



## A Chance To Do Meaningful Work

by Sabrina Carlson

On November 10, 2016, 60 students from the Kinsey K.I.D.S. (Kinsey Inquiry and Discovery School) 5th grade program demonstrated to be a very clever and observant group.

Prepped and excited to roll up their sleeves, with help from ACE (American Conservation Experience) and the US Forest Service, we set out to do some serious work on the Rocky Ridge Trail on Mount Elden in Flagstaff.

In preparing for our trail work day, I felt it was important to ensure the students understood that this trail project was not invented to just make them feel good about themselves, but rather they were contributing and helping maintain a vital piece of recreational trails for everyone and anyone who enjoys them. We spent a good deal of time in advance learning about the numbers of volunteer hours it takes to build and maintain a trail, as well as all the forces that can damage a trail, not to mention the limited budgets that agencies have to devote to keeping trails in good shape.



Laying out a trail.



What lives in here?

We divided into smaller groups to make managing the students and tools safe. Before lunch, half the group headed out to fix trail, while the other half participated in two activities that my co-leader Richard May and myself taught. Mr. May led his groups through an activity called "micro trails" in which the students consider various aspects of planning and building a brand new trail. They then lay out the alignment for their tiny trail with yarn in the forest. For my activity, each group got to read a beautifully illustrated book called "The Gift of the Tree" which uses poetic language to describe all that trees do for the ecosystem, especially after they die and begin to decay. This reading allowed us to explore with more intention as we sought out a rotting log looking for insects, beetle holes and carpenter ant dust. After lunch the groups switched.

The students were abuzz with excitement and joy from their trail work. The groups I saw after lunch all begged to go back and fix more trail. They had landed on real, meaningful and fulfilling work and couldn't get enough. When I asked how many of them like the work so much that they

would consider working for an agency like ACE or AZCC in the future, at least half raised their hands.

Maria Montessori, early 20th century educational influencer, believed meaningful work for children to be one of the central tenets of a successful educational experience.

*"But when through exceptional circumstances work is the result of an inner, instinctive impulse, then even in the adult it assumes a wholly different character. Such work is fascinating, irresistible, and it raises man above deviations and inner conflicts. Such is the work of the inventor or discoverer, the heroic efforts of the explorer, or the compositions of the artist, that is to say, the work of men gifted with such an extraordinary power as to enable them to rediscover the instinct of their species in the patterns of their own individuality. This instinct is then a fountain that bursts through the hard outer crust and rises, through a profound urge, to fall, as refreshing rain, on arid humanity. It is through this urge that the true progress of civilization takes place." (Dr. Maria Montessori, 'The Secret of Childhood', Orient Longman Limited, 196)*



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