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EcoVoices Shapes Future Environmental Caretakers

Alvaro Olivares admits that he wasn't all that interested in environmental questions as he grew up in Baldwin Park in the San Gabriel Valley.

But when a school trip to Whittier Narrows introduced him to EcoVoices--the environmental education [collaboration](#) between the San Gabriel River Discovery Center Authority and the non-profit Youth Science Center--Alvaro became intrigued and involved.

The EcoVoices theater program got him out of his shell, he says. He's now studying for an associate arts degree in automotive technology at Citrus College and choosing the four-year school where he plans to complete his B.A. in history. And this summer he's one of the EcoVoices alumni coaching young people in environmental and science education as part of the City of Los Angeles [Summer Night Lights](#) program in 32 parks throughout Los Angeles.

A recent Summer Night Lights event outside the Montecito Heights recreation center north of downtown L.A. featured live music, hot dogs, roasted corn—and environmental education .

Children and teens crowded around inter-active EcoVoices exhibits and worked with the scientific materials and displays, expertly guided by EcoVoice staff.

It's more typical to find EcoVoices on the banks of the San Gabriel River at Whittier Narrows. Youth from high schools around the San Gabriel Valley and east and South Los Angeles visit throughout the school year to participate in science education, walk the river trails, collect samples and observe the birds and animals.

But this summer, EcoVoices joined the Summer Night Lights program to take the environmental science program on the road.

At the Montecito Heights event, little kids pushed hands through trays of mud and rocks to create miniature watersheds and rivers and learn the way water moves through our Southern California region. As the state enters a fourth year of drought, water education to keep our communities and ecosystems resilient is a critical mission of the San Gabriel River Discovery Center EcoVoices program.

EcoVoices Inquiry Coaches Francisco Espinoza and Lorenzo Casteneda—both high school students at the Ambassador School of Global Leadership--guided eight and ten year olds as they dismantled and re-

assembled computer keyboards and got a taste of the technology and problem-solving skills scientists need in the field as they pursue water management methods.

Olivares staffs the EcoVoices program on Wednesday and Friday nights to help set up and break down exhibits, work at the tables, perform in the eco-education theater—"I actually do everything," he says.

Annie Liu is an EcoVoices deputy supervisor who has worked with Olivares for several years. "Alvaro is one of our most versatile staff. He flows around" from helping children and teens with the lunar and solar telescopes to instructing them about the properties of water at the ice exhibits (very popular in the summer.) "He's taken a lot of ownership and leadership."

Olivares is now firmly committed to environmental protection. "Wasting water, pollution—these are problems we'll all have to face if we don't regulate the things we do—don't leave our water running, recycling, buying stuff that won't hurt the environment."

The planned San Gabriel River Discovery Center, set to begin its first stage of development at the beginning of the new year, will support the expansion of EcoVoices and allow thousands more students to explore the Whittier Narrows watershed environment along with scientific methods and skills and ways to think about the future and water resources.

EcoVoices will be back at Whittier Narrows in the fall. In the meantime, young people across Los Angeles will have joined the environmental learning conversation.

Looking towards the fall and the future!