

LIFE Lessons: The Nature of Science

LIFE Profile: Misty Alderman

Position: Environmental Education Specialist, Office of Environmental Education, Florida Department of Environmental Protection



Misty with Florida Scrub-Jay after banding as a biologist with St. Lucie County.

Memorable EE Experience:

The change of perspective of a student participating in the Madison County LIFE Program: Initially, "It's too hot out here; I'm about to **DIE!**" -- to "There are too many bugs out here; I don't like it" -- to "I can't wait to come outside again!" -- all within just *one* short hour.

"What is the extinction of a condor to a child who has never seen a wren?"

-Naturalist Robert Michael Pyle-

Environment-based education is what the LIFE program is all about. Although one of the direct goals is to increase student achievement in science through the participation in multiple field experiences, one of the indirect goals of the program is to foster an awareness, understanding and appreciation of the natural world. Those of us involved in the LIFE program know the immediate benefits it offers, but are you aware of the other benefits of outdoor education?

According to [Richard Louv, author, Last Child in the Woods](#), students in environment-based education typically outperform students in traditional classrooms by producing student gains in social studies, science, language arts and math. They also show improved standardized test scores and GPAs and increased problem solving, critical thinking and decision making skills. And students in these programs typically demonstrate better attendance and behavior than those in traditional classrooms. Studies also suggest that exposure to nature may reduce the symptoms of ADHD and offer resistance to negative stresses and depression. And of course, with childhood obesity and vitamin D deficiencies on the rise due to our increasingly indoor lifestyles, there's the physical health benefits. As a remedy, this year the No Child Left Inside Coalition formed with efforts to pass the federal [No Child Left Inside Act](#) which passed in the House of Representatives in September. To keep apprised of its progress and see how you can participate in a No Child Left Inside Day, visit: http://www.cbf.org/site/PageServer?pagename=act_sub_actioncenter_federal_NCLB. For more information on the current epidemic of "nature deficit disorder," visit <http://www.cnaturenet.org/>.

With transportation costs rising, some LIFE partner schools are finding it difficult getting out to the parks for their field experiences. Some have to reduce their days in the field, thereby increasing the student/teacher ratio which ultimately influences the quality of the student experience, and some are unable to make it into the field at all. While schools are encouraged to seek out sources of additional funding to help pay for bus transportation for the continuation of the program beyond the inaugural year, students can still be given the opportunity to learn in Florida's environment. Depending on the creativity of their teachers, many of the labs can be conducted right within the schoolyard! And some of the more generic labs can be done just outside the classroom doors, such as Observation and Inference, Measurements and others. Please contact me if you would like ideas on how to move your inside curriculum to the great outdoors, Misty.Alderman@dep.state.fl.us or (850) 245-2906.

Another important point Louv mentioned in his book is: Where will the scientists, biologists, park rangers, park managers, interpreters and stewards of our state and planet come from if children are not given the chance to experience nature firsthand? Again, "*what is the extinction of a condor (or a Florida Scrub-Jay) to a child who has never seen a wren?*"