



# Christodora-Manice Education Center

## Information 2011



### I. Background

The Manice Education Center (“MEC”) is an operation of the Christodora Foundation of New York City (“Christodora”). Christodora was founded as a nonsectarian, youth-oriented settlement house on the Lower East Side of Manhattan in 1897 and today remains involved in camping programs, primarily for New York City youth, since 1908. The Manice Education Center originated from a Board of Directors decision to run a small, high-quality residential center with a strong emphasis on environmental education and wilderness programs.

Christodora also designs and operates environmental education programs in and around the New York City area. These programs, designed to complement programs at the Manice Education Center, offer students additional in depth learning opportunities along a continuum of involvement.

Students who participate in summer courses at MEC can continue their growth and learning through participation in various Christodora after-school programs in New York City. Scholarships for advanced studies in ecology, research and other exciting environmental programs are also available for select program graduates.

### II. Location

The Manice Education Center is located in the small town of Florida, Massachusetts (seven miles from North Adams) in the Hoosac Mountain range of northern Berkshire County. The surrounding countryside is almost entirely state forest land; the area abounds in lakes, streams, hiking trails and unbroken stretches of forest. This landscape lends itself perfectly to our primary programs directions: environmental and wilderness education.

### III. Goals

The goals of the Manice Education Center, as with all Christodora programs, are to offer youth from economically disadvantaged families in New York City a range of environmental and wilderness programs designed to increase their knowledge and understanding of the natural world and to challenge them to develop their self-confidence and leadership skills.

MEC’s environmental and adventure programs challenge students, stimulate personal growth and enhance responsibility. The process of learning and the excitement inherent in these activities encourage the spirit of cooperation and self-confidence, and guide participants toward a broader understanding of themselves, their environment and their community.

### IV. Programs

Our spring (May – June) and fall (September – October) sessions consist primarily of three-day field trips for students in grades six through twelve from many New York City school districts and Christodora programs.

The summer program includes four sessions of environmental science, wilderness expeditions, and leadership training courses for students ages 11 through 18. Each course, lasting from one to three weeks, is specifically tailored based on age, maturity and prior experience. The ladder course progression provides motivated students with a sequence of outdoor learning and growth opportunities over several years.

All students in the summer courses are chosen based on teachers’ recommendations and an interview with Christodora staff. Recommendations are based on motivation, enthusiasm for learning in the outdoors, and unavailability of comparable opportunities.

Group size at the Manice Center is about 40 students per session. We maintain sufficient program staff to offer an excellent student to staff ratio averaging 6:1, providing close supervision and attention to the needs of each individual student.

#### ***The Center’s primary activities are:***

##### **1) Environmental Studies**

For all students we provide classes in forest, aquatic, and soil ecosystems, wildlife observation, wild edible plants, astronomy and a variety of other lessons. Activities are “hands on,” and designed to stimulate excitement, discovery and learning. MEC’s forest location and access to an abundance of natural communities are an extraordinary resource for our nature program.

##### **2) Wilderness Skills & Expeditions**

Hiking, backpacking, and canoeing are central activities. Nearly all the students from the visiting schools participate in half-day hiking trips. Summer course participants engage in rigorous expeditions ranging from one to five days on the trail or along the waterway. Backpacking expeditions often take place on the Appalachian Trail in the Berkshires or in the Green Mountain National Forest in Vermont. Canoe trips run on local ponds, lakes, and rivers in the Berkshires, Vermont, and nearby New York regions.

Before an expedition, the students practice canoeing (extensively), camping skills, orienteering, and safe wilderness navigation procedures. Comprehensive safety training (for staff and students) is fundamental to all activities.

As a prelude to all trips, students participate in a vital team-building and problem-solving program on our extensive "Teams Course" of group initiatives and challenges. Groups must plan carefully, communicate effectively, and cooperate to make decisions that will affect the group's safety and success.

### 3) Leadership Training

The leadership training portion of our program, adapted from portions of the Wilderness Education Association (WEA) curriculum, helps to direct highly motivated youth toward leadership roles in our society through the development and refinement of leadership skills. Included are both theoretical and practical applications of leadership and group dynamics models. Activities include learning leadership styles, goal setting, group processes, judgment/decision making, and role modeling. This component may also include community service work as an opportunity to experience working cooperatively and unselfishly to achieve socially beneficial results.

Each year several students who have demonstrated exemplary leadership skills are recommended for our advanced program or hired to assist the outdoor education staff the following summer as Wilderness Trip Assistants.

### 4) Organic Gardening

The Center has a large organic garden and a newly built greenhouse that supplies the Center with vegetables in July and August. Students and staff work together to plant, cultivate, manage the rainwater collection system, and harvest. Complimentary to growing produce, students also enjoy feeding our chickens and collecting free range eggs for breakfast. The MEC gardening experience is a central focus for educating youth about the natural interrelationships between people and the earth.

### 5) Other Activities

Exciting supplementary programs include: swimming-a daily summer favorite, sports, arts and crafts, games, special field days, skits, campfires and talent shows.

## V. Staff

The spring and fall program staff consists of the Director, an Assistant Director, six Outdoor Educators, an Administrative Assistant, Head Cook, Assistant Cook, and Maintenance Manager. Summer staff add two Wilderness Program Coordinators, three to four Wilderness Trip Assistants and two additional Outdoor Educators. Staff members are selected based on outdoor education and wilderness navigation experience, knowledge of the environment, professional safety certifications, enthusiasm, passion, friendliness, and sensitivity in working with urban youth. Outdoor Educators are college

graduates, and Outdoor Educator Interns, Wilderness Program Coordinators, and Wilderness Trip Assistants are often amidst their collegiate studies. All staff possess a strong commitment to outdoor education. On average, fifty percent of our summer educators and wilderness program staff are Christodora program alumni. To ensure the safety of our students, MEC completes a thorough criminal history background check, sex offender record check, previous employment reference check, and a medical physical on all potential employees.

Manice Education Center staff training gives educational personnel comprehensive instruction and practice in interpretation, outdoor leadership and wilderness skills, including professional certifications in Wilderness First Aid, CPR, and Waterfront Lifeguarding.

## VI. Facilities

Our building and tents are simple and rustic, providing a comfortable and safe immersion into outdoor living. The farmhouse, built in the early 1800's, has been remodeled to meet current building codes and serves the program with a modern kitchen, a dining/activities hall, infirmary, library, and laundry/shower facilities. The science building, constructed in 1982, provides an important indoor work space for research and supplies.

Students and educational staff live in large (16 ft. x 20 ft.) cabin-style tents made from canvas and elevated on wooden platforms. Each tent – four each for boys and girls – has space for up to seven students and one staff member, but averages only 5-6 students in the tent. The boys' and girls' washhouse (with toilets and sinks) is situated near the tents; showers are taken and laundry is washed on a regular schedule in the farmhouse. Our natural well water is managed by a licensed public water operator and heated using solar energy.

MEC facilities meet or exceed all applicable Massachusetts Health and Safety Standards and are annually inspected and licensed by the Local and State Health Departments, Local Building Code Inspector, & Local Fire Code Inspector of the Town of Florida, MA.

## VII. Tuition and Funding

The total average cost to operate the facility presently ranges from \$345/student for a three-day school field trip to \$2150/student for those enrolled in the nineteen-day summer courses. Visiting schools currently pay a flat fee of \$4000. Summer course tuition is on a sliding scale based on family income, AFDC eligibility, sponsorship from outside agencies and financial aid from Christodora's donors. Transportation to and from the Center is included in all costs.

Christodora receives funding for the Manice Education Center from individual and corporate donations, foundation grants, and visitation fees.

***If you would like more information, please contact us at the Manice Education Center, 68 Savoy Road, Florida, MA 01247, Phone (413) 663-8463; Fax (413)663-5399; email: [manice@christodora.org](mailto:manice@christodora.org); or visit [www.christodora.org](http://www.christodora.org).***