Lead Nature Preschool Teacher

Department: Education
Supervisor: Jennie McGuigan, Education Director
Position: Full time; Exempt

Summary
Ijams Nature Preschool (INP) provides a hands-on, experiential approach to learning that is based on the needs and curiosity of young children. Its mission is to inspire children, families, and educators to connect more deeply with the world around them. Through INP research and programs, children and families develop a profound engagement with the natural world, where nature is an integral part of daily learning. All of these efforts focus on safety, customer service, and effective educational methods in a supportive environment.

Ijams Nature Center is seeking a dynamic, curious, and professionally organized educator to lead and develop nature preschool programming. The lead teacher is responsible for developing a cohesive teaching team, coordinating the curriculum, and managing the day-to-day operational activities of the classroom (outdoor and indoor spaces). Teachers must understand children’s cognitive, social, emotional and physical development in order to ensure a safe and stimulating classroom environment where children are actively engaged and encouraged to succeed. The teacher must be skilled in communicating with both children and adults in order to meet the needs of the children, and resolve parental concerns.

An ideal candidate enjoys being outdoors in nature year-round, is well versed in early childhood education practices, and infinitely curious about the changing social and emotional needs of preschool-aged children ages 3-5 years. Candidates must possess a strong respect for young children and families, a love of teaching young children, and a strong desire to provide meaningful and innovative learning experiences in nature for children, their caregivers, and assistant teachers. They must possess the ability to help support diverse team members in executing daily multi-sensory, play and nature-based, anti-bias, emergent and developmentally appropriate curriculum, incorporating a variety of hands-on experiences as they maintain warm, professional relationships with children, their parents, and caregivers.

Duties and Responsibilities

- Develop and implement emergent curriculum by developing classroom and forest school activities based on developmentally appropriate practices for ages 3-5 years
- Lead by example; encourage teaching team success through modeling and coaching.
- Maintain communications with families through informal discussions, progress reports, and parent-teacher conferences. Keep the manager and director informed and involved in these communications.
- Actively engage in activities; manage cleanliness, order, and availability of classroom materials.
- Organize indoor and outdoor spaces daily to keep the environment reasonably safe, clean, and accessible for children to use independently.
- Ensure all center policies and state regulations are met.
- Maintain accurate records, forms, and files in a timely manner.
- Complete the required training and professional development through the course of the school year and attend staff meetings.
- Other duties as assigned by the Early Learning Programs Manager.

Desired Skills and Abilities:

- A strong understanding of early childhood development, the different stages of growth, and an awareness of young children’s needs.
- Desire and ability to engage children in learning experiences using developmentally appropriate pedagogy and group management techniques, and the ability to employ redirection and positive behavior modification strategies when confronted with challenging behaviors.
- Interest in the natural sciences, local flora and fauna, and outdoor-based education.
- High energy and the ability to work well with others (staff, children, and parents) and to foster a team environment.
- Strong work ethic and personal integrity displaying initiative and ownership.
- Adapt and be flexible with quickly changing environments.
- Team-oriented with strong interpersonal skills; work collaboratively with fellow staff and ability to communicate in a timely and respectful manner.
- Strong oral and written communication skills and basic computer skills.

Knowledge

- Understanding of early childhood development standards and benchmarks.
- Understanding of outdoor experiential education standards and forest school models.
- Knowledge of educational approaches and strategies working with students with diverse needs.
- Knowledge of Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and/or Waldorf approaches to learning desired.
- Knowledge and experience regarding natural and cultural history of East Tennessee desired.
- General knowledge of biology, ecology, natural science, conservation, or related fields.

Skills

- Public speaking skills and the ability to work with people of all ages, especially children.
- Leadership and facilitation skills, especially work with leading teams of teachers.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills including the ability to communicate through multiple media (print, TV, radio, Internet, public events, etc.).
- Strong organizational skills, with attention to detail, accuracy, and deadlines.
- The ability to multitask, prioritize, and display excellent time management skills.
• Ability to speak, read, and/or write Spanish, French, or other languages is a plus
• The ability to carry out duties and directives independently under limited supervision.
• Responsible, creative, relational, enthusiastic, flexible, self-motivated and resourceful team player.

Experience
• Minimum of two years of experience teaching or child care experience in outdoor programs, camps, field trips, special education, and/or early learning programs (ages 3-5)
• Experience and demonstrated proficiency in using Google Suite, Canva, Microsoft Excel, Word, and PowerPoint software programs.
• Experience working with audiences who are diverse in culture, age, race, gender identities, and physical abilities.

Education
• Bachelor’s degree in a field related to natural history, education, early childhood development, science/ecology, special education, or environmental science. Master degree preferred.
• Two to four years of experience and/or training, or equivalent combination of education in early childhood development, outdoor education, special education, natural history, science education, Montessori, Reggio Emilia, and/or Waldorf approaches or other related fields.
• First Aid/CPR certification (or the ability to obtain certification upon employment) preferred.

Other Requirements
• Must successfully complete a pre-employment, post-offer background screen, and motor vehicle (MVR) screen.
• Must successfully complete DHS background check, director’s training, physical, CPR, and other required training to work as a manager at a licensed childcare facility.
• Valid Driver’s license
• Access to a personal computer and internet
• The ability to work some weekend and evenings throughout the year
• Energy and desire to work with diverse audiences
• Passion for nature and the ability to deliver programs in a pleasant, tactful, and enthusiastic manner.

Physical Requirements
• Spend the better part of their day outdoors
• Spend multiple hours outdoors in all weather (Heat, cold, rain, snow).
• Hike 2-5 miles a day on rough terrain, keeping pace with the children in their care.
• Engage in sustained physical activity throughout the day.
• Lift up to 50 pounds (size of a small child).
• Be able to hear, see, and guide children at all times.
• Must be able to work around small children including sitting, standing, running, and climbing.
• Must be able to see and respond to dangerous situations.
• Must be able to wear personal protective gear correctly most of the day.
Must be able to use office equipment such as a computer, copier, hole punch, calculator, etc.
Must be in good physical condition, with the ability to stand, walk, and hike for extended periods of time without exhaustion.

Compensation/Benefits

Salary is commensurate with qualifications and experience. Teachers will follow a standard school year schedule that includes up to 2 weeks of teacher training prior to the school year. The position offers health insurance including medical, dental, and vision, sick leave, paid holidays based on school schedule, and a 403(b) retirement fund match. Please contact jmguigan@ijams.org for more specific information on compensation.

About Ijams Nature Center

Ijams Nature Center is a nonprofit nature center located on the banks of the Tennessee River near Knoxville’s urban center. Its mission is to encourage stewardship of the natural world by providing an urban greenspace for people to learn about and enjoy the outdoors through engaging experiences. Ijams Nature Center manages 318 acres of land with more than 12 miles of trails, a large Visitor Center, Mead’s Quarry lake, mountain biking trails, river access, gardens, and much more. People of all ages attend educational programs, including school field trips, family programs, summer camps, and adult workshops. Ijams Nature Center partners with Knox County and the City of Knoxville as well as with multiple agencies to provide outstanding educational offerings. Visit the Ijams website at ijams.org for current program information.

Equal Opportunity Employment

Ijams Nature Center is an equal opportunity employer and does not discriminate against employees or job applicants on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, age, national origin, mental or physical disability, veteran status, or any other status or condition protected by applicable state or federal laws. These anti-discrimination policies also apply to volunteers and program recipients. Ijams Nature Center provides reasonable accommodations to all applicants and employees. Applicants with disabilities may request reasonable accommodation at any point in the employment process.

To Apply

Send resume, cover letter, and three references (will not be contacted without notice) to Jennie McGuigan, Education Director, at jmguigan@ijams.org. The deadline to apply is July 20th, 2023.