



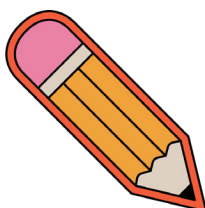
TreePeople Summer Report:



Growing Green Communities with Environmental Education



Katie Mills, PhD, TreePeople's new Director of Education and Outdoor Equity, shares her passion for education and her vision for TreePeople's Environmental Education programs.



Here at TreePeople, summer means caring for and watering trees and enjoying the sight of families and children visiting our parks and trails. Access to nature—in your neighborhood, your city, and beyond—is critical for health and well-being, both physical and mental, and for many LA residents it can feel out of reach. TreePeople strives to meet this need in our community through a thoughtful and comprehensive program of environmental education, outdoor access, and school and community greening. In this special report for you, our supporters and friends, we'd like to introduce you to Katie Mills, PhD, Director of Education and Outdoor Access, who joined TreePeople this past January. We've also highlighted the projects where we are focused currently, and hope you will enjoy learning more about the work you help make possible!

What are the goals of the Environmental Education team for the next year? Next five years?

KM: For the summer and the coming academic year, I am focusing on nurturing the expansion of TreePeople Environmental Education (TPEE) programs. In the five months since I arrived at TreePeople, our staff of educators has grown from a team of 10 to 18. Five new grants in Outdoor Equity have expanded our legacy programs of Eco-Tours and Generation Earth. I anticipate substantial growth to continue, with meaningful state funding for school greening and stormwater projects on school campuses, which require a robust education component.

In the next five years, school greening will expand considerably as climate change continues to

require campus reformulation, including major landscape redesign, native plant gardens, stormwater redirection—all of which require on-campus project-based environmental learning provided by TPEE educators and aligned to standards and school curricula.

What direct impact have you seen on children who gain equity in outdoor access?

KM: Coming to TreePeople trained as a scholar and educator, I rely upon both evidence-based practices as well as TPEE’s internal assessments of impact. The benefits of outdoor access for children are clear by both measurements. In March 2023, at Generation Earth’s Youth Summit, over 200 students shared with teachers, TreePeople staff, and County Administrators all they learned in GE service learning projects and field trips to

TreePeople’s urban and mountain forestry locations. On field trips to San Francisquito Canyon and the Del Rey Lagoon, I’ve participated with students committed to stewardship and nature, grateful for a chance to ignore their cell phones and breathe clean air for a few hours. Impact is driven by evidence-based practices shared by professional organizations such as North American Association for Environmental Education, Association for Environmental and Outdoor Education, California Environmental Literacy Initiative, plus engagement with Countywide environmental organizations and coalitions.

What would you ideally do with more support?

KM: With additional funding, I would like to shift from siloed engagements with individual schools to systemic interventions at the level of

school neighborhoods or districts. Ideally, we would develop a pathway within schools to link experiential education projects as children move up the grades. Even better would be to coordinate pipelines between schools, as when elementary students move to a designated middle school or from there on to high school; one example of this might be to have high school students lead recycling or conservation programs for elementary or middle school students on nearby campuses. Environmental literacy fits well with a wide range of subjects, making stewardship and advocacy part of schools’ primary function of developing civic and democratic engagement. More teacher training that fits well within their time constraints would continue to provide help from TPEE educators to assist overworked teachers on service learning environmental engagement. I’m excited about the possibilities of beginning workforce/ internship programs for high school students, so they can gain skills that lead to college or careers in natural resource management, arboriculture, environmental activism, or education, among others.

Tell us about the recent GE Youth Summit.

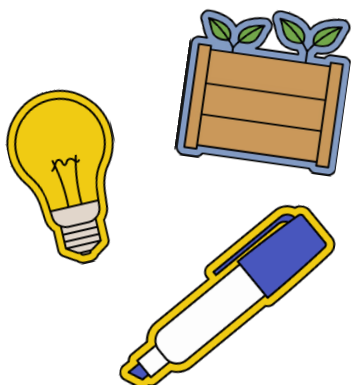
KM: Generation Earth hosted its inaugural Environmental Youth Summit on March 30 at the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County. The summit offered an exciting and inspiring day of learning



*Eco-Tour at TreePeople’s headquarters at Coldwater Canyon Park.
Photo credit: Adam Corey Thomas*

for over 200 young environmental champions from nine local schools. Students participated in a rich variety of workshops on topics such as school greening and environmental health, the benefits of trees, native plants, biodiversity, and more, and they explored approaches to becoming leaders in their communities and discovered a variety of environmental career pathways with our green career panel.

The student presentations were the true highlight of the day. This was incredibly inspiring not only for the rest of the students, but for everyone in attendance. These presentations showcased tangible examples of how powerful youth-led action can be, which really complemented the message from the keynote speaker, Andy Lipkis. Lipkis was just 15 years old when he first founded the organization TreePeople. Now, TreePeople has involved over three million people in planting over three million trees. Any one of these students could have a similar impact in their communities and there has never been a better time for young voices to lead the environmental movement.



Emily Tyrer, Green Infrastructure Project Manager at TreePeople, leads a workshop at the 2023 Generation Earth Youth Summit. Photo credit, Adam Corey Thomas.

TreePeople's Environmental Education Program reaches over 25,000 youth annually

The TreePeople Environmental Education program directly reaches over 25,000 K-12 Los Angeles County youth each year, the majority of whom come from low-income, environmental justice-impacted communities. Our goal is to provide the skills to enable students, families, and teachers to become informed advocates for the environment, help shape positive lifelong choices, and encourage community stewardship to create future environmental leaders.

Research shows that these hands-on environmental learning programs can improve critical thinking, increase motivation, and decrease grade level achievement gaps across multiple subjects in as little as one year.

From our first planting to the three-millionth tree planted, youth activism has been central to our mission—helping us build climate strategies and empower sustainable, community-led action in urban and wildland spaces. Environmental Education empowers youth to take simple steps to make their communities healthier and more sustainable, as well as to equip them with the knowledge to be system thinkers at school and envision STEM careers for their futures.



Generation Earth Campus Recycling Workshop - Paras Middle School. Photo credit: Adam Corey Thomas.

Generation Earth: Inspiring middle and high school-aged youth since 1997

Our hands-on service learning is what makes GE different, giving grade 7-12 students an opportunity to apply knowledge, skills, and self-reliance to real-world situations – and to understand that they can ultimately make a difference. Generation Earth integrates student-led projects with workshops, youth summits, and publications for families, focused on stormwater, waste, green spaces, and nature-based solutions. TreePeople serves students in 84 cities in Los Angeles County, focusing on disadvantaged cities in South and Southeast LA, the San Fernando Valley, and the San Gabriel Valley.

A significant GE objective also includes professional development resources for teachers, in which TreePeople training helps educators engage topics such as ecosystem cycles of waste, water, and habitat connectivity. Each workshop provides the resources teachers need to design and implement hands-on environmental projects, aligned with core curriculum standards, local history, and cultural inclusivity. Generation Earth has trained an average of 200-400 educators at up to 240 underfunded public schools each year.

Outdoor Access and Eco-Tours: Connecting children and nature

For three decades, TreePeople’s signature “Eco-Tours” program has created one-of-a-kind outdoor experiences for over 10,000 youth in grades K-6 each year, through dedicated partnerships with public school districts in disadvantaged communities.

Eco-Tours build STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math) knowledge through opportunities for students to explore, and then apply science learning to the natural world within their own homes, neighborhoods, and communities. TreePeople is significantly expanding our outdoor access programming, through several new initiatives to provide outdoor trips to underserved populations in Southeast Los Angeles, the South Bay, and the San Fernando Valley. These outdoor access trips will offer experiences in nature for youth and families who have faced historic barriers to green spaces, such as cost, transportation, and exclusion. Over fifty trips to natural areas and regional green spaces are planned in the next year.

Students learn about soil science from the “Dirt Doctor” on an Eco-Tour at TreePeople. Photo credit: Adam Corey Thomas.





TreePeople leads a tree planting at Patrick Henry Middle School - Granada Hills, CA. Photo credit: Adam Corey Thomas.

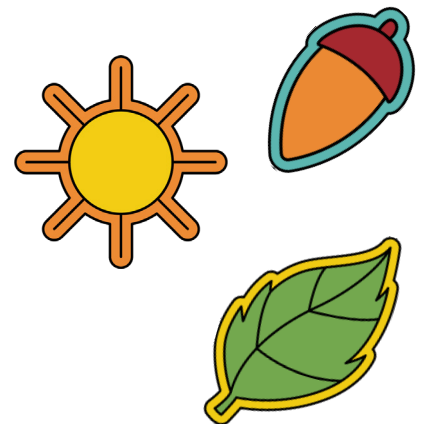
School Greening: Leveraging hard-won state funding dollars into thriving green schools

To fully address environmental justice for the neighborhoods we serve, we must prioritize improving the learning environments of our youth, in order to build environmental leadership for a climate-ready future. The TreePeople school greening strategy prioritizes:

- Increasing green infrastructure and shade canopy on underfunded campuses to address disproportionate environmental burden. This process reduces ambient heat for cooler, safer indoor and outdoor conditions, improving neighborhood access to nature overall.

- Creating more outdoor opportunities for youth, to improve physical education and public health. This process has the potential to impact both student mental health and lifetime activity habits, as well as recapturing play and outdoor learning lost over an average of 6 to 10 regional extreme heat school cancellations each year.
- Improving climate literacy through bilingual environmental education. This strategy empowers students, families, and educators to take ownership of the school greening process, and incorporate their new green spaces into STEM instruction—building green jobs pipelines, and catalyzing community action through volunteer-led project growth.

At LA's most under-funded and environmental justice-impacted schools, TreePeople has planted over 30,000 trees for regional campuses over the past 40 years. We are currently underway in a historic, region-wide effort to green campuses across five regional school districts, including Los Angeles Unified. So far, TreePeople has completed transformative greening projects at ten school campuses in Watts, San Fernando, Pacoima, and Wilmington, with dozens more to come.





TreePeople and YouthBuild - San Francisquito Canyon. Photo credit: Adam Corey Thomas.

Workforce Development: An investment in the future

As we recognize that environmental equity is tied to social equity, TreePeople is creating programming to provide job and training opportunities for young adults from the same historically underserved communities we aim to green. We are developing a dedicated workforce development program

to help cultivate and diversify the next generation of conservation professionals. TreePeople's current pilot workforce program includes over 15 paid participants in various teams across the greater Los Angeles region. Participants are receiving comprehensive experience in environmental career opportunities, conservation practices, arboriculture, urban forest management, post-fire wildlands restoration, volunteer organizing,

and other natural resource conservation skills—building a new generation of urban and wildland resource management professionals.

As our programs become ever more dynamic, engaging, and aligned with regional needs, TreePeople seeks to capitalize on the success of our environmental education portfolio by expanding these programs—as a direct counter to post-COVID STEM learning loss and urban forestry workforce pipeline gaps. With the support of our donors and partners, TreePeople Environmental Education will be able to green campuses, build leadership confidence, create connection with the outdoors, and equip students, teachers, and workers with action-oriented, hands-on environmental experiences that make lifelong impact. In the coming years, we hope to reach more underserved individuals and families than ever, connecting generations to the wonders of nature surrounding us.



**Your support makes this
work possible – THANK YOU!!**

Have questions? Please contact
development@treepeople.org

Want to make a donation?
www.treepeople.org/supportus

Bequests and planned giving inquiries:
development@treepeople.org