

*Elachee Nature Science Center’s connections with ANCA were vital in helping them move to the “we need to do this” stage.*

From humble beginnings 35 years ago as a grassroots community nature center serving a small number of students, Elachee Nature Science Center has grown into a regional center educating 35,000 students each year, hosting 30,000 visitors, maintaining 12 miles of hiking trails, and conserving the biodiversity of the 1,400-acre Chicopee Woods Nature Preserve for current and future generations.

The heart of their educational programming has always been to introduce children to the natural world using the natural classroom provided by the Chicopee Woods Nature Preserve. They have focused on the concepts of building learning experiences that endure for a lifetime, building self-confidence, combating sedentary lifestyles and childhood obesity, and providing a place where “no child is left inside.” These experiences, especially those for preschoolers, provide a foundation that will prepare them for kindergarten, school, and life.



Elachee’s connections with ANCA were vital in helping them move from the “wouldn’t it be nice” stage to the “we need to do this” stage: their staff observed the Teton Science Schools preschool at the 2008 ANCA Summit; took part in Rachel Larimore’s (from Chippewa Nature Center) and Buffy Cheek’s (from Schlitz Audubon Nature Center) Nature Preschool presentations at the 2011 ANCA Summit in Tennessee; and an ANCA Peer Consult followed later in 2011 with experienced preschool and center directors provided them with energy, recommendations for locations, processes, staffing, logistics, etc. Synergy intervened and shortly after they received a grant for an in-kind donation of pro bono services with MBA level professionals who helped explore market feasibility, financial scenarios, state licensure requirements, and planning charts. Armed with positive outcomes, bolstered by the ANCA consult, they kick started the idea of a capital campaign with their Board to fund both the indoor classroom renovations enhanced by the outdoor nature playscape.

The program opened in August 2013 operating two or three mornings per week with an enrollment of 11 children ages 3 and 4. Fully licensed by the state of Georgia’s “Bright From The Start” preschool curriculum, they also utilize the “Creative Curriculum” as an integrating context for nature-oriented lessons and activities. As a Southern Association of Colleges and Schools accredited nature center, the nature preschool also holds this prestigious recognition. Elachee Nature Science Center in the midst of a second promotion push in order to increase enrollment so the program will be more financially viable for years 2 through 3. They will also be increasing both the hours and the days of the program for the 2014-2015 school year.

The classroom is an early childhood educator’s dream and the outdoor nature playscape contains only one piece of plastic.... the slide!

Andrea Timpone, President/CEO of Elachee Nature Science Center says, “ANCA experiences, consulting, and experienced peer support has been invaluable to the growth and success of both our professional staff and our organization.”