Volunteers at the Sciencenter

By Kimberly Griffiths, Volunteer Manager

If you’ve had a close encounter with a horseshoe crab at our Touch Tank or interacted with a reptile in our Animal Room, there is an excellent chance it was with the help of one of our incredible volunteers. Sciencenter volunteers are enthusiastic about the Sciencenter’s mission and have a passion for teaching and learning. Each year, they engage thousands of visitors by facilitating interactive experiences at our Touch Tank and in our Animal Room. They help visitors explore hands-on science kits in the Discovery Space and run dynamic floor activities that enrich the visitor experience. In 2021 our volunteers spent nearly 4,000 hours volunteering at the museum and had over 45,000 interactions with guests!

Volunteers connect with us through partnerships with local high schools, colleges and universities, and community organizations.

After volunteers go through our orientation, they receive ongoing training to help foster their facilitation skills.

The Sciencenter’s history is deeply rooted in the work of volunteers. Not only did we grow out of a volunteer-run science program at a local elementary school, but the museum was physically built by volunteers. Today our volunteers continue to build on that rich history. Just a few of our amazing volunteers are highlighted here:

Alicia Fulbright, a volunteer of five years, began as a member of the Future Science Leaders program, a Sciencenter program for middle school students to gain experience communicating science through working with scientists, engaging with animals, developing exhibits, and participating in research projects. Alicia enjoys facilitating hands-on animal experiences for museum guests.

Jacob O’Neill, a volunteer of eight years, says his reasons for volunteering are, “the inestimable value of science education and the ability to give back to the community.”

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Marley Bonacquist-Currin, a volunteer of two years, is currently a Ph.D. Student in Natural Resource Management at Cornell University. She loves seeing guests engaging with the world around them, being playful and curious, and just enjoying a space that makes her so happy to be in.

We are truly grateful for the dedication of our current and past volunteers. It would not be possible to do all that we do without them.
Serving on the Sciencenter’s Board

I came to Ithaca from Brooklyn to attend Cornell as a first generation college student. The Ithaca community worked its charm on me and this has been my home ever since. I love that we are the kind of community that supported the evolution of a volunteer-driven school science program into the nationally recognized, hands-on museum that is our Sciencenter. One of the greatest societal challenges we’re facing is that fact and fiction seem to be increasingly put on equal footing. This is why the Sciencenter’s mission of cultivating a broad community of curious, confident, critical thinkers is so important to me, and why I serve as a Trustee on the Sciencenter’s Board.

Youth Employment, Work-Study, and Internship Programs

Our youth employment, work-study, and internship opportunities provide important ways for young people from all backgrounds to gain work experience, develop core skills, and foster a deeper relationship with the Sciencenter. These work opportunities, often crafted in partnership with other local youth-serving organizations, like the Ithaca Youth Bureau, offer the chance for work-study students to work with Sciencenter animals, facilitate hands-on science experiences, and learn how to effectively communicate science topics. These relationships and experiences can be transformational, helping to inspire youth to go on to work in science-related and museum fields.