# The Clearing Folk School Summary

**Number of employees:**
April-November 22 employees; November-April 8 employees

**Number of volunteers:** 130

**What is your Mission Statement?**
The Mission of The Clearing is to provide diverse educational experiences in the folk school tradition, in a setting of quiet forests, meadows and water. The Clearing is a place where adults who share an interest in nature, arts or humanities can learn, reflect and wonder. This is in keeping with the goals of Jens Jensen, founder of The Clearing, who loved it as a special place where one could feel kinship with the earth and reassess one's life.

**What is the main source of your funding and what percent of your funding does that source provide?**
As recovery from the pandemic continues, there's been an average of about 70% of revenue coming from program fees the last number of years. We continue to trend up and in 2024 and 2025, where 79% has come from program fees.

**What is the geographic scope of your services throughout Door County?**
The majority of students and volunteers in Door County are from Sturgeon Bay to Northport with lesser impact from Southern Door and Washington Island communities. This is the base of students and volunteer instructors in the mostly local Winter Program of day classes, as well as volunteers serving year-round in the Bookstore/Gift Shop, landscape projects, docents and event staffing. The Workshop Program of one- and two-day classes is about 40-50% local vs. visiting students and instructors, and the Summer Program of weeklong retreat classes, where students reside on campus, have approximately a 10-15% local commuter student population. The year-round and seasonal kitchen and housekeeping staff are all local residents to the Door County community.

**Explanation of how you serve Door County including primary programs your organization offers to the community.**
The Clearing provides diverse, lifelong learning opportunities to the community through weeklong retreats and day-classes in the arts, humanities, and natural sciences. The Clearing also offers its facilities as a community gathering spot for various local organizations, of which it is also a member, such as the Ellison Bay Arts Group, the Door County North Community Association, and provides the venue and volunteers for the Hardy Gallery's Gibraltar High School Exposure to Creativity day and Gibraltar School's 5th Grade history field trip for a day of hiking, painting, and writing. The Clearing has offered classroom space to the Wisconsin Master Naturalist certification classes, which is run in partnership with the Door County Land Trust, Crossroads at Big Creek and these certified Master Naturalists become volunteers as citizen scientists, land stewards and nature educators/interpreters in support of The Clearing and other local non-profit environmental organizations. Leadership Door County participants have also been provided tours as part of their

Arts and/or Education days. Community events such as The Clearing's summer Ice Cream Social and winter Christmas Open House days are free and open to the public

The Clearing campus is on the National and State Register of Historic Places. The 128-acre property is open for free hiking May-October on weekends, noon-4 p.m., and sunup to sundown the rest of the year to provide neighbors and visitors an opportunity to reconnect with nature. Plus, free, public volunteer docent-led tours (52 in 2025) provide insights to tour participants (over 300 in 2025) into the rich history of renowned landscape architect and founder of The Clearing, Jens Jensen's life (1860-1951) and The Clearing's 91-year history. Jensen established his "school of the soil" in 1935 to teach hands-on prairie landscape architecture design to his followers/students. He also provided a base for conservation of which The Clearing still holds true to with a Conservation Easement with the Door County Land Trust since 2006 whereby 120 or the 128-acre property will be preserved from development.

**How would you define the impact your organization is making in Door County?**

The Clearing employs local residents full-time year-round and provides full/part-time seasonal employment opportunities with various levels of benefits.

The most recent Clearing-specific economic impact to the Ellison Bay community is from the 2014 Estimated Collateral Spending Impact of The Clearing, Arts & Economic Prosperity IV: The Economic Impact of Nonprofit Arts and Culture Organizations and Their Audiences in the State of Wisconsin (Americans for the Arts), was $94,154 (excluding the cost of admission, or in The Clearing's case, tuition.). Economic impact reports since then have been in the aggregate of the arts in general in Door County and no individualized organizational information has been available. In general, the arts keep growing in Door County, of which The Clearing is a part.

Programming of classes is impactful to Door County in a non-financial way as well. The Clearing's Winter Program began as far back as the 1940's, when classes were offered to the local population with Jensen and other Door County friends of his including painter Gerhard Miller (founder of the Miller Art Museum in Sturgeon Bay), naturalist Emma Toft, and longtime assistant and master weaver Mertha Fulkerson. Today's version of the Winter Program of day classes started by local Clearing volunteers in 1976 and now averages over 600 local, adult students in over 85 classes led by local volunteer instructors who share their skill and knowledge with their neighbors. Multiple sessions over an eight-week period run January through February culminating with a free Student Exhibit of work open to the public once classes complete at the end of February. The Winter Program also brings together this winter community of local students every other Friday night in January and February with potlucks open to students, instructors and their guests, averaging over 120 attendees. Winter Program attendees stay social and physically and mentally active in January and February. Many winter classes have gone on to become year-round gatherings and social opportunities outside of The Clearing, and longtime friendships have been established.

Other programming includes the Workshop Program of one- and two-day classes which usually averages about 40-50% local attendance and the Summer Program of weeklong classes with approximately 10-15% local commuter students (2025 total attendance was 689 students plus 88 instructors), which is the closest to Jensen's vision of students getting away from everyday life and "clearing the mind". It is also the largest of The Clearing's programs. These same students attend theater, enjoy shopping and patronize local restaurants, stay in hotels providing a positive economic impact to Ellison Bay and surrounding communities.

The Clearing is a destination for landscape architects who come to see Jensen's last ""great work"", as The Clearing is known, and students attending classes learn of Jensen's legacy in prairie landscape architecture and design, conservation, and sustainability. Jensen's landscape design work includes the Chicago West Park District (Garfield, Union, Humboldt Parks) during his long career as Superintendent of the district, Lincoln Memorial Garden (honoring President Abrahma Lincoln) in Springfield, IL, and parks in Madison, WI, Racine, WI and design of estates of the Ford family and other newly minted industrialists of his time. Jensen's conservation efforts include Indiana Dunes National Park, Cook County (IL) Forest Preserve, and Door County's own Ridges Sanctuary, Whitefish Dunes State Park, Door Bluff Headlands and Ellison Bay County Parks. These Door County parks are part of the fabric of "natural" Door County preserved for generations thanks to the foresight of Jens Jensen and his philosophies of conservation.

In keeping with Jensen's vision of sharing his philosophies of prairie landscape design using natural elements and native species with students, The Clearing continues to offer hands-on learning experiences to university landscape architecture design students. The Clearing has worked with the University of Minnesota, Iowa State University and most recently re-established the relationship with the University of Wisconsin - Madison Landscape Architecture program. Spring of 2026 saw 20 students and 2 professors here for a weekend of work on the newly established Natural History Trail and landscape work on the campus area of The Clearing's historic property bettering the viewshed from the Lodge to Green Bay waters, as it was established during Jensen's time.

Renowned landscape architect and founder of The Clearing, Jens Jensen (1860-1951), has been honored by the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA) for his leadership in the field of landscape architecture and his prairie landscape design. Many come to The Clearing as a destination to experience Jensen's "last great work".

**What is your annual budget?**
$1.3M

**If you were to receive a donation from 100+WWC, how would that donation be used?**
The Clearing is seeking funds for repairing or replacing logs on the historic campus log cabin-type structures, many of which are over 100 years old. These log cabin-type structures' interiors have been renovated to include modernization for

the comfort of our students lodging on campus.  However, the exteriors have not been treated for preservation and continue to deteriorate.  Once the logs that need replacing or repair are complete, there is then a preservation liquid to be applied within a year.  As mentioned earlier, The Clearing is on the National Register of Historic places (1974) and State Register of Historic places (1989), which we have a duty to maintain.