

# More Than a Place: Their Stories of Impact

## *Spotlight on Natalie Christian*

For Natalie Christian, Schiff Nature Preserve has always been more than just a place, it's where she grew up, discovered her passions, and found her sense of purpose. Her relationship with Schiff began when she was only six years old, attending the Schiff Nature Program for Kids (SNP) each summer from ages 6 to 16. What started as a simple summer experience quickly became a lifelong connection to nature and community.

Natalie remembers those summers as a series of small, magical moments... tie-dye shirts that never turned out quite as planned, games of Camouflage and Tsunami in the woods, and the excitement of Stream Day, where she and her friends explored the cool, rushing water in search of hidden creatures beneath the rocks. Those experiences sparked an early love of environmental stewardship and hands-on learning that remains with her today.

As the years passed, Natalie's role at Schiff evolved right alongside her. She moved from attendee to Counselor-in-Training (CIT), then to Counselor and finally Instructor, teaching the same lessons around environmental conservation, preservation and stewardship that once inspired her. Returning each summer to guide new children, she discovered how meaningful it was to watch others experience the same wonder and joy she once did. Through teaching (or her role as an Instructor) at Schiff, she developed the confidence and curiosity that would later guide her into a career in education.

Outside of attending the program, Schiff became woven into Natalie's family life. She and her brother grew up exploring the trails near their home in Mendham, walking their dog, Molly, through the meadows and forests, watching wildflowers bloom and bats flutter from the bat houses at dusk. Those walks created some of her most cherished memories, and even after Molly passed, Schiff remained a place of peace and reflection, a space that feels like home.

What kept Natalie coming back year after year was not only the beauty of the preserve, but also the people. The directors, instructors, counselors, CITs, and children all part of Schiff's Summer Nature Program gifted her a sense of belonging, a community of mentors, friends, and fellow nature enthusiasts who shared her curiosity and care for the environment. Through those relationships, she gained an understanding of the importance of stewardship, volunteerism, and giving back.

Now a K-8 Special Education Teacher at the Harding Township School, Natalie carries the lessons she learned at Schiff into her classroom every day. The same hands-on, wonder-filled approach that shaped her as a child now inspires how she teaches her own students. She credits Schiff with nurturing her leadership, creativity, and compassion, not only for nature, but for the people and communities that depend on it.

To Natalie, Schiff will always be a second home. It's where she found her voice as a leader, her passion as an educator, and her lifelong commitment to caring for the world around her.

