



The Leaders-in-Training teens weeding horsetail and harvesting sorrel with Monty Lussow, Garden Manager. Monty shared vast plant knowledge with all the students

## Hiring a dedicated garden manager helps unique outdoor school enrich its educational programming

**T**HE TERRA NOVA NATURE SCHOOL IN the Lower Mainland region of British Columbia delivers educational programming that expands beyond the traditional four walls of a classroom. Much of the learning takes place outdoors on the Terra Nova Rural Parklands, a diverse terrain spanning 63 acres.

The school is a not-for-profit organization run by the Thompson Community Association, in partnership with the City of Richmond. Its mission is to connect children with their community and the outdoor landscape by offering direct experiences with nature and gardening.



TERRA NOVA NATURE SCHOOL, THOMPSON  
COMMUNITY ASSOCIATION, RICHMOND,  
BRITISH COLUMBIA

**Canada**

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Monty Lussow, Garden Manager, planting seeds with 3-5 year old children in the early spring. The preschoolers learn to connect with the garden through play and gardening tasks.



One of our Green Team students selling produce at our small scale Farmers Market. The Green team, under Monty's supervision, worked in the garden throughout the fall season. The Farmer's market sold produce harvested from the garden as well as some treats made from the garden..

In addition to being a licensed preschool where Early Childhood Educators teach children aged three to five, Terra Nova Nature School offers nature-based programs for infants and young children along with their parents/caregivers, as well as for school-age youngsters. The Leaders-in-Training program focuses on environmental stewardship and ecological literacy for 13 to 15 year olds interested in becoming leaders in the community.

“Our outdoor school brings something unique to the community. This isn’t about taking children to a playground,” says Emily Vera, an early childhood educator and one of the school’s two program coordinators. “We offer place-based learning, where the children gain knowledge about their place in a deep and authentic way. As they navigate their way through the park each day, they witness how nature is changing. They learn to become stewards of the land, which also ties into Indigenous ways of knowing.”

Terra Nova Nature School received funding from the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association (CPRA) Youth Employment Experience program to hire its first-ever full-time garden manager, and 26-year-old Montserrat (Monty) Lussow from Vancouver was chosen for the job. As part of the Government of Canada’s Youth Employment Skills Strategy program, this funding program is designed to provide young people with valuable experience in the recreation and parks sector, while allowing organizations to build their capacity to serve their communities.

“I saw this as a great and unique job opportunity,” says Monty. “I had worked on farms in the summers while I was doing my undergraduate degree, and I always had an interest in education, especially alternative education models.”

As Garden Manager, she was responsible for managing an 1,100 square-foot garden and the variety of tasks that

entails — crop rotation, planting, weeding, harvesting and seed saving. She also supervised community youth to engage with garden and related activities; developed and delivered educational curriculum for preschool and school-age programs; and delivered eco-environmental programs to community and families.

Bringing Monty into the fold has brought tremendous benefits to the school and to Monty. Although Terra Nova Nature School has had a garden program since it began operating nine years ago, but having a dedicated manager has brought everything to a new level. “We have a staff of about 14 people to run all our programs, and we’re often stretched very thin,” says Kate Dawson, the other program coordinator and also an early childhood educator.

“Having Monty here to organize the garden activities and to communicate with and support all the staff has truly made a difference. Our curriculum based on the children’s engagement with the garden was elevated because she was here to plan the lessons and help enrich the children’s experiences.”

As she became more comfortable with the garden management aspect of the job, Monty’s responsibilities expanded to include more direct work with the children. “It was amazing to be part of all the great things going on at the school,” she says. “I was able to work with kids from two years old to 15, as well as with parent volunteers and many community members.”

After her summer term ended, Monty remained with the school part-time, and the experience solidified her career plans. “When I came here, I didn’t know what I wanted to do. Now I’ve gone back to school so I can work in early childhood education.” 🍁