

Animal adaptation fun at the Waldorf West Library

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On July 11, local children ages 6 to 11 attended the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore program called “The Amazing Adaptations Challenge,” presented by educational instructors Danielle Smith and Tim Grunert at the Waldorf West Library.

Staff photos By TIFFANY WATSON

Animals are known to adapt to their environment. At the Waldorf West Library, representatives from the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore taught local children this week about how some of their zoo animals adapt to survive as participants got up close and personal with a few scaly and feathered animal friends.

On July 11, children ages 6 to 11 attended “The Amazing Adaptations Challenge,” a program presented by Danielle Smith and Tim Grunert, educational instructors at the Maryland Zoo in Baltimore. The children discovered some of the amazing adaptations animals have for life in the wild, used challenge activities to compare them to their own abilities and had an opportunity to see real animals up close.

“It’s hard for a lot of people in Waldorf to visit our zoo in Baltimore because it’s over an hour away, but with our program being able to travel to different places, we are able to create that connection with people who would otherwise have a difficult time making it to the zoo,” Smith said.

During the program, Smith and Grunert discussed animal habitats, specifically in the water and in the woods, identified animals that do not adapt to more than one surrounding and identified differences between each habitat.

“Animals do well in their own habitats,” Grunert said. “In a habitat each animal needs food, water and shelter and other necessities that will help it survive. When the habitat changes, that means the animals don’t do as well. Some animals are endangered because of some changes in their habitat, or they have become endangered because of poaching.”

Grunert and Smith carefully held each live animal and allowed children and parents to view the animal’s body parts that also help them adapt to their own surroundings. Attendees had an opportunity to examine a rose hair tarantula, a tenrec (a hedgehog-like creature native to Madagascar) and a Savannah monitor lizard.

“Having up-close and personal encounters with animals builds an emotional rapport with the children and by building up that emotional connection to those wild animals, it will foster a sense of care for them, and then they can help foster conservations for the animals,” Grunert said. “If a child knows that an animal that the children like is endangered, then they will care that it’s endangered and do more to stop it.”

The Maryland Zoo in Baltimore is home to more than 1,500 birds, mammals, amphibians and reptiles. In total there are more than 200 species of animals displayed in natural settings that replicate the animals’ native habitats.



The highlight of the program at Waldorf West Library was when the educational instructors pulled out an animal that Charles County residents are unlikely to have seen walking through their own neighborhoods. Tails, the African black-footed penguin, is typically a crowd favorite. Children were both shocked and excited to see a penguin in their part of town.

“I felt like they enjoyed the program and it seemed like the children were responsive to the experience,” Smith said. “The idea of just understanding a little bit more about the different animals shows the children that they don’t have to worry, don’t have to be afraid and that there are things that we do that affect animals. They can now understand that we coexist with animals and they learn how to continue doing that.”

The zoo’s educational instructors said they were pleased that the children had the opportunity to experience a program that includes fun activities and introduces them to animals that they aren’t normally around. They hope their efforts encouraged the children to develop the same appreciation for animals that they have for them as well.

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