

Out-of-School Time Stories

BOOST Grantee Spotlight: Elachee Nature Science Center



The Elachee Nature Science Center (Elachee) in northeast Georgia is set in the 1,440-acre Chicopee Woods Nature Preserve, one of Georgia's most ecologically diverse green spaces. The nonprofit was founded in 1978 by five Gainesville women and focuses on preservation and building environmental literacy for Georgians of all ages.

Elachee offers hiking, live animal exhibits, a wetland refuge, ecology exhibits, K-12 school presentations, field trip opportunities, seasonal public programs, a nature academy, science nights, an astronomy program, and more. **For more than 40 years, Elachee has also put on an environmental education and adventure summer camp for children ages 4-12.**

Expanding Participation

Gainesville City has in recent years become much more diverse, with Hispanic residents and immigrants now representing nearly 40% of the population. In response, Elachee has sought to expand the diversity of participants in its offerings to target this population and reduce summer learning loss. In previous years, Elachee could offer only a few scholarships to the adventure summer camp, and many interested families who wanted to participate could not do so because of registration fees and lack of transportation.



Youth Served:
688 annually



Ages Served:
K-5th grade

Counties Served:
Banks, Barrow, Cobb, Dawson, DeKalb, Forsyth, Fulton, Gwinnett, Habersham, Hall, Henry, Jackson, Lumpkin, Monroe, White

Programming Offered:
Summer

BOOST Grant Purpose:
Expand access,
Reduce barriers, and
Increase quality

OST Government Funding Sources:
BOOST grant and
Learning Loss grant

Website: www.elachee.org



According to Maranda McGaha, Director of Education at Elachee, BOOST funds had a transformative effect on the summer camp in 2022 and have allowed the organization to address these specific needs. **A grant-funded translator became “a game changer” who provided document translations and direct communication to promote the program and how to apply for Spanish-speaking parents,** particularly at Chicopee Woods Elementary School. This nearby school has very high rates of student poverty, immigrant families, and students with insecure housing, and was a driver for summer camp recruitment.

Expanding Staff and Program Offerings

BOOST funds were used to cover costs for meals, snacks, and transportation, and allowed the organization to subsidize the enrollment costs for the camp for families who needed this support. It is the first time Elachee has been able to provide such support, noted McGaha. The translator helped families complete registration forms, explained that all costs would be waived, and detailed the bus transportation logistics for participating children.

Support from BOOST also strengthened the summer camp curriculum and offerings. Additional naturalists gave presentations to students, bringing with them birds of prey, reptiles, and a petting zoo. The grant allowed Elachee to hire an assistant director, a former teacher, who focuses solely on the summer camp. Elachee also leveraged BOOST funding to hire more experienced staff, certified teachers in addition to college students on summer break, to help run the camp and provide higher-level learning opportunities.



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*– Maranda McGaha,
Director of Education*

Countering Pandemic-Induced Isolation

After only being able to provide limited camp offerings for two years due to the pandemic, **2022 was a roaring comeback and success, with nearly 700 kids attending camp over 5 weeks.** After pandemic restrictions, many kids were struggling with social skills, did not know how to handle face-to-face interactions, and were not used to being outdoors. McGaha noted that camp was an antidote to the isolation experienced by these children: **“The camp is all hands-on, no screens, and outdoors all day, so that was a huge shift from the at-home learning of the pandemic.”** Students worked and played in groups and formed relationships and a sense of community.

Many of the students were initially tentative about outdoor activities, but by the end of their week at camp had blossomed, “they discovered that they love being able to play outside,” said McGaha. One parent concurs, relating that her daughter was initially upset about being signed up for camp: “[She] is a hard sell and hardly likes going to new places, especially if she doesn’t know anyone.” But, she says, her daughter

👍👍 **loved camp from day 1, to the point she told me what she did every day without me asking. She wants to come next year, but I told her that she will not be able to due to her being in middle school. She stated that we can say ‘she stayed back.’ Lol. That really means a lot to me as a parent and speaks volumes of your program. Thanks again from the bottom of my heart for making learning about nature exciting and fun!!** 💬💬

With the success of camp in 2022 and knowing they have two more years of BOOST funding to build and sustain their efforts, Elachee staff look ahead with excitement. “I feel extreme gratitude for the BOOST program, which allows us to bring in so many kids who could not otherwise participate, as well as provide more and richer programming,” says McGaha.





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Building Opportunities in Out-of-School Time (BOOST) is a competitive grant program administered by the Georgia Statewide Afterschool Network (GSAN) and operated in partnership with the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE). BOOST offers \$85 million via three-year grants, renewed annually, with funding made available through the American Rescue Plan. The grants program is aimed at promoting evidence-based practices and whole child supports in afterschool and summer learning programs. BOOST is designed to expand access, reduce barriers to enrollment, and increase programmatic quality to improve outcomes for students and families throughout the state. GSAN provides recommendations for grant awards based on rigorous application criteria and offers technical assistance and training to grantees to ensure successful implementation. All grants are approved by GaDOE, ensuring alignment with statewide priorities and goals.