



UTILIZING HANDS-ON APPROACHES TO EDUCATE JEFFERSON COUNTY'S YOUTH ON CURRENT NATURAL RESOURCES TOPICS (JEFFERSON COUNTY)

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PROJECT INTRODUCTION

Metro West Housing Solutions operates out of Lakewood, Colorado with the mission to provide quality housing options. They focus on low to moderate income households and provide resident services and opportunities.

During the summer, Metro West Housing Solutions hosted 'Summer Series', an opportunity for school-aged children to learn about natural science topics once a week, at six different apartments around Lakewood.

Each location I taught at had a property coordinator who helped advertise the event to families in the apartment and most of them provided drinks and snacks for the youth who attended the 'Summer Series'.

As the Series was open to all youth ages and residents at each location, the age range and participation numbers greatly varied among locations.

My internship focused on planning and teaching the 'Summer Series' through a variety of hands-on activities. The 'Summer Series' was open to all school-aged youth at the apartment and didn't require registration. This gave parents/guardians time without their youth to complete tasks and/or relax for an hour.

When it came to creating my curriculum, I tried to focus on hands on activities that I could make more difficult for older kids and activities I could make easier for younger kids. The topics varied each week, some weeks were more arts and crafts oriented while other weeks had a competition component so I could do my best to cater to all the kids.

INTERNSHIP GOALS

1. Provide natural resource education for underrepresented youth.
2. Develop and execute curriculum that is educational and entertaining.
3. Discover if education is something I may be interested in pursuing in the future.

HOW DOES THIS APPLY TO YOUR EDUCATION

I am studying Fish, Wildlife, and Conservation Biology and have been thinking that I might be interested in conservation education in the future, so this internship gave me the opportunity to experience working with youth and educating them. Since the focus of the internship was natural resource topics, a lot of what I taught the youth also related to what I've been studying.

WHAT YOU DID

I wrote seven different lesson plans to teach for the 'Summer Series'. However, lessons were not cumulative, and each lesson plan had to stand on their own because I often had different youth every time I taught so I couldn't rely on information I had taught them in past lessons.

On Wednesdays, I went to three apartments: Sage Corner Apartments, Lamar Station Crossing Apartments, and Indy St Flats. On Thursdays I went to three different apartments: Cedar Gardens Apartments, Fifty Eight Hundred Apartments, and Maplewood Apartments.

When I wasn't teaching, I would work on making the curriculum for the next week and gathering necessary materials.

After my first time teaching at all the properties, I was able to customize different activities for each lesson at different apartments depending on what I felt like the various youth would benefit from the most from since I had such a wide variety of ages and behaviors. With my largest group (typically 15-20 youth) I discovered they did better with physical activities and competition while my younger and smaller groups did better with activities that were more craft oriented and gave them opportunities to help me.

Figure 1. (Teaching)



This is a picture of my first day teaching at Cedar Gardens. We were learning about habitats and the different parts of habitats.



This is a picture of me teaching about food webs at Lamar Station Crossing. All the youth had their own food webs they were following along with.

WHAT YOU LEARNED

Every kid is different. This is something that really challenged me at first. I struggled to come up with activities that could reach all the youth I worked with. But, I realized that it's okay if I have to do different activities with different groups, all that matters is that they're all learning something. I also learned how much work it is to make your own curriculum, which is something I haven't had to do in prior educational experiences.

I also learned that I want to get more experiences in education. This was an experience I won't soon forget and I want to use what I learned here in future natural resource and/or outdoor education opportunities. I'm unsure whether education is something I want to pursue as a profession, but I do know I enjoy it and want to help more with youth education and community outreach.

Figure 2. (Youth Demographics)

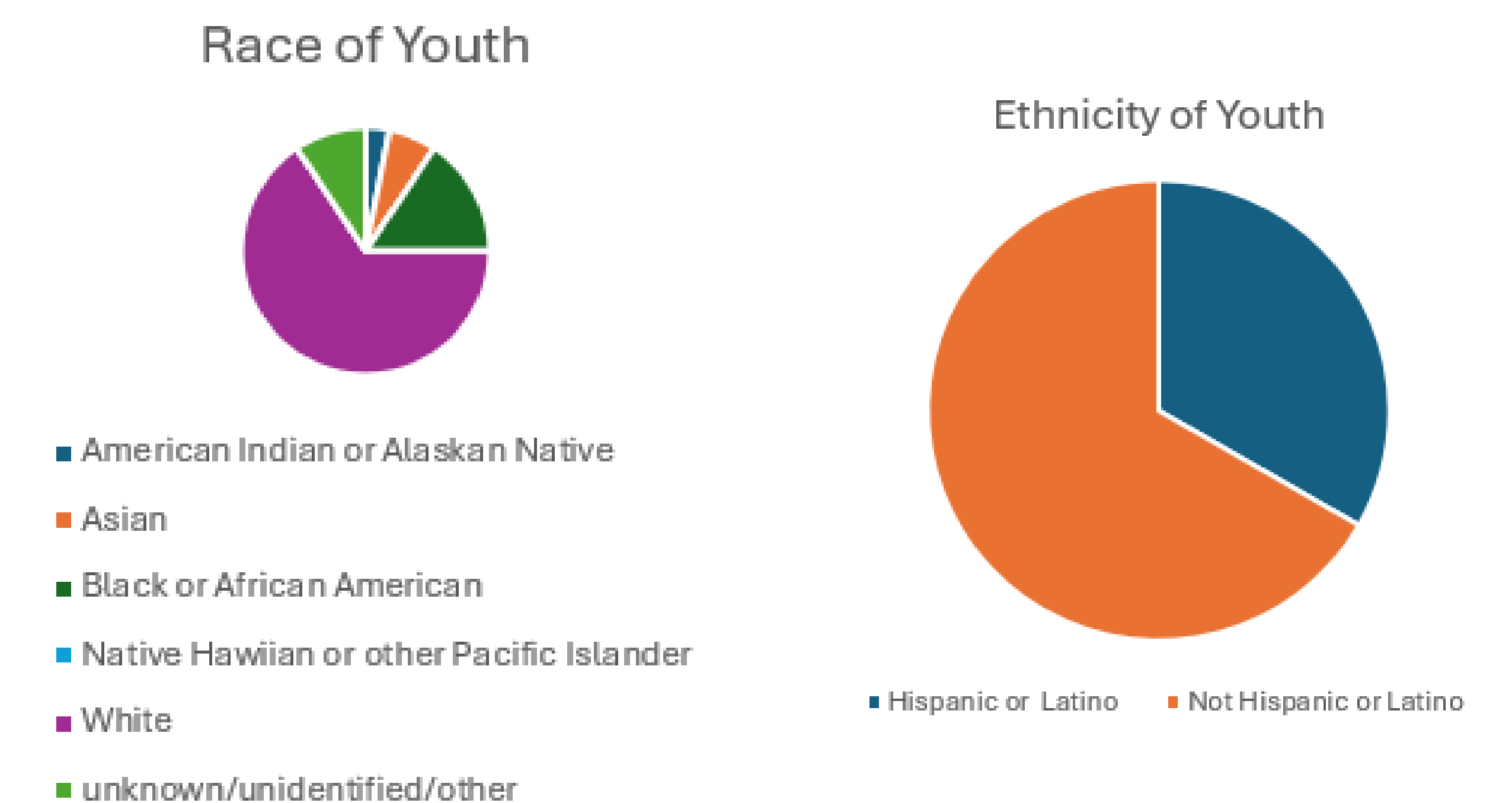


Figure 3. (Teaching)



(Left) This is a picture of a few kids dissecting owl pellets after we learned about owls and regurgitation.

(Right) This is a picture of the kids using insects they made out of pipe cleaners to pretend to be pollinators.

