



## Learning is Easier When You're On An Adventure

By Abigail Miller

Whether it's a trip to the zoo, a museum, or even a movie theater, many of us have fond memories from a school field trip. For me, that memory is from a class trip to a river where I was absolutely fascinated to learn about a species of blind salamander found in aquifers.

Field trips provide opportunities for students to connect with peers through learning outside of the traditional classroom environment. Students are spending more time on computers during the school day, and these opportunities to disconnect are even more important than ever.

For many children in Las Cruces, a field trip with Asombro will be their first experience in the natural desert environment. During a walk at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, a fourth grade student said "This is so much fun. Learning is easier when you're on an adventure!"

“ This is so much fun.  
Learning is easier when  
you're on an adventure!  
-4th Grade Student

Asombro staff have worked hard to develop a field trip program focused on current scientific research, alignment with science standards, and issues relevant to our community. Students in kindergarten through seventh grade participate in activities focused on animal habitats, wind and water erosion, conservation research, and long-term ecosystem changes.

First graders use laser thermometers to collect temperature data, and fourth graders build towers to model ecosystem interactions. Third graders engineer solutions to complex local problems, and seventh graders learn to communicate about science topics.



*Students build a tower to model ecosystem interactions during a fourth grade field trip.*

Each field trip is centered on a theme, which allows students to connect with a phenomenon and leave with a message to remember. Beyond academic learning objectives, students learn to feel safe outdoors, respect the desert environment, and discover new potential career paths.

Feedback from teachers and students is overwhelmingly positive. One teacher emailed "... it was awesome as usual. Some of the kids were so worn out they fell asleep on the way back, which is a good sign." Even perpetually hard-to-impress middle school students remember Asombro field trips. An 8th grader told an Asombro educator that they remembered going on a field trip in 2nd grade. He said "it was the best field trip ever!"



*First graders measure the temperature of materials that could be used to build animal homes.*

After a nonstop field trip day where we may even forget to eat lunch, it feels incredibly satisfying to know we've made a lasting impact on our students by giving them an experience they won't forget. We spend the car ride back to the Asombro office swapping stories, and always look forward to the next field trip.

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# 2021 - Flexibility Creates Opportunity

By Stephanie Bestelmeyer

Although Asombro is famous for our hands-on, engaging classroom lessons and field trips, we're equally proud of our flexibility and unwavering focus on science education. 2021 put that flexibility to the test as we adapted multiple times to the changing K-12 environment caused by the pandemic.

This flexibility allowed us to meet current needs and opened up exciting possibilities for the organization's future. In 2021, this included:

- We reached 19,599 K-12 students through remote-learning and in-person lessons.
- Desert Stories, Stepping Out for Science Inquiry, and the Desert Data Jam, three of our most popular programs, were all converted into remote-delivery formats.



- Shortly after students returned to school buildings, principals welcomed Asombro back too. Since June, we've provided science to every grade level in several elementary schools and every middle school in Las Cruces.



- Asombro hosted 11 teacher workshops in 2021, a single-year record. Our new skills in hosting quality virtual workshops allowed us to welcome 168 workshop participants from every corner of New Mexico and four other states.



- Multiple phases of our Water Conservation Data Jam project wrapped up in 2021. In addition to teaching more than 500 students, we also supported eight educators throughout New Mexico who brought the project to their students.

- The remote-learning lessons we developed are now part of "Asombro Anywhere," our campaign to provide quality science education to students in even the most remote and under-served parts of our state.



- At the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park, we celebrated 20-years of data collection on the science demonstration plots, got a beautiful mural painted on our amphitheater, and planned our "Gateway to the Desert" entrance facilities.

- Asombro supported the science education community through our service on multiple committees and statewide boards.
- Last, but certainly not least, two phenomenal women joined our team in 2021. Carrie Hernandez was appointed to the Board of Directors, and Gabriela Franco joined our staff in September!

These accomplishments set us up for a phenomenal 2022. While we hope we won't have to exercise quite as much flexibility this year, we know we can if needed.

## Celebrating Fundraising Success

We depend on the support of our community, and once again, Asombro supporters have shown their dedication to science education. We are extremely thankful to our generous donors for making this our most successful end-of-year fundraising campaign to date. In 2022, Asombro will be able to expand our programs and reach even more students and educators with engaging science opportunities.



# Target Circle Community Giving Program

We are honored and excited to announce that we have been chosen to participate in a special charitable giving campaign, sponsored and funded by Target. And you have the chance to help direct a portion of Target's donation to us!



Now through March 31, vote for us through the Target Circle program to help determine how Target's donation will be divvied up. Find out more about Target Circle here: [www.target.com/circle](http://www.target.com/circle)

We're asking our supporters to help us make the most of this incredible opportunity. Every vote counts to help us receive a portion of the available Target funds as we continue our mission to increase natural science literacy.

Don't forget, as you earn more votes, you can keep voting multiple times during the campaign! Thank you for your support, and we encourage you to share your support for us (and your thanks to Target) on social media throughout the duration of the voting!

## Wonder Award for Outstanding Volunteer Service: Robin Cline

By Kelly Steinberg

One of the things that makes Asombro lessons special is all the unique equipment, models and tools we bring into classrooms. Our volunteers spend hours preparing those materials and helping us set up and maintain them in busy classrooms. This month, the Wonder Award goes to someone who has put in a lot of time behind the scenes and with the students, Robin Cline!



Wonder Award recipient  
Robin Cline

Robin was new to Las Cruces in 2019 when she started volunteering with Asombro. She was eager to jump into classrooms and quickly became an exemplary volunteer in elementary classrooms. She was a regular in classrooms and volunteer gatherings. Throughout the pandemic, Robin has been picking up supplies from the office, preparing supplies for classrooms, teachers, and remote lessons. We are thrilled to have her back in the classroom with us this school year. Thanks Robin. We think you're WONDERFUL!

## Trail Keepers

By Ryan Pemberton

Raise your hand if you love the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park. I bet most of you raised your hand. Our little patch of desert is less of a secret today than it was a few years ago. Each year, more and more people learn about the wonders of the desert from walking our trails. More visitors lead to more wear and tear on our trails, benches, shade shelters, etc.

This is why Asombro has decided to start a Trail Keepers Volunteer Program. This corps of volunteers will act as Asombro's eyes on the park and help with trail maintenance and other park projects.



Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park Welcome Sign

If you already spend time walking the trails, are looking for other ways to volunteer with Asombro, or love the Nature Park, then you sound like a Trail Keeper.

Asombro will host an informational meeting on Thursday, February 10, via Zoom. Stop by any time between 5:30 pm to 6:30 pm to learn more about the park, how to sign up, and ask any questions. Please email [ryan@asombro.org](mailto:ryan@asombro.org) to receive the Zoom link.

We look forward to working with you soon, Trail Keepers.



Arroyo Trail at the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park

# A-Team Helps Asombro Meet Statewide Needs

By Stephanie Bestelmeyer

Asombro is obsessed with meeting the changing needs of K-12 educators and students, which means we need to be informed about the current situation and anticipate future needs. To do this, we keep up with education research, and we take every opportunity to talk with administrators and teachers we serve when we are in the schools. Yet our most effective strategy is working with an elite, exceptional group of 20 educators who make up the Asombro Advisory Team, which we affectionately call the A-Team!



*Educators participate in a virtual Asombro Advisory Team workshop*

Twice a year, these hand-selected educators participate in workshops with Asombro staff to help us ensure that our science education programs are constantly improving and meeting the needs of teachers and students.

This fall, we expanded the A-Team to include educators from all over New Mexico to assist us with launching "Asombro Anywhere," our new program to provide Asombro's science lessons to students in some of the more rural and under-served parts of the state. On October 2, these teachers joined us for our first virtual A-Team workshop. Two weeks later, the members of the A-Team from southern New Mexico participated in a workshop.

Our goals for A-Team workshops include: (1) providing content and resources that teachers can use immediately with their own students and (2) getting teachers' opinions and feedback on new Asombro programs and ideas. A-Team members' responses on anonymous evaluations showed that we met our goals. Teachers wrote:

“  
...it was nice  
to be listened  
to and  
respected for  
our opinions.  
This makes me  
excited!!!  
-A-Team Teacher

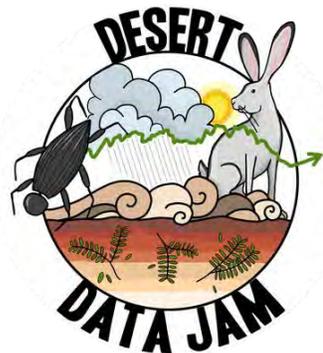
“This was empowering as it was nice to be listened to and respected for our opinions. This makes me excited!!!”

“I can't think of one thing to improve this workshop! As usual, Asombro staff has done an amazing job presenting the material and providing wonderful lessons for me to use in my classroom.”

“This workshop was incredibly useful and engaging! ... It felt like my feedback as a professional was actually valued which is not always the case as a teacher!”

“Breakout rooms are always great; especially when we are in small groups. Thanks for giving us plenty of time to play with the simulation and review materials. You have an ally for life.”

All of us at Asombro are so grateful that this talented group of educators is willing to devote precious weekend hours to assist us. Their dedication to quality science education for New Mexico students inspires us to work hard too. Together, we will make sure that Asombro programs always meet the needs of the K-12 community.



## Desert Data Jam Returns in 2022

In just a few short weeks, Desert Data Jam will begin its 11th year! Asombro educators will return to classrooms to work with 7th graders to interpret scientific datasets, identify trends, and present them in creative ways. We are looking forward to combining new skills acquired during last year's virtual competition with face-to-face student interaction.

This year's students are sure to come up with incredibly unique and exciting projects. Please stay tuned for opportunities to get involved in virtual judging for the competition in late April!

# Asombro is a Lowe's 100 Hometowns Secret Santa Recipient

By Emilia Linley

In celebration of Lowe's centennial year of business, the company's "100 Hometowns" initiative offered grants to fund 100 projects across the country. Human Systems Research, Inc., a nonprofit whose mission is to provide archaeological, historical, and educational services here in Las Cruces, was selected to receive one of these grants. The nonprofit's headquarters is housed in the historic Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) camp schoolhouse, and executive director Deborah Dennis, Ph.D. used the funds to complete a restoration project there.



Human Systems Research Inc.'s Deborah Dennis, Ph.D. (right)

After the project's completion, she was asked by Lowe's to provide the names of other local nonprofits she felt would benefit from additional funds. She thought of Asombro because of her love for the Chihuahuan Desert Nature Park and our shared efforts to provide science education to students in Las Cruces. Through Dr. Dennis' nomination, Asombro received a \$500 Lowe's gift card. We are very grateful to Dr. Dennis for nominating us for this generous gift and to Lowe's for their support of the Las Cruces community.

## THANK YOU!

We are grateful to our generous donors from the fourth quarter of 2021.

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Seventh grade students use a black light to identify and sort model chromosomes.

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