

Brooklyn Bridge Park is an 85-acre post-industrial waterfront site running 1.3 miles along the East River allowing unprecedented waterfront access to the public. Providing beautiful views of the Manhattan skyline, the park combines the urban splendor found only in New York City with the natural setting of the lush green space created to give city dwellers a break from their concrete jungle. The park is built on historic shipping piers and utilizes environmentally sourced and recycled materials to create waterfront promenades, open lawn spaces, playgrounds, and sporting fields. After twenty years of community advocacy, construction of the park began in January 2009 and the first piers opened to the public in 2010. Currently, the park is still under construction with the next piers slated to open at the end of this year. The Brooklyn Bridge Park Corporation partners with the Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy to create a programming schedule that provides over 400 free events throughout the year, including children's education programs, fitness classes, and cultural performances.

As a Summer Associate at the Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy I quickly came to realize that every day at the park brings different challenges to meet with enthusiasm and creativity. With such a wide variety of activities and events offered each day, it was impossible to have a set weekly schedule. All of the summer associates worked together setting up and staffing the events, working as teachers and facilitators to ensure that everything ran smoothly.

Some of the regular events that I worked most closely with were the daily Kayak camp classes and the twice weekly Green Team, both of which worked to get the community involved and active at the park.

Kayak camp is offered to schools and summer camps for 6 weeks during June and July; programs that are qualified under Title One were able to take part in the program for free.

Working with these groups of kids was the most rewarding experience that I had all summer.

Many of the kids could not swim and it was most of their first times on a kayak, so they had to put a lot of their trust into me as an instructor and safety boater. At the class, many were

nervous and unsure if they even wanted to give it a try, but all it took was few minutes of paddling around for their confidence to grow and the fun to start. Because the program mainly caters to urban schools who qualify for free programming, we worked with students who came from many diverse backgrounds. Working with these urban youth, I learned many insightful things about communication, both with other staff members and with the students themselves. With the staff split between those on land and those on the water, effective communication was essential; repeating the same phrase over and over to a child who is scared and ineffective in a boat isn't going to be very helpful, and the same goes for instructions between staffers. As the weeks went by, the team grew adept at signaling each other and notifying one another when something needed to be done that may have been out of their personal range. And as we became better, we were able to instruct our land classes more effectively and develop improved on-water teaching skills.

During my summer at the park, I worked with the full-time education instructor, Isa, to assist with summer outdoor environmental education classes. This was especially important to me because I plan on going in to the field of environmental education when I graduate next year. It was really inspiring to work with Isa because like me, she did not graduate with a degree in environmental studies, which one would think is essential to go into this field. These classes were taught so that the students could interact with the part of their natural environment that is so often withheld from them living in Brooklyn. The students would put on waders and be allowed to take part in seining, a type of net fishing that the Park is licensed to do which catches many marine creatures. After studying and explaining their importance, the students would help release them back into the East River. While not all of our classes involved getting into the river, most of them focused on the ecological importance of it and how human actions affect and are affected by our natural environment. This was a great teaching experience and helped me get a firmer idea about teaching in a non-profit park setting.

I also worked closely with the volunteer coordinator with the twice-weekly Green team group which worked to do basic gardening and maintenance at the northern end of the park.

This was a great group because there were always the same few people who came every time and then many times a group would schedule to come as well. Having this group of people working on the landscape enabled the Park to hire fewer full-time gardeners, cutting down on expenses.

Overall, my experience at Brooklyn Bridge Park Conservancy was extremely rewarding. I explored many areas of running and working in a non-profit company and saw firsthand how important our work was to the community. Because we provided so many free events and programs as well as open green spaces and access to the waterfront, the Park helped to strengthen the greater community of Brooklyn. As this area becomes more and more frequented by tourists, people see the amazing differences that the park has made in the area and are more than happy to support it. Working at the park really opened my eyes to the challenges that many face living in an urban setting and has made me even more determined to continue in this line of work because I see just how much of a difference access to nature makes in the lives of children.