

"That is an urchin," the middle-aged visitor said to her friend as they stood in front of the largest habitat at the Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre (SODC). The friend of the visitor was listening to every word, and so too was Zeylah, a three-year-old frequent visitor. She walked closer to where these two women stood, pointed to the creature being discussed and confidently stated: "That is not an urchin, it is an anemone." I was happy to witness this event for two reasons. One: she enunciated the usually tricky tongue-twisting word "anemone"

with perfection and two: she was absolutely correct.

In January, the Centre celebrated 200,000 visitors. Approximately 17% were children as young as or younger than Zeylah; children who at a young age are learning the building blocks of ocean biology. Teaching young children about ocean basics is instrumental in nurturing an awareness and appreciation for this important ecosystem, the Salish Sea.



News from the Seaside

Students in preschool through secondary school take part in a variety of educational programs offered during the school year. Along with the school programs offered at the Centre, other programs target some of our youngest visitors.

Parents bring their toddlers to the Centre to participate in Tot Tuesdays (shown at right). Under the tutelage of oceaneers, toddlers and preschoolers use their imaginations and creativity to engage in ocean-related story times, activities, songs and crafts.



A New Wave of Ocean Advocates

by Tina Kelly, Ocean Advocate,
Shaw Ocean Discovery Centre

Summer camps, geared to students in grades one through five, give children close encounters with the Salish Sea. Boat trips to Gulf Islands National Park, intertidal surveys, beach seines and plankton tows add an extra dimension to the marine biology they learn from our indoor habitats.

The Centre is unique in its youth volunteer program; children as young as 11 can volunteer as an oceaneer. This program offers an incredible experience to be immersed in marine biology and gain important life skills.

A third reason for my ear-to-ear grin when Zeylah politely corrected the stranger's error is the hope that it gave me. Hope for a new wave of ocean advocates who will join the challenge to save our seas. Jane Goodall once said: "Only if we understand can we care. Only if we care will we help." We hope our young visitors will grow up to understand everything that inhabits our local Salish Sea, understand the connections the plants and animals have to us and to each other, and care enough about the world's oceans to advocate on their behalf. 🌊