

Krista Gordon

Growing the Salish Sea Experience Field Trip

By Krista Gordon, owner, dba Salish Sea Experience

Five years ago, I started taking fourth graders in the Bellingham School District to San Juan Island via school bus on the Washington State Ferry to educate them about the Southern Resident Killer Whales. The purpose of this tangible experience was to hook their interest in their local environment and help them understand the impact of human actions to inspire and empower them towards stewardship. It was a project started of passion that was offered through already developed connections in the school district and on San Juan Island. My vision statement of “Bringing learning to life to inspire tomorrow’s environmental stewards” focused my efforts when I found I needed to start an LLC for liability and billing purposes. It was the beginning of my journey as a business owner.

I never aspired to be a business owner. Collaborator – yes. Business owner – no! My strong organizational skills made it easy for me to do the paperwork required, but I was easily overwhelmed with the thought of growth and did not seek out opportunities to expand my potential. The CE Fellows Program provided safe connections to a group of other professional educators and professionals with whom I could share my concerns and listen to theirs. The Design Clinics gave me insights to what issues others have in their process of developing their ideas, many of which I saw in my own situation. This process was affirming as well as educational for me. The group provided a professional community outside of the school district that built my confidence in the purpose of what I was doing and my view of myself as a business woman.

Sustainable funding for my field trip has been an on-going issue. Grants have been the most successful way of funding, but determinations are not made until February leaving schools in limbo until then. One event I organized took an extraordinary amount of effort with minimal success due to weather. It was not the type of thing I wanted to do again, yet maybe this type of event could lead to sustainable funding. This would change my program by allowing the field trip and the concept of stewardship to be presented in the fall because the field trip would be assured allowing more time for students to learn about how they can be stewards and take

action nurturing the mindset and habits to promote ongoing stewardship. The issue of sustainable funding was what I brought to the group for my Design Clinic. There were many good ideas that helped me think bigger. As it turns out, a funder has stepped up to potentially offer three years of funding relieving this pressure and allowing me to focus on developing the program. This, in itself, validated the value of my program to the greater community for me.

This was my first year with CE Fellows. It was a year of discovery and connection as I became familiar with the program and what it had to offer. It bolstered my confidence as a business owner and encouraged me to think bigger understanding this means going beyond what I can do alone. The input from others in the CE Fellows Program broadened my perspective and nurtured my willingness to try new directions.

I plan to participate in the CE Fellows Program again next year as I see my project and myself as a business woman in a clearer and broader context. Now that I know what the CE Fellows Program looks like and has to offer, I hope to use its attributes to think bigger and develop more of the potential of my program by bringing potential growth ideas to the group for their input in my design clinic now that the funding issue may be satisfied.

One of the great attributes of this program is the diversity of career stages represented by different fellows. I have learned so much from those who have more experience yet are dealing with some of the same issues I am or have insight into how to handle them. I would consider participating a third year as a possible mentor to other new participants who are early in their business mindset as I was, to give back to the program.

The connections provided by CE Fellows are great catalysts for growth that only happen when people are brought together. The diversity of projects and ideas stimulate thought in unexpected ways. It gave me a sense of belonging in a professional community where I could share my ideas and concerns, learn from others, and ultimately understand the value of my contribution to my community in a larger context which encourages me to grow.