



NEW YORK STATE ENVIRONMENTAL EXCELLENCE AWARD CASE STUDY

Schoharie River Center – *Honored for empowering young people through a comprehensive environmental youth development program*

SUMMARY

The Schoharie River Center (SRC) is a small and unique not-for-profit organization in the Schoharie River watershed. The Center was awarded in 2013 for committing to empower young people in an innovative youth development program. This program develops environmentally literate, self-directed individuals who can identify and work toward positive life goals and achieve constructive change in their lives. The program is open to all interested youth and specifically engages at-risk and underserved youth from both urban and rural areas.



BENEFITS

More than 800 students from four counties and nine school districts have been trained to use federal and state stream-monitoring protocols. This grassroots education center also provides hands-on, professionally supervised outdoor learning activities, community-based archeology research, folk art demonstrations, and workshops that showcase traditional arts, crafts and music. The center is committed to educating people about local history and traditional culture, natural history, environmental issues and the relationship between the natural environment and human activity in the Mohawk River watershed.

KEY METRICS

- Engaged more than 800 students in environmental study teams
- 20 college students serve as research and career mentors during summer months
- Created one full-time job and 4-5 part-time temporary positions
- Promote tourism through local events

ABOUT SCHOHARIE RIVER CENTER

- Incorporated in 1999
- Instills a love for learning and science, promotes environmental literacy and stewardship and encourages positive and responsible community involvement

NYS Environmental Excellence Award: Annual recognition of outstanding innovative and sustainable projects or programs and unique partnerships that are improving and protecting New York State's environmental resources and contributing to a stronger economy

A MODEL OF EXCELLENCE

- Promotes environmental literacy in youth
- Grassroots program empowers youth to take responsible community action
- Youth achieve greater academic success and become environmental leaders
- Developing skills and competencies that connect youth to the outdoors and building a values system based upon the concepts of conservation and stewardship
- Community-based working with a wide range of local and regional partners
- Provides and supports the teaching of high-quality, experiential environmental education and career skills
- Center promotes the environmental, cultural and historical significance of the Schoharie watershed

HIGHLIGHTS

Grassroots and community focused, the Schoharie River Center engages and empowers youth (and their parents) in watershed communities. The center involves students in on-going, year-round and multi-year hands-on experiential activities that foster development of critical thinking, literacy, communication and analytical skills. The Environmental Study Team (ETS) program offers youth opportunities to become environmentally literate, self-directed individuals able to identify and work toward positive life goals and achieve constructive change in their lives. Those who are involved in ETS achieve greater academic success in school, become knowledgeable environmental advocates who learn how to monitor and document conditions within their home communities, and take active roles in improving and protecting local water and natural resources.

ETS youth acquire public speaking skills by participating in public programs to educate the community about stream monitoring. They learn to integrate academic skills and apply them to local environmental study and scientific research. They also improve communication skills (written, oral, electronic and video) and learn about attitudes toward citizenship (environmental justice) and career options in the field of science. ETS graduates have pursued higher education at Cornell, the University of New England, Syracuse, Drexel, and SUNY at Binghamton, Stony Brook, Albany, Oneonta, and the College of Environmental Science and Forestry.

The Schoharie River Center's community-based programs are designed to support, foster, and to promote positive youth development and healthy local environments, and improve the quality of life within local communities. Some examples of these programs are:

- Hands-on supervised experientially-based outdoor learning activities
- Environmental research and stream water quality monitoring
- Folk arts demonstrations and workshops showcasing traditional arts, crafts and music
- Educational events highlighting local history and traditional culture, natural history, and connections between the natural environment and human activity in the watershed

FUNDING

The Schoharie River Center relies on grant and foundation support. It raises money from maple syrup production, teacher training workshops and annual festivals.