

# Coming Full Circle at Zoo Camp

For the longest time, Katie Klestinski kept a portfolio in her basement of art she created while attending Zoo Camps as a child – until her mother recently did some cleaning and tossed it. But that's OK, because Klestinski will be back at Zoo Camp this summer. After two summers as an education intern with the Zoological Society of Milwaukee, she's preparing for her first summer as a camp instructor. "It's fun to come full circle," she says.

Both of Klestinski's parents are teachers, and she always wanted to be a teacher growing up. Her internships with the Zoological Society, which runs Zoo Classes and Camps, helped her achieve that goal, she says. She graduated from the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse with a teaching degree in December 2014 and is completing her first year as a kindergarten teacher at Kluge Elementary School in Milwaukee. There was no question she would apply to be a camp instructor with the Zoological Society this summer. "I feel a personal connection to the program," she says. "I know how awesome and engaging and fun the classes were for me, so to be able to give that to other children is amazing."

Klestinski, who lives in Brookfield, first applied for a Zoological Society internship during her freshman year of college, but she wasn't selected. Patty Trinko, assistant education director, encouraged her to get some more experience with children and apply again. (Incidentally, Trinko also taught Klestinski's art camps.) She did just that, working at the YMCA for three summers, and was accepted into the Zoological Society program in 2014. "It was so exciting to see that my hard work paid off," she says. She had more hard work in front of her. Education interns are required to work toward specific goals and learn new skills, such as leading class segments and supervising high school assistants. "The program forced me to learn how to manage a classroom," Klestinski says. "It gave me all the resources I needed to hone those skills." Interns keep journals and receive intensive mentoring from the Education Department staff.

The Zoological Society believes the internship program improves its offerings while also developing strong educators who will take what they've learned into the

community, Trinko says. "We help the interns develop their skills in a safe environment with a lot of mentoring support," she says. "Year after year, we hear from interns how this program has changed their lives." Klestinski showed obvious promise as an educator, Trinko says. The staff praised her enthusiasm in the classroom while encouraging her not to be afraid to show her more reflective and serious side. "We saw her develop into a true professional and knew we wanted to hire her as a camp instructor."

With her perspectives as a camper, intern and now teacher, Klestinski understands the value of Zoo Classes and Camps. "I know how much learning loss happens in summer. This program combats that in a fun and engaging way." Classes offer a good balance of instruction, activities and time touring the Zoo, she says. "The Zoological Society provides the structure, but the kids don't feel like they're in school." Klestinski will teach classes for children ages 4 through 7, and she even gets to lead "Oodles of Art," one of the camps she attended as a kid. "I love the Zoological Society too much to work anywhere else this summer," she says.

*By Stacy Vogel Davis*

Katie Klestinski will be a Zoo Camp instructor for the first time this summer after two education internships with the Zoological Society. Photo by Stacy Kaat



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