

Young Tigers Sustain the Upstate
A Sustainable Universities Initiative Mini-Grant
Final Report
July 12, 2001

Executive Summary

Young Tigers Sustain the Upstate provided an opportunity for [America Reads](#) at Clemson University tutors and the K-5 children they tutored to explore sustainability issues in the Upstate of South Carolina, while strengthening the college students' mentoring and tutoring skills and the K-5 children's reading and writing skills. The tutors and the children read about recycling, native plants and wildlife, and water and fuel conservation; began building a Web site of the K-5 children's written reviews of the sources; began rehabilitating the stream at Clemson Elementary School by installing native plants on the stream banks and nearby woods, and presented the results of their project at [CommuniCon 2001: Sustaining the Upstate](#), at which the tutors awarded the K-5 children with a favorite book about the environment.

Participants

Twenty-one America Reads tutors, who represented all five colleges at Clemson University and ranged from first-year to graduate students, participated in Young Tigers Sustain the Upstate. About 45 K-5 students, who either attended Morrison Elementary School and/or the homework center at Littlejohn Community Center, worked with their reading tutors to improve their reading and writing skills while learning more about the environment.

Preparation

To prepare for their work to help the K-5 children rehabilitate the stream at Clemson Elementary, the tutors attended a workshop led by Ed Falco and a presentation by Gina McLellan, PRTM. Ed Falco is well known for his passionate oratory on sustainable lifestyles and was able to show the tutors how they could make the complex topic of sustainability understandable to young children. Professor McLellan is the project leader for all outdoor plans at Clemson Elementary School. The tutors also read *Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold, *Stuff: The Secret Lives of Everyday Things* by John Ryan and Allen Durning, and *Earth in Mind* by David W. Orr. The tutors then began their own research of the topic to discover appropriate books and other sources they could use with their assigned children. The K-5 children prepared for their work at Clemson Elementary by reading the books and on-line material suggested by their tutors and books they selected on their own from the Morrison Elementary School library, by writing book reviews, and by creating artwork to express their understanding of their reading.

Action

On March 31, 2001, the children, their tutors, and some of their parents worked hard to clean out the dead limbs, briars, and trash from the stream bank and woods along the slope above the stream at Clemson Elementary. Others who came to help were Dr. Paul Prichard, Morrison's principal and an America Reads Advisory Board member; tutors' friends and family members; and Clemson University Men's Basketball team members Ray Henderson, Tomas Nagys, Ed Scott, and Spencer Bernstein. By the end of the afternoon, more than 30 plants, mostly shrubs such as American beautyberry, mountain laurel, and oakleaf hydrangeas, were installed. WHNS Fox 21, during its 10:00 News on March 31, aired a brief segment on the tutors' and K-5 children's work at the

stream. Also, Jeff Bennett from Clemson University's Communications Center, videotaped the event for a proposed SCETV documentary about Clemson Elementary School.

After school on April 4, 2001, the K-5 children and their tutors rode a CAT bus to and from Morrison Elementary School and the stream at Clemson Elementary School. They installed the cardinal wildflowers that the tutors had propagated in October and additional plants that were donated by Dr. Byron Harder, the team physician for the Clemson Tigers and a well-known local gardener, and H. Morris Cox, retired dean of arts and sciences who now practices law in Clemson. Patrick Rockey from WYFF, the local NBC affiliate, Channel 4, developed a charming story about the America Reads project by relating the work to *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss. The news story aired during the 6:00 News on April 4, 2001. A photographer from *The Greenville News* also took pictures of the children and tutors at work. One photograph was published with a feature article about Clemson Elementary School.

Reflection

The tutors and K-5 children had several opportunities to reflect on their work together. Their first opportunity came when they designed and developed their CommuniCon poster. They had to determine their most important accomplishments, what they had learned, and how they could best express their new knowledge and experience to guests both orally and visually. The tutors also wrote journal entries about their experience with Young Tigers Sustain the Upstate. The K-5 students answered survey questions about their experience and discussed their experience with their classmates and classroom teachers. The children reported that they enjoyed reading about the environment, learning about sustainability, and helping rehabilitate the stream behind Clemson Elementary. One fifth grader, who will attend middle school in the fall and is therefore no longer eligible for America Reads, stated that he wished he could stay in elementary school because of America Reads and that all the reading and writing he did with his tutor was well worth the effort when he saw how he got to use the information in a real project. The tutors' journals also make clear that they enjoyed implementing this service learning project because it helped them focus their reading lessons on a topic that motivated their assigned students to read.

Celebration

A community poster session entitled CommuniCon 2001: Sustaining the Upstate was held on Thursday, April 19, 2001, from 4:30 – 6:00 p.m., at Littlejohn Community Center. America Reads tutors and the children they tutored presented the results of their reading and their project to rehabilitate the stream at Clemson Elementary School. Others who participated were students in Mary Haque's horticulture classes and Bernadette Longo's laptop English class, as well as R.C. Edwards Middle School students who presented their writing about sustainable lifestyles. Guests from the on- and off-campus community talked informally with the presenters to learn about their work to sustain the Upstate and to find out how they could get involved. Printed materials on native plants, how to attract birds, and various programs that support youth involvement with the outdoors were available for guests. A tape of the WYFF news story on the America Reads project to rehabilitate the stream was shown for those who missed it when it aired, and America Reads Advisory Board member Michelle Martin played her guitar and sang environmental children's songs. All the America Reads K-5 children were awarded their favorite book about the environment. Most children received *The Lorax* by Dr. Seuss. Others received *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstien, *The Secret Garden* by Frances Hodgson Burnett, or *The Legend of the Blue Bonnet* by Tomie dePaola.

Future Plans

Young Tigers Sustain the Upstate will continue throughout academic year 2001-02. Fall 2001, Frances Chamberlain, landscape architecture, and her design studio students will work with the tutors and K-5 students to design reading/thinking/learning spaces on a steep slope above the stream; a goal of the design is to stop the erosion that is affecting the health of the stream. Depending on available funding, those spaces will be installed in March and April 2002. Also during fall 2001, Rockie English, forest resources, will work with the tutors and K-5 students to redesign the current drainage system and then install a rain garden at the bottom of the slope; a goal of the rain garden is to slow down and clean the parking lot runoff into the stream to protect the stream from further damage. America Reads has been awarded a \$2,500 grant from S.C. Leadership in Public Service, but more funding will be needed to complete the project. The project will be installed in phases as funding becomes available.

Selected Photos that Document Young Tigers Sustain the Upstate



The steep slope above the stream at Clemson Elementary School is eroding during rain storms, even with the grasses that have grown since the space was bulldozed during construction and the silt barriers that have been placed on the site.

The rip-rap the construction crew placed where the new drainage pipe empties into the stream is unsightly and ineffective. The amount of clay and trash that has washed from the construction site into the stream has reduced the stream to a drainage ditch.



Here, Ed Falco leads the America Reads tutors in an exercise that demonstrates how everything in nature is interdependent. This activity, as well as several others, helped the tutors explain sustainability to the K-5 children they tutored.

Gina McLellan, PRTM, gave a presentation on the outdoor plans for Clemson Elementary so the tutors would understand how Young Tigers Sustain the Upstate fits in the overall plan for the new school.



Workdays on March 31 and April 4 resulted in the installation of more than 50 plants along the stream bank and in the nearby woods. Here Mary Cate Garrett and Matthew Allison dig a hole for a native shrub while tutor Carrie Morey supervises.

Here some of the K-5 children gather for a group photo while waiting for the CAT bus to take them back to Morrison Elementary School.

