

Learning from our Children

On Halloween Day, Calgary River Valleys (CRV) assembled a small group of volunteers to begin our 2020 riparian rehabilitation. This project had previously been delayed due to weather conditions, but CRV saw a window of opportunity and went for it. The project was only slightly diminished due to Covid restrictions. Just 15 people could take part, and all recommended hygiene protocols were followed.

Working with the City of Calgary as a partner, the Hanson Ranch stretch of West Nose Creek in Hidden Creek was identified as our project area. CRV surveyed the sites, and made plans for planting. A target of the number of willows to be planted was set by the City (more than 700), and our fabulous volunteers accomplished it in record time.

Amongst our volunteers were Jennifer and Josh. They are local area residents who heard about our plans through social media (Facebook: @CalgaryRiverValleys and Twitter: @clgrivervalleys) and joined us for our restoration, and brought their children.

Jennifer explains her motivation: "When I heard about the project to revitalize the banks of Nose Creek in Hidden Valley, I was very excited. How could we pass by an opportunity to contribute to a natural area so close to where we live? Two of my kids went there in grade 4 to learn about wetlands and how incredibly important they are. Not only did I want to support the project, but I wanted to strengthen my children's appreciation and connection to the area. Even more, I wanted to empower them to take action in creating positive change and ownership towards their community."

Josh had previously worked as a landscaper in the area around the creek, and was rewarded with a renewed sense of stewardship for the land he once took care of: "It was fun to get back into the wetland and do something that should help maintain and increase the quality of the natural area there."

Their children were equally enthusiastic. Rose, Sean and Eve shared their experiences:

"I wanted to participate because I thought it would be fun to plant trees. It was a little fun, until my sister dumped water into my boots."

"I actually really liked pushing the willow sticks into the ground and the hot chocolate."

"I liked scooping up the water in a bucket from the creek to water the trees after they were planted. I also really liked the feeling of the sticks going into the ground without difficulty. I thought that we would be putting potted trees into a hole, but we just put a bunch of sticks into the ground that would grow to be a bush kind of tree."

They have a common hope for the outcome of their plantings: "I want to be able to see the trees grow."

Calgary River Valleys took an experimental approach to this planting with several methods of treating the willows:

- Some were soaked to promote growth, some were not.
- Some were treated with water soluble paint on their tips to prevent drying, and some were not.
- Some were spiced with chili oil and yoghurt mixture to see if animals might be deterred from eating them.

Our youngest volunteer, Rose, was very observant: "I enjoyed writing letters on the flags to make sure we knew which types we were planting. Some sticks had beaver repellent or paint on them. We saw a muskrat and it was really cute."

Calgary River Valleys will provide an update in the spring, when we return to the site to observe our success rate with the willows, and to plant more shrubs. Please contact us at CalgaryRiverValleys2@Outlook.com for more information.