



Harnessing teen power: Effective youth programmes to develop the next generation of ocean conservation leaders

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Recent opinion polls indicate that the typical American knows little about contemporary ocean issues and doesn't think that the ocean is 'at risk'. Fortunately young Americans are much more concerned, informed, and willing to take action than adults. Aquariums can harness that knowledge, concern and passion for nature by helping youth develop life and leadership skills while encouraging their commitment to ocean conservation.

The Monterey Bay Aquarium offers two programmes that incorporate best practices for nurturing young people and teaching science standards through ocean-related topics:

- Watsonville Area Teens Conserving Habitats (WATCH) is a year-long, service-learning programme that connects marginalized high school students to their local watershed, enhancing their ocean science knowledge, English-language learning, leadership and job skills.
- Teen Conservation Leaders (TCL) gives youth opportunities to learn while engaged in service activities at the aquarium.

Longitudinal studies indicate that participation in these programs results in personal changes, positive conservation behavior changes, and gains in knowledge about ocean and coastal ecosystems. Both programs have benefited from evaluation that is age-appropriate and culturally sensitive. Programme principles and evaluation findings will be offered to illustrate how any aquarium can ensure its youth programs are effective.