The day has come — 53 young children ages four to five years old will release trout into the wild! The preschoolers from Bronxworks will be releasing the trout that they raised into the Cross River at Ward Pound Ridge Reservation on Friday, April 27th.

The Bronx Children’s Museum has been collaborating with Trout in the Classroom, a national environmental education program, to pilot Little Friends of the River at the BronxWorks Early Childhood Center on the Grand Concourse. The heart of the program is a chilled 55 gallon tank where children raise trout, from eggs to fingerlings (baby trout), which are then released back into the wild in the spring. The Museum wanted to find out if very young children could benefit from a program based on educational strategies designed by Trout in the Classroom (TIC) (http://www.troutintheclassroom.org) for older children. The answer is a resounding YES!

Bronx early childhood teachers said in 2010 that they needed support in integrating more science into their curriculum. The Bronx Children’s Museum got right to work to create an exhibit, River on the Go, based on the innovations of successful science education programs. River on the Go is an interactive diorama of the Bronx River created by educators and artists. It incorporates sights and sounds of the Bronx River in a traveling bus exhibit where Museum Guides lead groups of children through the “River.”

Carla Precht, the Executive Director of the Bronx Children's Museum, was certain Little Friends of the River would be a big hit. She said, “what better way for young children to learn about the natural sciences than to bring the natural sciences to them!” In the past, the TIC model has geared itself to working with older students—teachers apply for tanks to participate in the TIC program and TIC gives them trout eggs to hatch. Their students observe the life cycle of the trout, and then they release the 8 month old trout into watershed streams in the spring.

As hoped, the program has become a tremendous success with the young preschoolers in the Bronx who are fascinated with the life cycle of the trout and learning about our important water resources. The Museum is
leading this project and planning to replicate it in the South Bronx Headstart programs in the fall 2012. Teachers receive training and monthly professional development support from TIC and the Museum provides a fish tank and a stipend for one teacher liaison at each site. The Bronx Children’s Museum is providing resources like books, maps and posters. Lilli Genovesi, the Trout in the Classroom Coordinator and also a Bronx Children’s Museum Guide in the River on the Go exhibit, visits the center once a month or so to provide support.

At BronxWorks, Chinyere Celcis is the Little Friends of the River liaison and resource person who has developed the TIC pre-school prototype along with her colleague, Moyjae Aaron, the Bronx Children’s Museum and Trout in the Classroom. They have created lesson plans, songs and other materials to teach the children about fish and natural water resources. Chinyere says, “as the Little Friends of the River liaison, one of my responsibilities was to brainstorm age appropriate ways to engage young children in the topic. The children did the rest. They lead us further in our pursuit to teach them about Trout and River Life. Their questioning and response to lessons helped us in creating more lessons/activities. All of the lessons/activities were created through the interest of the children. The Trout in the Classroom model was a perfect fit for our curriculum needs. It created an opportunity for us to have an abundant science curriculum while exposing our urban preschool students to a subject they probably never would have known.”

Moyjae added that, “learning about Trout was a simple way for children to get in touch with nature through various activities such as nature walks, exploring local plant life and animals and correlating to other nature themes. My assistant, Diane Semper, was a great asset to the pilot because of her knowledge regarding New York City’s natural resources.” Diane said, “we were able to visit parks such as Central Park, Morningside Park, Crotona and Pelham Bay Park to give the children a complete hands-on experience. These parks all contain educational programs run by the Urban Park Rangers who are equipped to teach children about natural environments within their communities.”

For more information:

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