

Story of Self, US and Now

I did not grow up like you AND I belong here

Mel Mac Innis

She/They

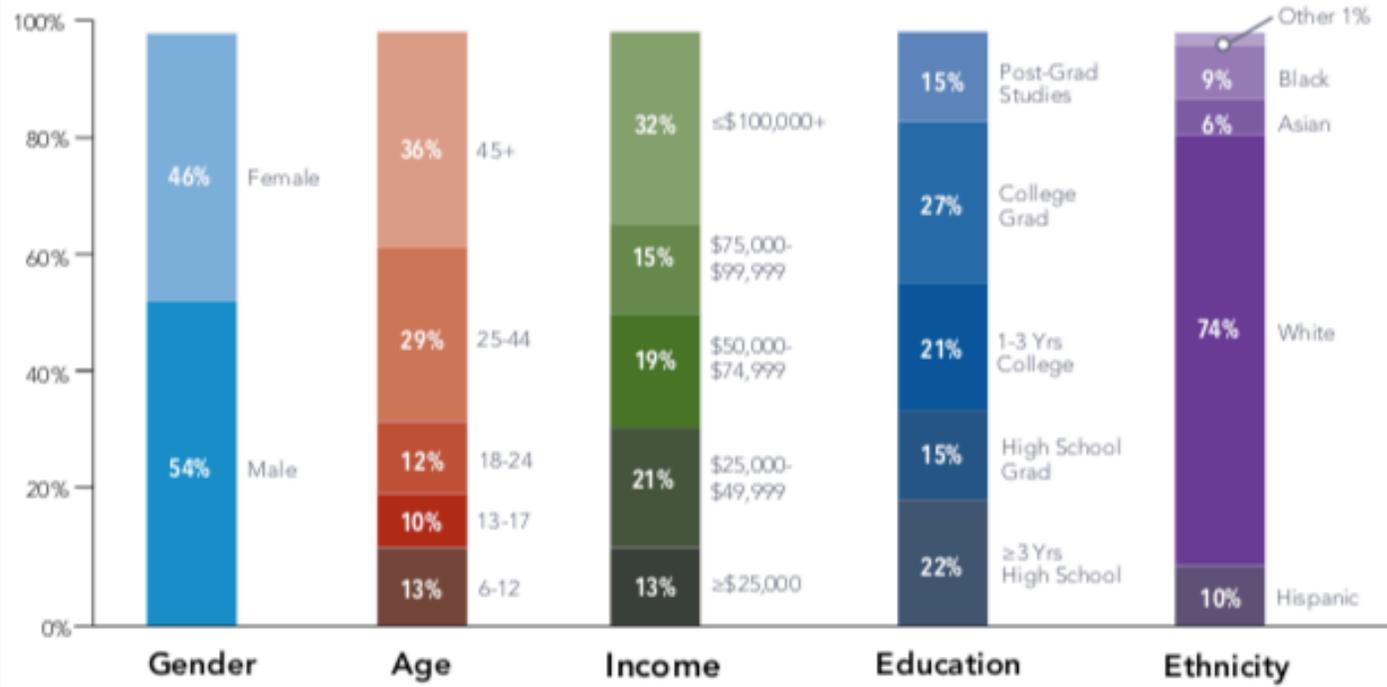
Director Outdoor Activities, Sierra Club

And you are about to learn a whole lot more about me



participant demographics

Outdoor Participants, ages 6+



TAKE HOME

Mentor someone holding identities
other than yours

TAKE HOME

Acknowledge and Confront your Bias

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>



Volunteer of the month River-rider Melanie Mac Innis understands rough water

For seven years rivers have been running through—and propelling—Melanie Mac Innis' life.

Every weekend from May to September, the rafting chapter of the Bay Chapter's Inner City Outings (ICO) takes a group—usually of at-risk teenagers or young adults with special needs—white-water rafting. At least half of those weekends Mel is captain of a raft and admiral of the whole operation.

Though she lacks a peg leg, Mel's responsibilities compare with those of the famous captains of yore. By the time the group hits the water, she will have prepared the paddlers, the food, the equipment, and the work plan.

On the rafts and in the camps, she oversees the social and environmental education of young people who may have normal relationships and no special needs. She guides tough conversations about respect and self-control.

On a recent trip an astonished participant never knew I could be so strong.

Her story of substance abuse and insisted that I walk with her and persuaded the group to walk.

She kept at it until she was clean via her support group.

State. While earning her bachelor's in humanities, she studied American Sign Language and became involved with the deaf community.

In 1993, she accompanied a deaf group on an ICO rafting trip. As interpreter (or "boat-banger") she sat in front of the paddlers and banged on the side of the raft to get their attention and transmit the captain's instructions. On that first trip Melanie fell in love—with the river. At age 24 she signed up for ICO's training program to become an ICO guide.

And an excellent guide she became. "Mel is a great rafter, extremely skilled," says 10-year ICO veteran Chris Knowlton. "She can handle very challenging water."

Beyond becoming a guide, Melanie became a leader in the organization. Chris Knowlton says, "Mel has been in the core of leadership that has helped the program through the transition from pretty disorganized to more structured." David Nemuth, former Bay Chapter director who has volunteered in ICO for about six years, calls Mel "amazing, a major worker, the glue that holds us together."

As ICO's "trips manager" Mel, along with assistant Eddie Dwang, schedules the year's outings, reviewing 50 or more applications from schools, youth groups, and other organizations wanting to go on ICO-led trips and selecting about 35 who can most profit from the experience. Then, come spring, she helps out with several of ICO's four training weekends on the South Fork of the American River and the upper Sacramento near Mount Shasta.

From her years of planning, training, and leading trips, Mel concludes that there are two main aspects to ICO. The obvious one is introducing at-risk youth and adults to the wilderness and to cooperative experiences. The second aspect is for the volunteers, many of whom were once at-risk youth themselves. The combination of service and the river "turns people's lives around," she says. "I've seen it happen."



Drawing by Cedar Carrier



Melanie Mac Innis, Berkeley, California
Inner City Outings leader, age 27

ONESMALLSTEP Paddling for the Planet

I went through hard times in my teens and spent some time on the streets. I had always lived in big cities. I had never spent time in the outdoors. I had never pitched a tent and didn't know what a raft was. I was a rafter in a rafting trip with the Sierra Club's Inner City Outings program.

with up to 20 kids per trip. I've seen participants who have come out a couple of years in a row and then tell me they want to become a volunteer guide. They realize they are a part of something bigger, and they want to give back to others. Kids come to our program as part of a group—Boys and Girls Clubs, churches, schools. The program teaches them group dynamics and teamwork.

"A lot of kids don't know what it's like to be in a place where there's no concrete. They don't even know why they should care when they hear about being green or saving the forest. Here, this wonderful place, and we have the opportunity to protect it. You can see them begin to realize why it's important. We're changing kids' lives every trip."

—Interview by Ori Co

NATURAL-HIGH A 2005 study initiated by the Sierra Club and administered by the California Department of Education showed that at-risk students who take a weeklong outdoor science school reported having increased self-esteem, a sense of responsibility, and raised their science test scores by 27 percent on a trip every weekend, about 35 a season.

ON THE WEB Find out more about Inner City Outings and the Planet at sierraclub.org/youth.

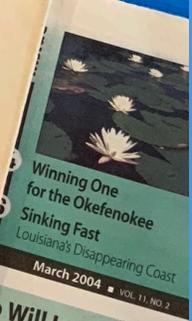
Melanie Mac Innis—Berkeley, California Inner City Outings Leader



Seventeen years ago I fit the profile of an ICO participant," recalls Melanie Mac Innis. "I lived on the streets in Florida and Georgia, used drugs, dropped out of high school and ran away from my mother's house. After a year or so on the streets, I moved to California to live with my father on the condition that I graduate from high school."

Not only did Mac Innis keep her part of the bargain, she flourished, completing not only high school but also a bachelor's degree and a master's degree in the humanities. While attending San Francisco State University, she took a course in American Sign Language and got involved in a program for the hearing impaired run by the local Big Brothers and Sisters.

—TOM VALTIN



Winning One for the Okefenokee
Sinking Fast
Louisiana's Disappearing Coast
March 2004 • VOL. 11, NO. 2

Who Will Lead the Sierra Club?

You could hardly find a more persuasive argument for voting than the 2000 presidential election. A handful of votes made the difference between President Al Gore and incumbent George W. Bush.

—TOM VALTIN

TAKE HOME

Include people with marginalized identities without tokenizing them

TAKE HOME

Get to know people who live life and
experience life differently than you
do

- Gender Identity Inclusion Practices
- Exclusive Spaces: Managing Inherent Risks to Traveling as a Visibly Marginalized Group
- Ability Awareness: Emotional Well-Being for People with Disabilities
- Supporting Indigenous Resurgence Through Anti-Colonial Approaches to Risk Management Planning

BRING IT! HOME

- Mentor and open doors
- Examine your bias
- Authentically Include people with marginalized identities
- Get to know people with different lived experiences
- Tell a diversity of stories