



## Making a difference in nature: an evaluation of Hidden Villa Environmental Education Program: 2003-2004

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**Contact:** Susan Love  
 Hidden Villa  
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Program Profile	
<b>Program Description:</b>	Hidden Villa is a 1,600-acre educational farm and wilderness preserve. Its mission is to inspire a just and sustainable future through its programs, land and legacy. The Hidden Villa Environmental Education Program (HVEEP) works with 2 <sup>nd</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup> graders who visit the farm and wilderness for a one or two day field trip. Before students come to the farm, they are visited in their classroom by an HVEEP staff member who presents a slide-show to prepare the children for what they will be seeing and doing on the farm, and what they need to bring to be prepared. Also in the classroom, the staff member engages students in songs and role-plays and leads them through several hands-on learning stations on topics that will be discussed further on the farm or in the wilderness. On the day of the visit, children are led in small groups of 6-8 through the garden, to each of the farm animals, and on a hike in the wilderness by a staff or volunteer member. Students are introduced to some basic ecological concepts in a hands-on manner and are provided with some unstructured exploration time. Hidden Villa seeks to communicate a sense of discovery and wonder, as well as a caretaker ethic toward life.
<b>Program Goals:</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To introduce students to basic ecological concepts in a hands-on, experimental way, emphasizing the interconnection between human social systems and natural cycles.</li> <li>• To awaken a sense of discovery and wonder toward the natural world, including its diverse human population.</li> <li>• To instill a caretaker ethic toward all life, raising awareness of the consequences of individual and community choices and actions on living things.</li> <li>• To provide program participants (children and adults) with tools and information that inspires a caretaking ethic in others and encourages responsible choices that will positively affect life on earth.</li> </ul>
<b>Program Funding:</b>	A combination of program fees, major donors and foundation grants
<b>Program Links:</b>	<a href="http://www.hiddenvilla.org/HVEEP.php">www.hiddenvilla.org/HVEEP.php</a>
Evaluation Profile	
<b>Evaluation Goals &amp; Questions:</b>	<p>The evaluation was conducted to obtain answers to the following questions::</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To what degree are teachers' goals for the field trip to Hidden Villa aligned with HVEEP's environmental education program goals?</li> <li>• How do teachers integrate the Farm and Wilderness Exploration into ongoing classroom activities?</li> <li>• What short-term outcomes and longer-term impacts does the one-day experience at Hidden Villa have on students from a teacher's perspective?</li> <li>• How can HVEEP better support teachers in preparing for and following up after the field trip?</li> </ul>

<b>Evaluation Methods:</b>	Open-ended interviews with Hidden Villa teacher-naturalists and interns, focus group conversations with teachers and Hidden Villa volunteer guides, questionnaires, field trip observations, and internal documents (e.g., grant proposal, annual reports, training manuals)
<b>Evaluation Instruments:</b>	Teacher Survey
<b>How were results used?</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building evaluation capacity within the education department and coaching education staff in evaluative processes for ongoing program assessment as well as new program development;</li> <li>• Program logic map for day-long field trip “Farm and Wilderness Exploration” was revised adjusting student outcomes and introducing teachers as key players for keeping the field trip experience alive for students back in the classroom;</li> <li>• Teacher sign-up procedures and paperwork was redesigned to be more efficient, user-friendly and to solicit more relevant information so that education staff can tailor field trips more easily;</li> <li>• The slide-presentation used for pre-field trip visits in the classroom was updated;</li> <li>• The no-garbage lunch activity encouraging students to reduce the amount of trash in their lunches was one of the most successful activities particularly with younger students (2<sup>nd</sup> through 4<sup>th</sup> grade). Based on this unanticipated finding from the evaluation report, education staff redesigned the no-garbage lunch brochure including a version in Spanish. The no-garbage lunch activity is also part of Hidden Villa’s online curriculum: <a href="http://www.hiddenvilla.org/OnlineCurric/teacher/curculum/Inchinsp.html">http://www.hiddenvilla.org/OnlineCurric/teacher/curculum/Inchinsp.html</a>;</li> <li>• A copy of the evaluation report is given to Hidden Villa education program interns during their two-week training providing them with an introduction to the program.</li> </ul>
<b>Evaluation Cost:</b>	For the first nine months, Hidden Villa received funding from the Center for Venture Philanthropy’s Environmental Solutions Forum I (part of the Silicon Valley Community Foundation). Hidden Villa successfully fundraised for this position and hired the evaluation consultant as full-time evaluation specialist until August 2008. Uncovered costs for the first year included funds to hire substitute teachers so that education staff could participate in regular meetings with the evaluation specialist and an evaluation budget to cover evaluation-related expenses. In subsequent years, Hidden Villa provided additional funds that allowed for hiring substitute teachers and for an evaluation budget.
<b>Evaluation Insights:</b>	<p><b>What worked well?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Being a staff member allowed the evaluation specialist to build evaluation capacity within the organization and to coach staff in evaluative thinking and process for ongoing program assessment as well as for program development.</li> <li>• Working from within the organization (as opposed to being an external evaluation consultant) allowed the evaluation specialist to support staff in their efforts to integrate the recommendations from program evaluation projects on an ongoing basis thus establishing evaluation as an iterative process.</li> </ul> <p>At first, evaluation was perceived as a potential threat carrying negative connotations of distanced and uninvolved assessment of work many Hidden Villa staff members felt so passionate about. Having been at Hidden Villa full-time provided the evaluation specialist with the necessary organizational context to build trust among staff and to gain their buy-in for a participatory evaluation approach.</p> <p><b>What were the important evaluation “lessons learned”?</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Program evaluation takes time. For the evaluation projects with Hidden Villa’s education department, it turned out to be crucial to have additional funds available for hiring substitute teachers so that educators as well as the education director had the necessary time to meet with the evaluation specialist;</li> <li>• Prior to hiring an evaluation expert, the reason for and goal of an evaluation should be discussed with staff members creating buy-in ahead of time;</li> <li>• Evaluation is iterative and ongoing, not just a one-time project.</li> </ul>

<b>Profile information provided by:</b>	Sigrid Müller, Hidden Villa
<b>Profile prepared by:</b>	Elissa Chasen, Graduate Student, University of Michigan
<b>Posted on:</b>	April 2008



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## *The Hidden Villa Farm and Wilderness Tour-Questionnaire*

### **1. Your reasons for coming to Hidden Villa**

What were your reasons for picking Hidden Villa as the destination for your field trip?

What did you hope your students would gain from a field trip to Hidden Villa?

### **2. In-classroom presentation and field trip preparation**

a) What aspects of the in-classroom presentation by Hidden Villa staff seemed to make the deepest impression on your students (for example, what parts of the presentation did they find most exciting)?

b) What, if anything, did you do to prepare your students for the field trip, including lesson plan and pre-visit enrichment activities?

### **3. During the field trip itself**

What seemed to make the biggest impression on your students during the field trip itself (for example, what specific changes did you observe in students during the hike)?

### **4. After the field trip and back in the classroom**

a) After the field trip, how did you follow up with your students?

b) What did your students talk about after their visit and what did they remember from their Hidden Villa field trip?

c) What have your students retained from a Hidden Villa field trip: for example, did your students want to engage in activities that reflect the field trip content such as the no-garbage lunch? Did they have a better understanding of the connection between farm animals and food?

d) After your field trip to Hidden Villa, how did you integrate the trip into your classroom activities during the rest of the school year?

e) As your students move on to other grades, do you see any indication that Hidden Villa continues to have an impact on them? If yes, please describe how.

### **5. Teacher support**

a) Which curricular objectives (if any) did the Hidden Villa field trip support? Please provide examples.

b) What can Hidden Villa do to better support your field trip objectives and follow-up activities?

c) How could an interactive website, where teachers and students could post photos or where teachers could download resources related to Hidden Villa and environmental education, be useful to you?

d) What difficulties and challenges do you face in coming to Hidden Villa for field trips?

### **6. Demographics**

How many field trips have you led to Hidden Villa?

What school district does your school belong to?

In what city is your school located?

What grade level do you teach?

How many years have you been teaching at your current grade level?

How many years have you been teaching at your current school?

How many students do you have in your class?

How many of your students are on a Federal Lunch Program?

How many of your students have English as their first language?

Do you have a school garden? Yes: \_\_\_\_\_ No: \_\_\_\_\_

How many of your students have had similar experiences at Hidden Villa with their families?

### **7. Evaluation**

Hidden Villa is currently evaluating its educational program. We are interested in finding teachers who would be willing to share with us some of the work that they are doing that is related to a Hidden Villa field trip (for instance, writing exercises or art projects). Please indicate below if you would be willing to support us in our efforts to improve the HVEEP program. We are asking you for your email address so that we can follow up with some more detailed information.

Yes: \_\_\_\_\_

No: \_\_\_\_\_

My email address: \_\_\_\_\_