Scholarships connect Bay Area kids to the wonders of Point Reyes National Seashore.

The son of Jalisco, Mexico-born agricultural workers, Santiago “Santi” Gomez has lived his entire life at the Seashore’s historic Home Ranch near Drakes Estero, but it was only after receiving a scholarship to PRNSA’s Nature Science Camp at age 10 that he began to appreciate the vast natural wonders of his “backyard.” The naturalist-led adventures he shared with his camp-mates inspired him to organize his own nature and birding hikes around Home Ranch and other parts of Point Reyes. Santi credits camp with a deeper love of learning and more success as a student at West Marin School, especially in science class.

SO CLOSE, YET SO FAR. In spite of living so close to Point Reyes National Seashore, many of West Marin’s young people don’t know very much about the park. Some visit with their families, but others, because their parents are working multiple jobs, don’t have an adult to help them explore and enjoy the outdoors. Moreover, many kids in the Bay Area’s urban core have not been to a national park or spent time in nature, relying instead on TV and video games for entertainment. Few have the chance to be amazed by wilderness or participate in hands-on field study. With Young Stewards scholarships, PRNSA is working to change that.

BREAKING DOWN BARRIERS: With six programs led by experienced naturalists, teachers, docents, and volunteers, Young Stewards connects youth from all backgrounds in West Marin and throughout the Bay Area—more than 3,500 every year—with the natural beauty and wonder of the Seashore. PRNSA works with dedicated partners and volunteers to overcome financial and transportation barriers, language barriers, lack of outdoor gear, and oftentimes the child’s unfamiliarity with or fear of wild spaces.

MARVELING IN THE MUD: The Young Stewards programs bring science alive, using Point Reyes’ diverse habitats as natural laboratories for exploration, habitat restoration and ecological field study. Young Stewards sparks joyful curiosity in children and young adults, ages 7 – 18, who gain the skills and confidence to build a lifelong love of nature and become the future guardians of our precious wild places. Young people can explore the seashore through:

- Nature and Science Camp. Youth 7 – 16 enjoy week-long wilderness and environmental education adventures based at the Clem Miller Environmental Education Center (Clem Miller).
- Science at the Seashore. Bay Area students from 4th through 12th grade collect data as they explore the seashore’s many special habitats on field trips designed to fit each classroom’s science curriculum.
- School at the Seashore. Teachers and group leaders get the training and support required to provide 3- to 5-day overnight environmental education adventures for their students at Clem Miller during the school year.
- Seashore Youth Ambassadors. Special day and overnight experiences for youth living in and near the park. These adventures introduce local kids to career pathways within the National Park Service and inspire a connection to their local national park.
- Science and Counselor in Training (CIT) Internships allow young adults to work alongside experienced naturalists, scientists and camp counselors during the summer months.
- Free “Every Kid in a Park” nature exploration events throughout the year.

A WHOLE NEW WORLD—AND GALAXY. For the last twelve summers, Brijeanae Foster (camp name “Galaxy”) has had amazing experiences to look forward to, thanks to Young Stewards scholarships. In her words: “Having the opportunity to do something in nature away from the city that my mom couldn’t afford to do changed my life.” Starting as a Nature Science camper, she got to know the places, plants and creatures of Point Reyes, but she also spent time with people from different places and backgrounds—some of whom have become lifelong friends. From camper, to CIT, to camp staffer and college student at UC Merced, Galaxy gained the skills and confidence to achieve just about anything, thanks to her connection with the natural world.

CREATING EVEN MORE: This year, PRNSA is working to increase funding so Bay Area and West Marin schools can create a more summer camp-like experience for their students, by providing naturalists, chaperones, and cooks at Clem Miller. Cooks like Galaxy, who started out as a Young Steward and now enjoys the behind-the-scenes work at camp. “I love seeing other kids, new and returning campers, experiencing the same things I got to experience. It’s really cool to watch.”

For more information about our programs, partner organizations, and outreach efforts, please contact Donna Faure: donnaf@pteyes.org.

YOU CAN HELP INSPIRE A LIFELONG LOVE OF NATURE FOR BAY AREA YOUTH

Thanks to the support of individuals and foundations, PRNSA ensures that Young Stewards programming is open to children of all backgrounds. This year we’ve dedicated $200,000 to fund scholarships and free programming for more than 2,300 kids. With your help we can do more. Donate today and support the next generation of park stewards! ptreyes.org/donate (include “youth scholarships” as a comment).