students have participated in our *Nature Learning Leadership* programs. Our partners include 15 public schools throughout the city. In this milestone year, Christodora marks its 25th Anniversary of operating our flagship wilderness and leadership program site, the Manice Education Center.



From Our Chairman and Executive Director

What an exciting year

It has been for Christodora and our *Nature Learning Leadership* Programs! As an organization we have made important strides forward, increasing our capacity in every area. As a result we were able to reach some 2,400 low-income New York City youth with year-round opportunities to explore their natural world, providing environmental science education programs and building leadership skills through wilderness experiences.

Among the accomplishments we want to highlight in this report are several that stand out for their significance:

- We partnered with 15 New York City middle schools (in the South Bronx, Harlem, the Lower East Side, and Queens) to carry out our *Nature Learning Leadership* program of hands-on lessons in ecology and the environment, activating students' sense of connection to the natural world around them, and building confidence and leadership. Provided at no cost, this unique program now has more requests from interested new schools than we can currently provide.
- In 2006 Christodora's Manice Education Center ("Manice") celebrates its 25th Anniversary. Its founding as a pioneering residential environmental education center for inner city youth set the direction for all Christodora's environmental education and leadership training programs to this day. Since its inception, Manice has increased its operating season from 3 to 6 months, maintaining the same high staff-student ratio of 1:5. This year Manice served 858 New York students in need, of whom some 90% received full scholarships from Christodora.
- Fifteen Christodora high school students participated in our Elliman Scholarship program at a range of premier partner institutions such as the Teton Science Schools, the Student Conservation Association and Hobart and William Smith Colleges.
- Our intensive field ecology program at the Great Mountain Forest in Connecticut welcomed 28 students over two 14-day sessions to learn about forest ecology, botany and river ecology.
- Christodora's two after school groups, the New Youth Conservationists and the Ecology Club, met weekly at the New York Botanical Garden throughout the year, offering some 15 junior high and high school students weekly hands-on learning and community service experiences. A primary focus was the protection and study of The Bronx River.
- Our 2006 Annual Benefit raised the bar yet again for Christodora, bringing support from new friends as well as many loyal contributors. Our featured

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guest was the author Jonathan Franzen and we premiered our new 5-minute documentary, *The Manice Education Center: Everything is Magical*, now available for viewing on our website: www.christodora.org. We encourage you to take a look!

- And finally, in 2006 Christodora has applied to become a Public Charity (after having been a Private Operating Foundation), and is working to develop sustained funding from individuals, foundations and corporations to help support the costs of carrying out our expanding mission. Through this strong public-private partnership, Christodora will continue to offer New York City's less fortunate young people vital opportunities for Nature, Learning, and Leadership in the century ahead.

We hope you'll join us in this vital endeavor.

Harriet Gerard, CHAIR

Katrina Cary, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



"The wilderness camping trip led me to think about how you can cooperate with peers to make things work. Those are the most essential skills in life to succeed."

"My new friends made it their business to make me feel safe."



The Manice Education Center: 25 Years!

In July 2006,

Christodora celebrated the 25th anniversary of the opening of the Manice Education Center, our wilderness camp in the Berkshire Mountains of Massachusetts. For this report we asked Ted Elliman, longtime Christodora Board member, Founder and first Manice Director, to share his memories from that first summer at Manice.

July 1981: The battered, staff-driven *Rent-a-Wreck* vans left 96th street with 28 intrepid seventh-to-ninth graders — our Manice pioneers. During the four-hour odyssey, their laughter and joshing gave way to an anxiety-tinged quiet. We were all a bit stunned — staff and students alike — as the vans turned down the narrow, rutted road to the camp. “Man, we are in the woods! This is country!” After weeks of anticipation, we knew it was sink or swim for us now.

After a two-year search, the Christodora Board had found a matchless location — an old farm nestled in a remote corner of the Berkshire Mountains, bordered by thousands of acres of public forest, with easy access to the Appalachian Trail, lakes, and white water rivers. Here we would extend Christodora's long tradition of camping programs for New York City youth, with our focus on wilderness and environmental education. We would focus on a relatively small number of students (30-40 at the camp at any time) recruited for their motivation and enthusiasm for attending a challenging outdoor program.

In the winter of 1980–81, we began meeting with New York City teachers and youth group leaders to urge their help in recruiting outstanding students. One of our first meetings was with the Associate Director of the Academy of Environmental Sciences on East 96th Street. As we talked through our goals and the organization's history, Cole Glenn gently interrupted us. “Gentleman, you need not explain any more. I participated in Christodora programs in the 1950s. You are a great organization, and your reputation has preceded you.” With that endorsement we were off and running, recruiting students and educator support from the East Harlem Block School, JHS 45, the American Museum of Natural History, Wave Hill, and the Brooklyn Botanic Garden.

However, we had one big problem — the 150-year old farmhouse was in total disrepair. Winter's deep snowpack and the impassibility of the narrow, rutted road during the March and April mud season meant there was only the smallest window of time to reconstruct the farmhouse, install electric lines and a well, construct the tent platforms, and prepare for students. And so, during the



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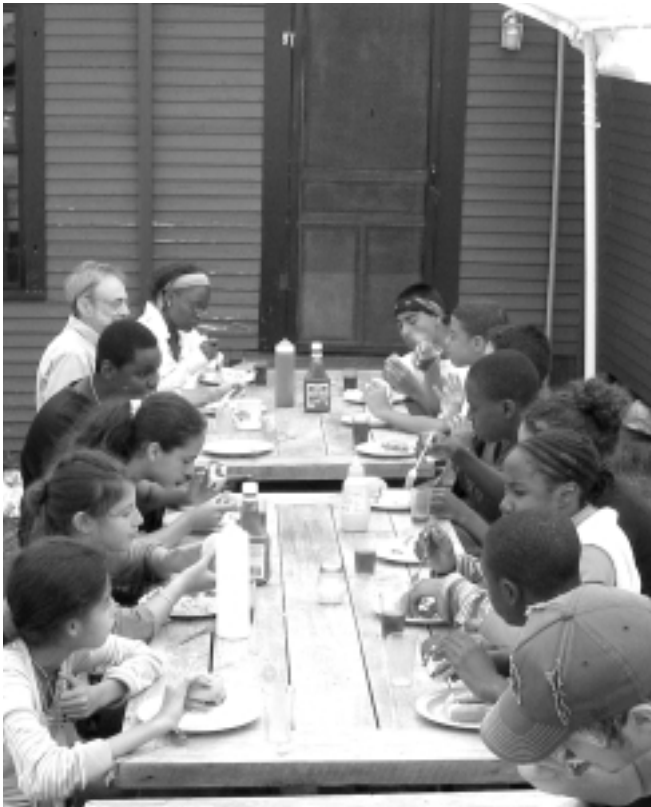
frenzied month of May, our builders took up residence and worked day and night. Their industry and ingenuity were miraculous. The program staff moved in ten days before the program began, alternating program training with assisting the builders. Holding our breaths, at the end of June we passed town inspections and received our license to operate a camp.

Those first student vans arrived just as the builders pulled out. Their joyful response during those three weeks has been echoed by every group over the past two and a half decades, as thousands of students have become part of the Manice experience. The themes of education, adventure, and community continue to form the core of our programs as we engage students in the natural world, fostering curiosity, initiative, leadership, and cooperation. Christodora takes pride in this active legacy, and a very special pride in all the Manice staff members and students who have established it.



"Most of all I learned how to close my mouth and open my eyes and ears."

"This is my sixth summer at Manice and I always have fun and meet new friends."



My Manice: Three Christodora Alumni Reflect

Manice

was never about going to camp for any of us. It was never about a job. Manice was about continuity, security, safety, family, having a place in this world, belonging. Manice has always been that moment in time where you leave behind the trauma, the troubles of life and for a brief moment you find yourself with a clear mind, a peaceful mind ... The power of Manice is the power of providing kids with such complex lives the opportunity to be children again. They need to be out in the unfamiliar forests, they need to be challenged and vulnerable and that way they have no choice but to trust.

— *Emilie Mittiga, a former Manice student and currently a Christodora staff member running our Summer Ecology Program at the Great Mountain Forest, teaches in the NYC public school system.*



Christodora changed my life. It made me a different person than I would ever have been if I had not gone. When I was in 7th grade I was a troubled kid. At Manice I was able to experience something that I did not know existed. Now I am a teacher at Manice for the same reason. Someone was there for me back then — and I want to be there for someone else.

— *Nile Carter-Thorpe attended Christodora programs in the 1990s and has returned to Manice as a counselor and as Assistant Director.*



Oh my god, I was just looking at those pictures, they are so beautiful. I miss Manice so much and I am counting down the days until I get to go back ... I feel like Manice is my 2nd home. It has introduced me to another world beyond the city. Nature is life too, and I want to learn all of the aspects of it. Christodora has taught me so much, and I would like to build on my experience.... Well, gotta jet, extremely busy these days

P.S. There are 97 days remaining until July 31st Manice Awaits!!!!!!

— *Nicholas Mendez will return to Manice for his 4th summer in 2007; he also attends Christodora's New Youth Conservationists weekly after-school program at the New York Botanical Garden.*



The Summer Ecology Program at Great Mountain Forest

Christodora

was fortunate in 2006 to host our Summer Ecology program once again in the Great Mountain Forest on the site of a Yale Forestry School facility. The site provided 28 inner-city high school students from New York's five boroughs with a magnificent landscape in which to carry out our research, and an opportunity to meet and learn from many extraordinary people who live in this community.

Students worked together on one of three team projects: an exploration of the Eastern Hemlock insect infestation; a water quality study of the Blackberry River; and a survey of how native and non-native birds in the area are affected by clear cuts. Each student also worked hard to produce an individual scientific report on their research. They also were given the time to reflect on their experiences through creative writing projects, poetry discussions and landscape drawings. Each day had time for other activities, like jogging or hiking, swimming, throwing a football or playing a game of cards on the porch. And as in past years, we were invited for a movie at a local drive-in theatre. For most of our students, this was the first time they had watched a movie under the stars.

Our staff of five counselors worked closely with each other to create an atmosphere of comfort, consistency, reliability and mutual respect to help our students shed their New York City façade, and feel comfortable rising to new challenges. I am proud that each member of our staff worked so diligently to give our students a chance to be themselves. I look forward to a great summer in 2007.

A SPECIAL THANKS GOES TO A NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO ENRICHED OUR SUMMER WITH THEIR KNOWLEDGE AS WELL AS OFFERING US A WARM WELCOME TO THEIR COMMUNITY.

Such kindness in and of itself teaches our students an invaluable lesson: The Childs and Schrenk families for their great generosity. Star Childs, Jodie Bronson (and Jean, his wife) and Frank Christinat, foresters of long-standing at Great Mountain Forest, shared their knowledge of the forest and joined us for meals, hikes and afternoons of relaxation. Bob Blair, an expert dowser and owl caller, spent two evenings teaching us the ancient art of dowsing and calling in owls over Old Man McMullen pond. Students milked cows with Ben Freund at his family's dairy farm. He also taught them about ecological sustainability in their organic vegetable greenhouse as well as in the dairy. Dr. Carole Cheah, of the CT Dept. of Agriculture, an authority on the Woolly Adelgid infestation of Eastern Hemlocks, worked with students in the field and helped with their projects. Barbara Clark taught us about the medicinal and edible uses of the meadow and forest plants surrounding the camp. Joe Brian shared his expertise of compass navigation and furniture making. Kurt Mayland and Dr. Frank Schidgen of Trout in the Classroom taught our students to fly cast in the meadow behind the house. Tracy and Dan Hayhurst, of the Chubby Bunny farm, a small organic fruit and vegetable farm at the base of Great Mountain Forest, spoke to us about the science involved in sustainable organic vegetable farming and explained the importance of the potential recycling systems within good dairy farm management.



New York City: Nature Learning Leadership Programs

Winter Ecology In-School Program

PEPE GOMEZ, PROJECT DIRECTOR

Currently in its sixth year of operation, Christodora's Winter Ecology In-School Program reached over 1,400 New York City public school students in 2006-7. Supported in part by a generous grant from the J. C. Kellogg Foundation, Christodora recruited and trained four educators, all recent college graduates who had prior experience working at the Manice Education Center, to teach hands-on environmental science to 6th through 8th graders in 15 public schools in the South Bronx, also in Manhattan and Queens. Our environmental educators also led students on weekend trips for day and overnight nature study, to augment classroom lessons with real life applications in the field. For many students, the overnight excursion was a first trip outside the city.

Teaching four classes a day, our educators team-taught a series of seven lessons to each class — one per week — bringing high quality, interactive nature programming to inner-city classrooms. Working closely with each science teacher, the educators tailored lesson plans to support the academic science curriculum and offered hands-on activities appropriate to each grade level. The program introduced students to such ecological concepts as carrying capacity, natural selection, the trophic pyramid, toxic bioaccumulation, and more. It also encouraged students to become effective stewards of natural resources, and introduced them to the decision-making involved in the allocation of scarce environmental resources.

The Christodora education staff strives to make lessons not only instructive, but fun. One day, students could be examining the fur and skull of a coyote, or digging through an owl pellet as an archeologist would, to learn about the typical diet of a barn owl. On another, they might test the quality of water at local water source and explore the possible paths of the New York City watershed from its source to the tap.

This year's weekend field trips included a total of 16 excursions — including the exploration of a salt marsh in Alley Pond Park in Queens, bird-watching in Crotona Park, the study of invasive plant removal in Pelham Bay, tours of the American Museum of Natural History, Wave Hill, the Bronx Zoo, and more.

Extended interaction between our teachers and their students paved the way to more ambitious trips. In April, the Winter Ecology Program hosted 42 students for two three-day trips to the 1,500 acre Blue Mountain Reservation in Westchester. Each trip enabled students to study forest and wetland ecosystems. In addition to giving students a chance to get hands-on exposure to natural systems in the outdoors, these trips allowed students to interact with each other in new ways, and to function outside of their previously-established comfort zones. They participated in team building activities, hiked rocky trails, and, in the evening, told stories and toasted s'mores by the fireplace.

Our Winter Ecology Program is a gateway for many students' future participation in longer outdoor experiences with Christodora, including summer sessions at our two wilderness camps, the

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Manice Center and Great Mountain Forest. Many parents have misgivings about sending their children to a sleep-away wilderness camp. The presence of our environmental educators in the public schools during the year helps families overcome their fears and become enthusiastic advocates for their children's expanding wilderness competence through Christodora.

The New Youth Conservationists and the Ecology Club

ANDREW MITTIGA

From the start the New Youth Conservationists have played an active role in protecting our natural areas in an urban setting. This past year our group of fifteen high school and junior high school students continued their work on a community restoration project, the Bronx River Blue Way. Through the support of the Bronx River Alliance and the New York Botanical Garden, our students studied the Bronx River, from its function as part of a larger watershed and its history, to its stream water chemistry.

We spent several days testing the chemistry of the river to find what was present that we could not see. We identified elements that could be harmful to the river's ecosystem and studied how to better control these factors. We also learned that in the end, if our waste is not disposed of properly it will end up in the river: what better way to learn this than by cleaning floating trash after a rainstorm.

We also had a number of wonderful trips this year: a tour of the Bronx Zoo and the American Museum of Natural History, fishing in the Harlem Meer, and a canoe trip down the Bronx River.

It was a fantastic year and we look forward to continuing our friendship and collaborations with the New York City Parks Department, the Bronx River Alliance and the New York Botanical Garden.

"Christodora's Winter Ecology Program helped my students develop a greater appreciation of the relationship of science to man and his environment."

— Dr. Sheila Buot,
science teacher,
The Young Women's
Leadership School,
Astoria



"I want to conserve water, recycle and other stuff that I never would have done if it wasn't for Christodora."

The Elliman Scholarship Program

The Elliman Scholarship Program for Advanced Studies in the Environment builds on students' experience at the Manice Education Center and in other Christodora programs, offering a select number of highly motivated high school students an opportunity to further pursue their studies in the natural sciences in specialized summer science and wilderness programs and at private colleges. In 2006 fifteen alumni scholarship recipients attended Hobart & William Smith Colleges' Environmental Studies Institute, the Teton Science Schools and the Student Conservation Association.



"Thanks to the Elliman Scholarship Program I will be leaving here as a changed person: my love for nature has grown stronger, my views have gotten wider. I know for a fact that this program will always be in the back of my head, influencing the choices that I will be making later on in life."

— Lily Chen, a senior at Brooklyn Tech, attended programs at Manice and the Great Mountain Forest. In 2006 she was selected as an Elliman Scholar and attended Hobart and William Smith's Environmental Studies Summer Youth Institute Program.



Our Partners: Teachers, Friends and Organizations

Christodora salutes the science teachers, principals, parent coordinators and administrators who, in recognizing the positive influence of Christodora programs, have gone the extra mile to assist their students in participating. Their encouragement and support is a crucial part of making the leap from the familiar urban landscape to the wilderness of northern Massachusetts and Connecticut and back again. We could not do it without you!

Erin Balet, AP, Pace at MS 118 • **Kenneth Baum**, Principal, MS 241, Urban Assembly School for Math & Science • **Heather Benson**, AP, CIS 339, South Bronx • **David Buie**, counselor, Bronx Leadership Academy II • **Vladimir Caamano**, Liberty Program guidance counselor, Bank Street Teachers College, Upper West Side UWS • **Andrea Chappetta**, schoolwide counselor, Leadership Institute, Police Athletic League, Bronx • **Boris Consuegra**, science teacher, IS5, Queens • **Margarita Coons**, science teacher, Marta Valle High School • **Farrah Couch**, counselor, Preston HS, Bronx • **Burnedette Drysdale**, Principal, City College Academy of the Arts • **Kathy Elwood**, science teacher, TYWLS East Harlem • **David Forman**, Raise AP, MS 118, Bronx • **Tara Goulet**, Field Program Manager, TYWLS Astoria • **Lois Gregory**, Principal, Learning Tree School • **Louis Hernandez**, school wide counselor, MS 117, East Harlem • **Geoff Hockert**, counselor, High School of Environmental Studies • **Ife Hutchinson**, science teacher, Academy of Environmental Studies • **Johanna Meadvin**, teacher, Dual Language Middle School • **Milissa Melchior**, science teacher, TYWLS Bronx • **Carolyn Michael**, AP, East Harlem School • **Laura Mitchell**, Principal, TYWLS Astoria • **Lenny Plastino**, science teacher (retired), Pace Academy • **Anne Piotrowski**, Spectrum AP, MS 118 • **Nick Ramoni**, science teacher, Raise at MS 118 • **Stacey Ratel**, science teacher, Pace at MS 118 • **Nia Rhodes**, counselor, High School of Environmental Studies • **Lisa Rocco**, science teacher, Spectrum at MS 118 • **Yaakov Saturen**, science teacher, Jane Addams High School • **Katrina Smith**, science teacher, Kingsbridge Academy, Bronx • **Claudia Sell**, science teacher, TYWLS East Harlem • **Matt Tepper**, homeroom teacher, CIS 339, South Bronx • **Anh Truong**, counselor, I-Lead Program, Bank Street Teachers College • **David Vasquez**, Principal, Bronx Studio School, Bronx • **Susan Vincent**, Dean, science dept., YWLS, Manhattan • **Tammy Vu**, AP, East Side Community High School • **Crystal Williams**, parent coordinator, Marta Valle HS, LES • **Marc Williams**, counselor, Brooklyn Tech HS, Brooklyn • **Ingrid Wong**, English Teacher, Essex Street HS, LES

Christodora recognizes our partners, the individuals and institutions, that have enriched the learning opportunities of our students by generously offering their facilities and their knowledge on numerous occasions.

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Bob Blair • Joe Brian • Jody and Jean Bronson • Dr. Carol Cheah and her CT Department of Agriculture research team • Starling Childs and all the Childs family • Frank Christinat • Barbara Clark • Dr. Adrian Finzi and his Boston University research team • Ben Freund and Freund's Farm • Dan and Tracy Hayhurst • Pamela Manice • E.J. McAdams • Kurt Mayland • Jaan and Jacque Metsma • Russell Russ • Bill and Kay Schrenk • Dr. Frank Schidgen



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"My cheek bones hurt so much from smiling."



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