



Experiential Education – Empowerment – Diversion

WOLF CONNECTION'S EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS

At Wolf Connection, we empower youth to become authentic leaders and contributing community members. We accomplish this through facilitating experiential relationships with rescued wolves and the natural environment. These deeply intuitive animals inspire young people to be fully present in their bodies, release ideas and behaviors that no longer serve, and understand their unique role in a human "pack" or community. The wolves help youth focus on their impulses, feelings, and behaviors in a constructive way; they learn to forgive and give others (and themselves) a second chance.

Why Wolves? ... Like the teens we work with, wolves are misunderstood. Yet science tells us the wolf is the first animal we ever associated with more than 40,000 years ago. Early humans adopted our family and social structure, survival and hunting techniques from wolves. Researchers believe we have a memory of this bond in our DNA, so teens and wolves naturally connect at a deep, primal level, carrying great therapeutic value.

Founded in 2009, what started as in-school presentations and brief visits to the sanctuary have evolved into a multi-disciplined program with one-day field trips and our signature ***8-week Experiential Education, Youth Empowerment, and Diversion Program.***

EMPOWERMENT PROGRAMS OVERVIEW

Wolf Connection’s signature programs engage participants to grow, thrive, and become contributing community members. Grounded in principles of empowerment and resilience, the programs teach at-risk youth to face their fears, embrace their unique strengths, and own their inherent worth. Participants learn the importance of working as a team or “pack”, and practice sensitivity to the unique gifts, experiences, and emotions of others.

During the program students will develop:

- Self-awareness, self-reflection, and self-acceptance;
- Skills for working through challenges and taking responsibility for their future;
- Connection with nature and animals, leading to compassion, forgiveness, and acceptance
- Pro-social behavior with a sense of belonging to a community, a “pack” of their own; and
- A sense of curiosity around their purpose and hope for their future.

What students have said about their experience in the program:

“Wolf Connection has given me hope, and the tools and desire to try and make my life better despite my past. If the wolfdogs are able to move forward so am I. I feel happy with who I am now.”

“[The program] has showed me how to trust myself and believe that I can make a difference in the world.”

"The activity of letting go of what I needed to let go helped me move on from the past."

"I like the project because it helps look back on all your obstacles and see how far you came."

"Everyone at Wolf Connection has helped me find my voice."

Experiential Education units delivered throughout the Program:

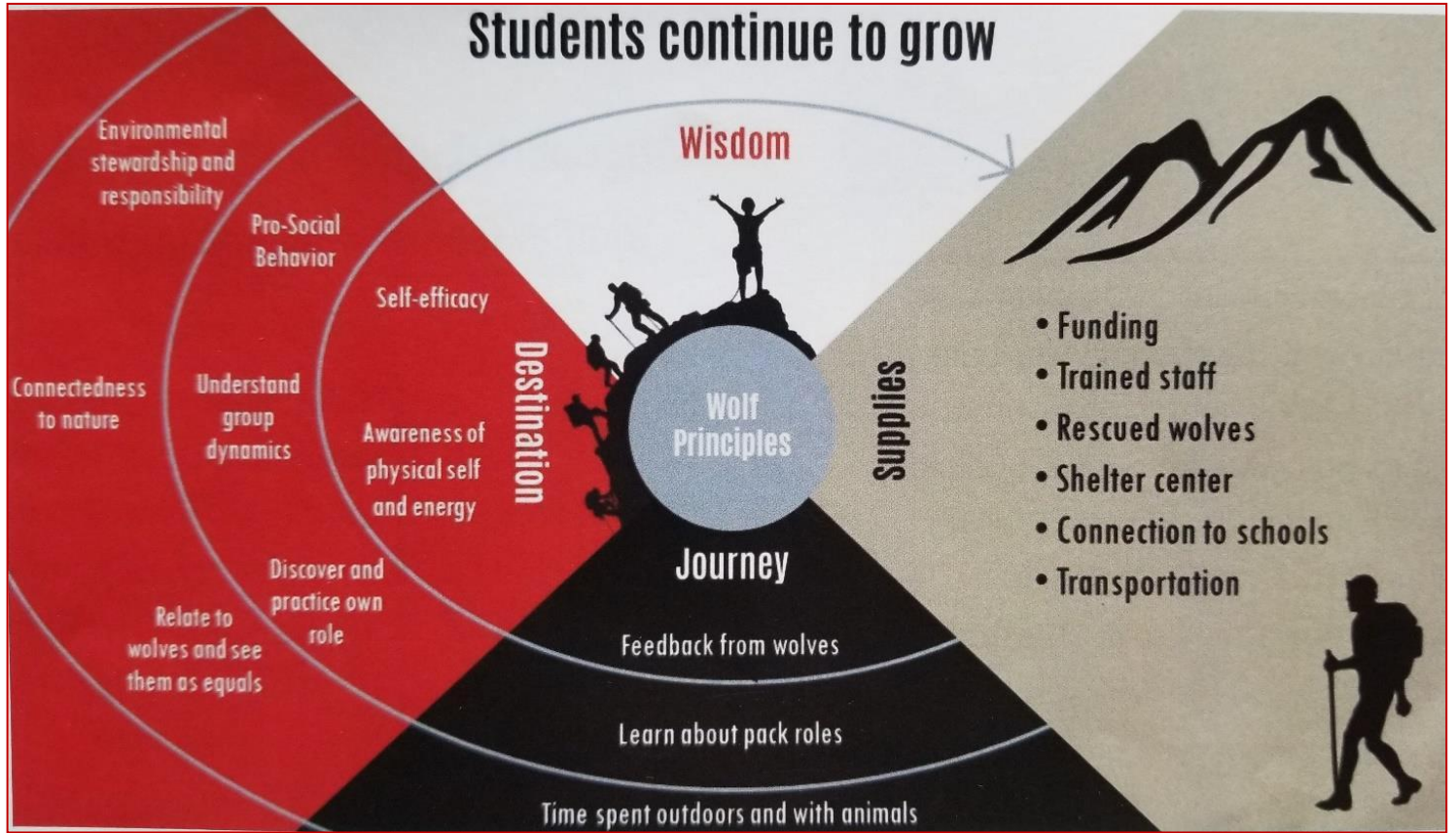
- **Wolf Principles:** Simple lessons from wolf to human eliciting character traits such as: self-empowerment, leadership, team collaboration, self-care, and social and environmental awareness.
- Witnessing the pack dynamics among wolves and applying what they learn to their own human behaviors and understanding of how they affect and are affected by others.
- Exploring the different **roles in the wolf pack:** Alpha, Beta, Nanny, Hunter, Tracker, Omega, and how these complex social dynamics apply to human interactions. As a result, students discover their natural tendencies and how to leverage them, as well as understanding, accepting, and integrating other people’s personalities and tendencies.
- Experiencing how one can transform and grow through self-awareness and self-acceptance.

What students say about the *Wolf Principles* they learn:

"The [Wolf Principles], I think we're gonna do it unconsciously. It's just gonna be something we do in our everyday life."

"I think Wolf Connection actually helped us with [the 'Wolves are okay with who they are' principle], because, I think, some of us weren't really sure who we were."

PROGRAM RESULTS



Program model as explained by Claremont researchers

In an ongoing study initiated by Claremont University, Doctoral and Masters Students of Psychology report, it was found that:

Students demonstrated high emotional and behavioral engagement, which increased over the course of the program. Students especially connected with activities involving the wolves, both interactions and learning their stories. They also got the most out of activities where they were pushed to open up, connect with others, and work towards accomplishing a task.

Overall, students demonstrated potential for long-term change. They developed a strong connection with the wolves and the *Wolf Principles*, staff expected maturity and respect from the students, and students responded to staff energy. Students wished they had more time at Wolf Connection.

Self-Reflection and Insights:

- The students demonstrated greater self-reflection.
- They became more trusting towards others.
- They became more in touch with their emotions.
- They integrated the *Wolf Principles* in ways that helped them in their everyday lives.

Pro-Social Behavior:

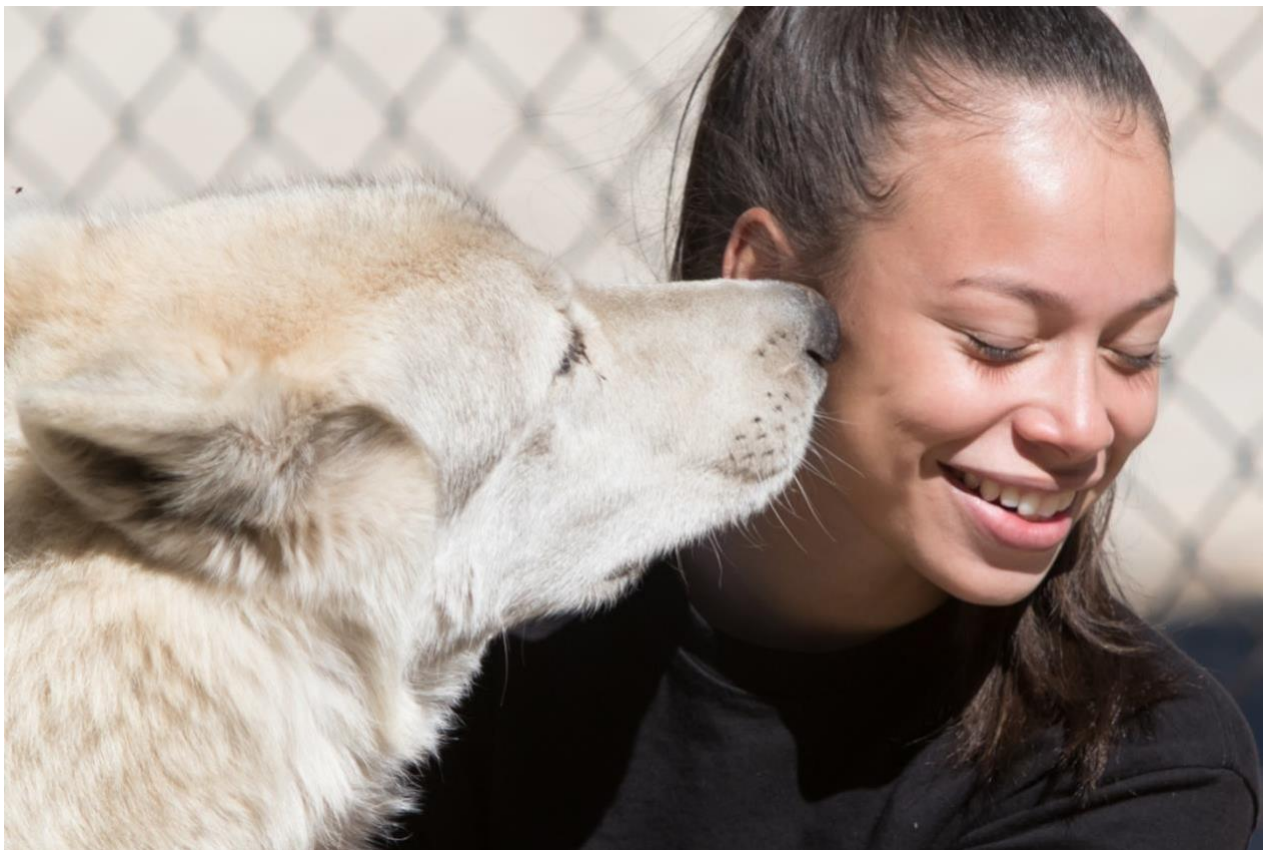
- Students reported increased helping around the house.
- Students reported behaving more calmly across situations.
- Participating students bonded as a group.
 - 100% of teachers surveyed reported:
 - Better behavior by program graduates was noted.
 - Students displayed a better sense of community, interacting more positively with peers. Students exhibited desire to contribute and give back.

Connectedness to Nature – 100% of students surveyed showed:

- Spending time outside was a new experience.
- Newfound respect for wolves.
- A greater connection with nature.
- Actively seeking out nature experiences.

Personal Growth:

- Students indicated a desire to continue abiding by the program’s *Wolf Principles* in their daily lives.
- They reported practicing meditative moments of silence on their own time.
- Many want to return to volunteer at Wolf Connection.
- A clear modification of daily habits was reported - Quote “*I don’t go out on the streets anymore.*”



8-WEEK ON SITE EMPOWERMENT PROGRAM

Sessions 1 & 2 - Connection: Discovering the bond - *Connecting with the heart*

- Experience the bond between human and wolf: This requires both awareness of how the wolf responds to the person and self-awareness as to how one's feelings and behavior affect the wolf.
- Develop a healthy bond with other program participants and with Nature.
- Experience a renewed relationship with self.

Session 3 & 4 - Discovery: Blazing new trails within oneself - *Opening to new experiences and beliefs*

- Exploration of Wolf Principles: Simple wisdoms based on the way of the wolf. Apply practical wolf wisdom learning to in-the-moment experiences while at the ranch as well as examples from everyday life.
- Discover where one is in the life journey. What role would one be in a wolf pack?
- How well do I communicate? Engage in role-playing to experience old and new ways of communicating.

Sessions 5 & 6 - Creation: Making choices and following through - *Collaborating with others*

- Set the intention and choose a creative, collaborative project - whether it's carpentry, photography, poetry, or video production. What action steps must I take in order to reach my goal?
- How do I treat myself and others as I work on this project? Am I willing to seek assistance if necessary? Am I willing to assist others? How does the role I play in a wolf pack affect my efforts?

Sessions 7 & 8 - Consolidation: Getting ready to face life's challenges with the new tools and skills learned during the program - *Becoming a member of the human pack*

- Execute effective communication: Discovering one's "howl" and authentic self-expression. Convey and receive information honestly and clearly, to achieve one's, and the group's, goals.
- Self-Regulate: Be observant of emotional responses and choices in behavior. Practice positive self-talk and willingness to seek assistance as needed.
- Prepare program participants for the 12-month follow-up process.



WHAT A TYPICAL DAY AT WOLF CONNECTION MAY LOOK LIKE:

9:00-9:30 am Welcome - Council Circle

- Grounding Moment of Silence and Meditation - How present AND READY am I right now?
- Check In: Reflection on previous week and how the program applies to real life.

9:30-9:45 am Medicine Wheel (or Wheel of Life)

- Nature-based learning of life cycles and stages of human development inspired by Native American traditions. Each participant is given a “Journey Stone” that symbolizes their journey through the eight weeks. Here they place each personal journey stone in the Medicine Wheel to reflect upon and represent where they are that day.
- Review *Wolf Principles* from the previous weeks.

9:45 am-12:00 pm Wolf Therapy 1 - Field Activities

- *Wolf Principles* practical discussion and application.
- Mountain and forest hikes with the wolves.
- Walking the Labyrinth ... another traditional practice to reflect on the ups and downs of one’s life journey.
- Exercises for emotional forgiveness and release. An example is the “Rock Activity” in which students carry a sizable rock up a mountain trail that symbolizes the weight of their past and their burdens.
- Team Building: Collaborative activities such as Shelter Building Competition and the Crossing the Dessert Obstacles.

12:00-12:45 pm **Lunch.** We address nutrition by providing healthy and nutritious food options.

12:45-1:45 pm Wolf Therapy 2 - Elective, Creative Projects depicting their experience with the wolves

- Film: script development, direction, camera work, sound, and interviews.
- Art: murals, mandalas, and dream catchers.
- Spoken word: Poetry and song writing.
- Carpentry: wolf houses, benches, tree houses, bridges, stages, etc.

1:45-2:00 pm Closing at Medicine Wheel

- The day’s final remarks.
- Retrieve Journey Stone, take it home and keep it near as a reminder of the wolves during the week.
- Students set intentions for a good and positive week.
- Homework assignment for the week is distributed.



Wolf Connection is not just another program ...

It is a life-changing experience for the young women and men who attend. Wolf Connection has gained the attention of both local and National media ...



Los Angeles Times

Psychology Today

The New York Times

