

Connecting Urban Families with Nature Via Stepping Stones of Engagement With Vasmos A Pescar and Take Me Fishing Day Events

The Providence Urban Wildlife Conservation Partnership and its partners, operate utilizing the guiding principles outlined in the Standards of Excellence, with a targeted focus on *Standard 2: Connect Urban People with Nature Via Stepping Stones of Engagement*. It is imperative that we engage youth and their families in outdoor recreation by slowly having them step out of their comfort zone, one interaction at a time.

Providence is a diverse city with populations represented by Hispanics (38%), African Americans (16%), Asians (6%), and non-Hispanic whites (37%) comprising less than half of the population. The need for a direct conservation message in this urban environment is especially significant as the city has a poverty rate of 26%, with 22% of the population under the age of 18 (U.S. Census Bureau). There are approximately 41,000 youth in Providence; 84% non-white and 56% are Hispanic/Latino. 85% of children in the Providence Public Schools qualify for free or reduced lunch. 37% of Providence youth are living in poverty and many report that they feel unsafe to go outside. It is critical to reach these children and families where they live, work, and play.



Providence Police Officer supporting happy anglers at the Vasmos A Pescar's Cops and Bobbers Event in Roger Williams Park. Credit: USFWS

Taking families with little to no experience in exploring the outdoors into the wilderness can be overwhelming and daunting. Many urban families have reported that they do not visit places, such as National Wildlife Refuges, because they feel unsafe, unwelcome, and lack confidence outdoors in these spaces. *(Know and relate to your community)*



Youth from Providence School visit a fish ladder to learn how the USFWS Coastal Program provides safe passage for migrating fish. Credit: April Alix, Urban Conservation Coordinator

Working with several USFWS Programs, RI Department of Environmental Management, Recreational Boating & Fishing Foundation, and the local police, supported engaging with

families more than one time, encouraging repeat visits and interactions in nature through multiple experiences (*Building Partnerships*).

The Vamos A Pescar fishing events, are based on these *Stepping Stones of Engagement* by first introducing families to fish and fishing in a familiar setting, by creating an opportunity to fish at a well-known pond located in a Providence park. The next step is to introduce families to saltwater and other fishing locations immediately outside of the city, followed by fishing on an off-shore chartered vessel.



Second from left -Acting Regional Chief, Ecological Services Sharon Marino, with Coastal Program Staff and Yale Scholar Intern. Credit: USFWS

All stations are equipped with bilingual instructions and all families are able to enjoy fishing using rods and tackle purchased through funding from the George H.W. Bush Vamos A Pescar Education fund. As food disparity is a barrier in Providence, we provide free meals for families to enjoy at the park. Local, bilingual young adults trained in our “Train the Trainer” course assist families and ensure all activities are available in English and Spanish. The trainees receive stipends for their time.

Families will leave this event with branded bags filled with fun, family activities to do at home, information about how to obtain a fishing license, materials from Vamos A Pescar’s website, and a flyer with all the event dates for future events. These materials will be available in both English and Spanish. These actions *provide equitable access* to the underrepresented families in Rhode Island.

In addition to the events listed above, families were encouraged and attend attend state-wide fishing programs such as USFWS ‘Take Me Fishing Day’ at Sachuest Point National Wildlife Refuge. Bilingual police from local towns assisted in making Hispanic families feel welcome.

Additionally, the Urban Partnership will be receiving a Mobile First Catch Center, to enhance fishing access within our state. Through the First Catch Center program, we will be hosting a series of additional fishing events throughout the state and families that take part in our Vamos a Pescar series will be informed about and invited to all subsequent fishing events. (*Community Asset*)



Kevin Cheung, Project Leader of the North Attleboro National Fish Hatchery, teaches visitors about the life cycles of the alewife and brook trout. Credit: USFWS



The goal is to have participants feel safe, comfortable, and confident in engaging in outdoor activities such as fishing and boating.

These *stepping stones of engagement* ensure that all persons are connecting to the natural world at a pace that inspires wonder and appreciation rather than fear and discomfort.

Steve Steniger, Federal Law Officer, mentoring a Narragansett Tribal Youth to catch his first fish at a Vamos A Pescar Event. Credit: USFWS