Indraloka Animal Sanctuary’s Educational Programs
Help Children of All Ages, Abilities and Backgrounds

Second-grader TJ couldn’t sleep. Bedtime terrified him; he knew he’d lie awake all night alone with his thoughts. In school the next day, he’d become frustrated over the slightest mistake. He’d view every interaction with his teacher and classmates as a battle. He didn’t know why he couldn’t just get along as he saw everyone else doing. He just knew he was angry and sad and scared and lonely and to him, it seemed no one cared. That is, until Sarah Thornton, Director of Education at Indraloka Animal Sanctuary, arrived to help.

Indraloka founder Indra Lahiri, PhD, had long witnessed how children who suffered from behavioral issues could connect with the animals in a way they said they couldn’t connect with their peers. She saw how the animals’ innocence and acceptance calmed the anxious. Smiles spread across their young faces. Anger disappeared.

“The Sanctuary’s first educational programs really developed organically. Sarah and I witnessed the changes in the students and got feedback from their parents and teachers and realized we had something special here,” Dr. Lahiri says. “Over time, Sarah has developed curricula for a wide range of students, interests, academic levels and abilities.”
Indraloka’s Educational programs combine storytelling, letter writing to the animals, field trips, videos, behavior incentive and modeling of appropriate, compassionate behavior to help children develop skills—empathy, resilience, confidence—they need to connect to others and succeed in school and in life.

The Sanctuary’s educational programs include STEAM (science, technology, engineering, arts and math), literacy, environmental studies, music, meditation, summer camps, healthy eating, growing food, storytelling, creative writing, life skills and so much more.

“We’re blessed to have Sarah here full time now,” Dr. Lahiri says. “Sarah’s skills as an educator are extraordinary. I’ve seen her set firm boundaries with kindness in ways that are impressively effective. With her decades of teaching experience plus her decade volunteering and then working part-time at the Sanctuary, Sarah brings an exceptional ability to create a safe, structured and fun learning environment.”

That learning environment gave rise to remarkable changes in TJ. His interactions with a goat named Mira elicited his first demonstrations of empathy. Empathy led to kindness in the form of words of love and support. TJ became willing to communicate openly with his classmates, which led to his developing the first friendships of his life.

Indraloka’s educational programs offer a holistic approach to learning. Participants range in mobility and cognitive ability—some are non-verbal, many are diagnosed with Autism. Life skills students are empowered by independently sorting produce, making music, creating art, communing with animals and sharing space with peers and adults.

Sarah Thornton holds a BM in Music Education from Susquehanna University and an MM in Music Education from Ithaca College. She taught music in the Sullivan County School District for 20 years.
At Indraloka, Sarah and her team teach onsite and virtually, through classes, workshops, public tours (in-person and virtual) and camps. Sarah is always looking for teachers and qualified volunteers to help. For more information, visit Indraloka.org.

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About Indraloka Animal Sanctuary
Indraloka, a 501(c) nonprofit, provides “heaven on earth” for farm animals that have nowhere else to turn. We inform, inspire, and empower the community, especially children, on ways in which we can better care for ourselves and the environment while helping animals in need. We advocate for a kind and compassionate lifestyle that protects animals, the earth, and our own health. The community is invited to tour the sanctuary; reservations are required. We host live, public and virtual events throughout the year for adults and children. Visit us at Indraloka.org.