

YOUTH EDUCATION AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT FOR A GENERATIONAL IMPACT ON WATER QUALITY OF THE INDIAN RIVER LAGOON

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A team of University of Florida (UF) and Florida A&M University (FAMU) Extension agents partnered with the Ocean Research Conservation Association (ORCA) to hold a fishing clinic in the Indian River Lagoon. It was the result of a deliberative forum hosted by The Community Voices, Informed Choices (CIVIC) program leaders to address water quality issues in the Indian River Lagoon (IRL). During that forum, participants expressed concern for community members who fish the urban tributaries flowing into the IRL. They wondered if the fish consumed by the community members was toxic and could be negatively impacting their health. To learn more about the issue, CIVIC reached out to researchers with UF, FAMU, and ORCA to convene a town hall meeting with the community. During that meeting, the ORCA researcher shared her work looking at fish toxicity in the region and the challenges she faced in obtaining fish for her research. The community was enthusiastic about the research and wanted to contribute, so the idea of a youth fishing clinic in which the fish caught would be given to ORCA to study and the community could be educated was conceived. Extension agents reached out to their partners and secured over \$2,000 worth of fishing equipment and food to be shared during the event. The youth learned knot-tying, casting, baiting, and fishing. Every fish that was caught was donated to ORCA and in exchange, the participants enjoyed a freshly cooked fish sandwich and got to take home their fishing gear and bait. Community partners such as the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission, Coastal Conservation Association and St. Lucie County 4-H County Council provided education and volunteers. Thirty-five youth ages 8-14 participated in the event and twelve of the fish they caught were donated to ORCA.

PRESENTER BIO: Ms. Baily is a UF grad student.