

A.C.A.M.P

Animal Care Assistant Mentoring Program at the Oakbrook Terrace Park District Lake View Nature Center

Overview

The Oakbrook Terrace Park District's Lake View Nature Center is proud to offer ACAMP; *Animal Care Assistant Mentoring Program*. ACAMP is a volunteer program designed specifically for individuals with disabilities. We are dedicated to promoting and strengthening the knowledge and care of local wildlife. Through animal care and outdoor opportunities, we create a safe, inclusive environment where individuals can learn important, transferable job skills geared toward independence and personal growth. The ACAMP program gives individuals with disabilities a chance to work in a unique setting. Participants will help care for the animals at the Nature Center, giving them the chance to connect with both people and animals in a hands-on way. In addition to animal care, ACAMP participants will also perform tasks meant to help the nature center, the park, and the environment.

Participants will gain the following skills while in the program:

- Increased independence
- Knowledge of animal needs and behaviors.
- Ability to follow specific written instructions.
- Time management skills.
- Organizational skills
- Confidence
- Increased appreciation for the natural world

Ratios

We understand that ACAMP may not be for everyone in your program, and we ask that you bring students who will enjoy the animal care or outdoor tasks that they will be given. Tasks here involve participating in an active way to care for animals that some individuals may not be comfortable with. Participants may need a little extra help or an extra set of eyes with some tasks to ensure the safety of the animal. As such, we require our groups to be between 4 and 8 individuals, keeping a 1:4 ratio staff to participants. Please note that this ratio does not include Nature Center staff.

Participant Readiness Guidelines

To help ensure a positive and successful experience in the program, participants should be able to:

Feel comfortable being around animals, including reptiles and insects

Communicate needs, questions, or concerns (verbally, with assistive technology, or preferred method)

- Follow safety instructions related to animal handling, cleaning, and equipment use.
- Complete tasks independently following staff training, with occasional check-ins as needed.
- Tolerate mild sensory experiences (e.g., smells, textures, or sounds common in animal care settings).
- Work cooperatively around others and demonstrate respectful behavior in shared spaces.
- Follow written instructions or visual/social stories with some support.
- Wear closed-toed shoes and appropriate clothing for an animal-care environment.
- Stay with the group and always participate safely.

Nature Center Staff Involvement

ACAMP is primarily a volunteer program for individuals with disabilities to gain knowledge and skills that will help them move forward in their adult life. A Lake View Nature Center staff member will always be at the Nature Center during your visit to ask questions or troubleshoot. For the first three visits, the Nature Center Staff person will be facilitating and helping the groups to ensure everyone understands and is capable with the tasks. After this initial period, the staff member will continue to be in the center but will take a back seat and allow the transition staff and participants to complete the tasks independently.

Transition Staff Requirements

All staff accompanying the participants will be required to oversee tasks after the initial three visits. To help with the preparation, all Transition staff that will participate in ACAMP are required to attend a mandatory orientation led by Nature Center staff. During this session, transition staff will learn and practice many of the tasks participants will be doing. The goal is to ensure they are prepared and confident in supporting participants during the program. This is also a time to communicate with Nature Center Staff any aids your students may need to help them succeed and ask any questions you may have. This orientation will be scheduled with your program on a day and time that works for your staff and will be about an hour in duration. It is free of charge to schedule and can be done during the week or even on a weekend.

Scheduling Your Group

ACAMP is offered year-round, however many groups we work with come during the school year (September-May). With the idea of this program being a consistent aspect of participants' day, we require a minimum of two visits per month. Many groups choose to come weekly on the same day at the same time. This makes it easy for us to schedule and easy for you to remember! Whether you are coming weekly, every other week, or sporadically, we require that you notify the Lake View Nature Center Manager of your schedule and when you are coming at least three days in advance. Any cancellations or rescheduling should be communicated no later than 24 hours before the scheduled program. Any change to a scheduled program time or day should be communicated and verified by the Nature Center Manager. Time slots are 1.5 hours long. This is typically enough time for participants to complete the tasks for the day. We offer ACAMP programs on the following day and time slots:

- Monday 1-4pm
- Tuesday 9am-12pm
- Wednesday 9am-12pm
- Thursday 9am-12pm

Arrival and Departures

Participants involved in ACAMP are responsible for their transportation to the Lake View Nature Center, whether through their transition program or independently. Once arriving at the Nature Center, participants will need to sign in on our ACAMP volunteer sheet before getting started. For the first three weeks, a Nature Center Staff member will quickly go through the tasks to be completed for the day and make sure participants remember where supplies are. Task lists will be consistent throughout the visits and will only change slightly to help create routine in participants. About ten minutes before the end of the allotted time, Transition staff and participants should begin their cleaning tasks. Participants will check in with Nature Center staff for a final check and walk through once cleaning tasks are completed. At this time, participants will sign out on our volunteer sheet and take their leave.

While You Are Here

Upon arrival, each group will be given a list of tasks to be completed during their time. It is up to the chaperones and participants how to divide tasks amongst those that have attended. Examples of tasks to be completed are listed below:

- Preparing box turtle salad
- Feeding aquatic turtles pellets
- Picking feces out of cages
- Washing and replacing water/food bowls in cages
- Feeding and misting insects
- Picking up litter around the pond
- Weeding gardens/planting garden beds in Spring
- Cleaning and dusting Nature Center exhibits
- Helping prepare craft items for upcoming classes
- Any other tasks that the Nature Center Manager has deemed appropriate

All tools needed to complete daily tasks will be supplied by the Nature Center. Animal care checklists will be in large print and color coded for ease of reading. There will be visual aids (pictures) of anything that may be needed depending on abilities of participants attending. If at any time there are questions about tasks or issues arise, Nature Center staff will be in the building to answer them. Nature Center staff will help the group the first three weeks to determine if any additional tools or accommodations need to be made for participants. After the initial three weeks, staff will take a backseat to participants and their chaperone.

Code of Conduct

- Behave respectfully to all participants and staff.
- Refrain from using foul language.
- Refrain from causing bodily harm.
- Treat all equipment, supplies, and facilities respectfully.

General Safety Guidelines

To help keep everyone safe and ensure a fun environment, all participants are expected to follow these basic rules.

- Walk at all times when indoors.
- Use quiet, indoor voices while inside the building.
- Listen and respond when staff give instructions.
- Follow directions the first time they are given.
- Use all equipment safely and appropriately.
- Keep hands, feet, and body to yourself.

Photo Policy

By registering your group for ACAMP, you agree to allow publication of any photos taken of Transition staff and participants at any program, event, or facility of the Oakbrook Terrace Park District. If there are individuals in your program whom you know should not have their photo taken, this should be communicated to the Nature Center Manager prior to the start of the scheduled ACAMP days.

Signing up

If you are interested in being part of our ACAMP family, or would like more information or have questions, please don't hesitate to reach out to Kate Johns, Nature Center Manager: kate@obtpd.org or 630-941-8747. Upon reaching out, you will receive communication to schedule a transition staff orientation and information packets to be given to any participants who may wish to be involved in ACAMP. These must be filled out by participants or their parent/legal guardian and returned to the Nature Center Manager prior to the date of the first program.