

Title: Growing Up WILD Training with Moody Air Force Base Staff

Summary: Through the 4-H/military partnership, Georgia 4-H trained Moody Air Force Base Child and Youth Programs staff with the national Growing Up WILD educator program.

Situation: The American Academy of Pediatrics encouraged children and teenagers to spend time outdoors. Young people that spend time in nature can be physically healthier, more engaged in learning, more positive in behavior, and mentally healthier. Dr. Claire McCarthy, Senior Faculty Editor at Harvard Health Publishing, also cites that giving children the opportunity to play outdoors encourages them to take risks and try new things. Children today are spending less time outdoors than in previous generations (Charles and Louv, 2009). Research indicates that teachers are reluctant to take youth outdoors during the school day for a variety of reasons including not having the appropriate space, instruction scheduling, equity issues, and not seeing outdoor space as an opportunity to teach/learn, (Patchen, et. al., 2021).

Response: Project WILD is a national, interdisciplinary conservation and environmental education program that focuses on wildlife and habitat. Through the 4-H/military partnership, Georgia 4-H partnered with Moody Air Force Base Child and Youth Programs (CYP) to offer a Growing Up WILD training for the School Age Center staff. Growing Up WILD is an early childhood education curriculum that builds on children's sense of wonder about nature and invites them to explore wildlife and the world around them. Through a wide range of activities and experiences, Growing Up WILD provides an early foundation for developing positive impressions about the natural world and lifelong social and academic skills. The activity guide features 27 field-tested, hands-on, nature-based, ready-made thematic units and over 400 experiences in a full-color activity guide. Georgia 4-H taught a 6-hour training that provided CYP staff the opportunity to discuss best practices as it relates to early childhood learning and allowed the staff to sample eight activities from the Growing Up WILD guide.

Results/Impacts: Ten staff from Moody Air Force Base participated in the training. According to the evaluation results (n=7), all participants agreed with the following statements: (a) the content of this workshop is developmentally appropriate for the children I teach, (b) the content of this workshop is appropriate for the subjects I teach, (c) I will include Growing Up WILD resources in my teaching, (d) Growing Up WILD activities will help me address and meet curriculum requirements, and (e) I believe that the information and activities contained in Growing Up WILD will resonate with the children I teach.

One staff member shared, "I loved that everything was hands on and kept us involved the entire time and kept things interesting," while another participant shared the "training materials are very easy to understand, and I'm confident I can implement them."