

# RAISE KIDS TO CARE FOR THE WORLD

BY DR. NANCY S. GRASMICK

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During my tenure as Maryland State Superintendent of Schools, it was both a priority and a privilege to work with the Department of Natural Resources to create and implement the nation's first mandatory environmental education curriculum. Ensuring that Maryland students begin to learn about conservation and environmental stewardship through even their earliest educational experiences is a legacy I am proud to have shaped. However, if five decades in education have reinforced any one adage, it is that children learn by doing. There is simply no substitute for hands-on experiences, especially when the issues are big. Without tangible, real-world application, even the most important lessons on climate change or ocean health are little more than a chapter in a textbook.

***...children must be raised with a working understanding of what it means to care for the natural world.***

Here in Maryland, these lessons play out around us every day. The identity of our state is intrinsically linked to the water, just as it has been since colonial times when Baltimore was best known as the nation's shipbuilding capital. Our economy and success have always rested upon our waterways. Recently, as the health of the Chesapeake Bay faltered under the strain of industry, Marylanders stepped up, passing legislation and enacting real change to improve the condition of the bay, but the bay's revival is not easily accomplished. To sustain our environment, children must be raised with a working understanding of what it means to care for the natural world.

We are fortunate to live in a state that is home to both dynamic ecosystems and forward-thinking institutions, making us well-suited for shaping the next generation of environmental ambassadors. As a member of the National Aquarium's Board of Directors, I am encouraged to see this proactive conservation organization taking steps to bring real-world conservation skills to life for more than 100,000 students each year. The aquarium is currently working to bring thriving natural habitats back to the Inner Harbor by fostering floating wetlands around their campus. These efforts will bring the real, living Chesapeake Bay home to thousands of students and millions of visitors each year.

As children grow, we must continue to provide age-appropriate opportunities to engage in meaningful conservation-based programs. An excellent example is Aquarium on Wheels, a work-study program that allows high school students to shadow aquarium staff, taking part in immersive learning experiences with animals and conservation initiatives before spending their summers spreading these messages to younger students throughout Baltimore. For the younger set, Read to Reef, in partnership with the Enoch Pratt Free Library, is an initiative that allows Baltimore children up to fifth grade to earn National Aquarium passes for themselves and their families by reading conservation and aquatic-themed books. In its first year alone, 4,770 students read 23,850 books, earning 9,841 free Aquarium passes. Getting up close to the animals that make their home in our global ocean is an excellent way to expand a child's sense of the ocean itself.

Opportunities to make a difference are everywhere, and we must meet them. Conservation is not a far-away notion, belonging to a quiet meadow or ocean beach. Urban conservation, from reclaiming forgotten spaces to bringing conservation education to city residents, makes real progress possible. I am encouraged by the progress taking place around Baltimore's Masonville Cove, where the National Aquarium and their partners at Living Classrooms, Maryland Port Administration, Maryland Environmental Service and the Brooklyn and Curtis Bay Coalition have made substantial investments of time and resources to foster serious change. The future home of the Animal Care and Rescue Center, in Baltimore's historic Jonestown neighborhood, will not only house the aquarium's animal care operations, it will offer after-school and out-of-school programs, high school and college-level programs, summer camps and teacher workshops, reaching 2,000 participants annually.

It is time that we embrace our role as a waterfront city with a unique responsibility to the waterways that surround and sustain us. The Inner Harbor's original renaissance in the early 1980s rejuvenated a neglected, industrial stretch of waterfront and gave it new life. Thirty-five years later, the health of our waterways is an apt indicator of the health of our city and its residents. We must maintain it, and we must begin by offering the children who will steward our region into the future ample opportunity to do just that.

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ENGAGING THE PUBLIC—1.3 MILLION GUESTS ANNUALLY

One of the top three aquariums in the nation

# IN 2016, WE



Celebrated **35** years of welcoming guests to our Inner Harbor campus and **25** years of rescuing and rehabilitating animals

Planted **57,133** grasses, shrubs, trees, perennials and freshwater wetland plants



Removed **75,861** plastic bottles and other pieces of trash from critical habitats

Engaged **118,437** students in education programs



Rehabilitated **16** injured animals and released them back into their ocean home



Welcomed **101,038** guests for free or at reduced admission rates through community access programs



Mobilized **1,758** volunteers at the Aquarium and in conservation and cleanup projects



The National Aquarium is a nonprofit organization with a mission to inspire conservation of the world's aquatic treasures.

[aqua.org](http://aqua.org)

We choose recycled.



**2016 IMPACT REPORT**  
You make it possible.

2016 was a year of significant milestones at the National Aquarium.  
Your support makes it all possible.



**Your support connects us to our community.**

The National Aquarium offers free and reduced admission through a variety of programs, including the Read to Reef book club in partnership with the Enoch Pratt Free Library System, Maryland Mornings, Dollar Days, Half-Price Friday Nights presented by M&T Bank, and Pay What You Want Day, which is made possible by the generous support of T. Rowe Price, our official community engagement sponsor.



The National Aquarium is the official coordinator of all Ocean Conservancy International Coastal Cleanup events in Maryland. Worldwide, nearly 800,000 volunteers collected more than 18 million pounds of trash, and in Maryland, 962 volunteers collected 41,278 pounds of trash during last year's International Coastal Cleanup.

By partnering with local residents and community-based organizations near Masonville Cove along the Middle Branch of the Patapsco River, we are empowering neighbors to preserve wetland habitats and transform neglected sites into green spaces.



**Your support breaks new ground.**

The National Aquarium is creating three visionary projects—a new Animal Care and Rescue Center in Baltimore's historic Jonestown neighborhood slated to open in 2018; revamped, accessible green space around the Aquarium's Inner Harbor campus that establishes a new model for urban conservation, rolling out through 2019; and North America's first seaside dolphin sanctuary, establishing a new option for human care of dolphins by late 2020.



**JOIN  
THE MOVEMENT  
#48DAYSOFBLUE**



**Your support inspires conservation action.**

Through the 48 Days of Blue campaign, thousands of people completed 17,463 conservation challenges between Earth Day and World Oceans Day—from skipping plastic straws to taking shorter showers and unplugging electronics for an hour each day. In its first two seasons, 48 Days of Blue helped save 49,660 pounds of paper and plastic, and more than 11.7 million gallons of water.



Together with Monterey Bay Aquarium in California and Shedd Aquarium in Chicago, the National Aquarium is one of three founding members of the Aquarium Conservation Partnership. The goals of this group are to reduce the sources of ocean and freshwater plastic pollution, advance meaningful policy-related conservation goals and increase collective impact.