



Supporting the Smiling Faces of Parks & Open Space

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JEFFERSON
COUNTY COLORADO
Parks & Open Space

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Gratitude

- Thank you to Jo Burns, Director and Co-Founder, CO Public Health/Parks and Recreation Collaborative; Tom Hoby, former Director, JCPOS; and Rachel Brenna, Strategy and Planning Director, JCPOS.
- Thank you to all JCPOS volunteers, especially our focus group participants, for sharing their time and insights.
- Thank you to the community health assessment course students: Ella Abramonte, Niles Gilmore, Paris Saenz, Maddie Van Os, and Taylor Veneziali.



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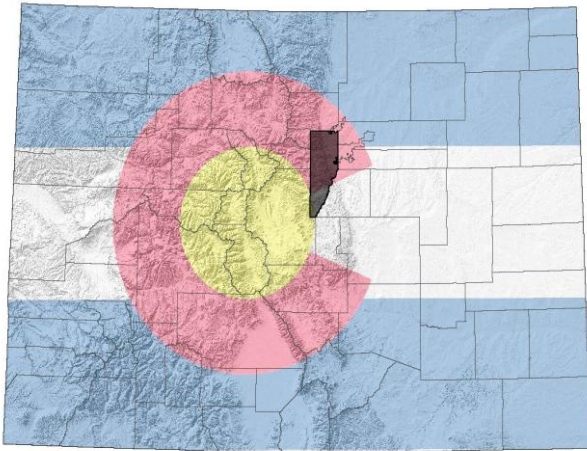
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ColoradoSPH Community Health Assessment Course Description

- Provides Master of Public Health students with applied practice experiences designed to produce community-driven deliverables
- Utilizes mixed-methods assessment designs developed and implemented in collaboration with community partners
- Incorporates the principles and practices of critical service-learning

Jefferson County Parks & Open Space (JCPOS)

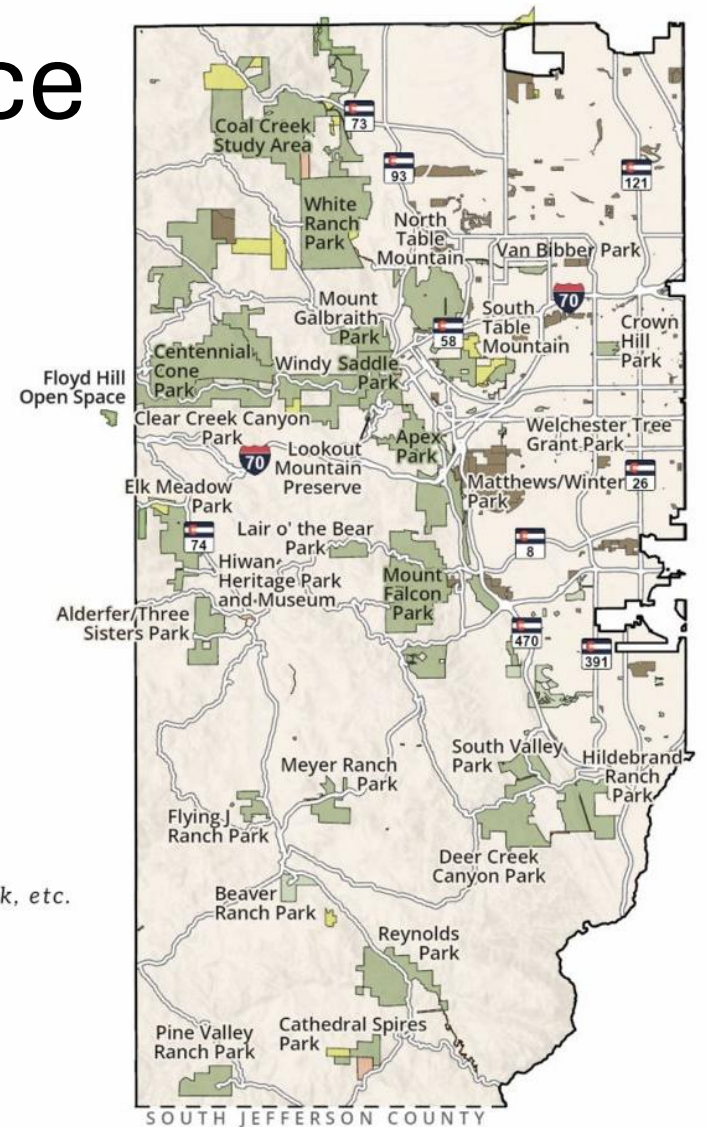


27 Parks

49,000 Acres

122 Designated Access Points

269 Miles of Authorized Trail



rk, etc.

575 Volunteers - 25 Volunteer Opportunities

Project Purpose

What are the mental health benefits that being a JCPOS volunteer provides?

Under the overarching question, the assessment aims to:

- **Help JCPOS better understand the experiences of volunteers**
- **Find ways for JCPOS to better support volunteer mental health and wellbeing**
- **Identify opportunities for enhancement of JCPOS volunteer program**
- **Serve as a tool to guide JCPOS volunteer recruitment strategies**

Project Design

Data Collection

- Two student-facilitated focus groups with JCPOS volunteers
- Collaborative creation of focus group scripts, exploring
 - motivations for volunteering
 - most and least rewarding features of volunteering
 - how volunteering supports wellbeing
 - how interactions with park visitors affect feelings about volunteering
 - ideas for how JCPOS could further strengthen support for volunteers

Data Analysis

- Thematic analysis of qualitative data, yielding multiple themes

Deliverables

- Formal report
- Question bank tool for JCPOS's application to future volunteer surveys



Have you volunteered before? How did it make you feel?



Do you manage volunteers? How is their work meaningful to you or your organization?

Thematic Map

1

Promoting Environmental Stewardship

Connection to nature/environment

Greater access to parks

Opportunity to educate

Reciprocity towards nature

2

Pursuing Growth and Fulfillment

Embedded in routine

New opportunities in retirement

Educational opportunity

Multiple volunteer roles

Knowledge gain

Physical activity

Shadowing opportunities

Volunteer Benefits

3

Cultivating Connections

Appreciation for staff

Active Recruitment

Inspiration to peers

Youth mentorship

Networking

Providing support

Sense of community

Contribute to community

Observing diverse experiences

4

Challenges of Volunteering

Parking

Encounters with unhoused individuals



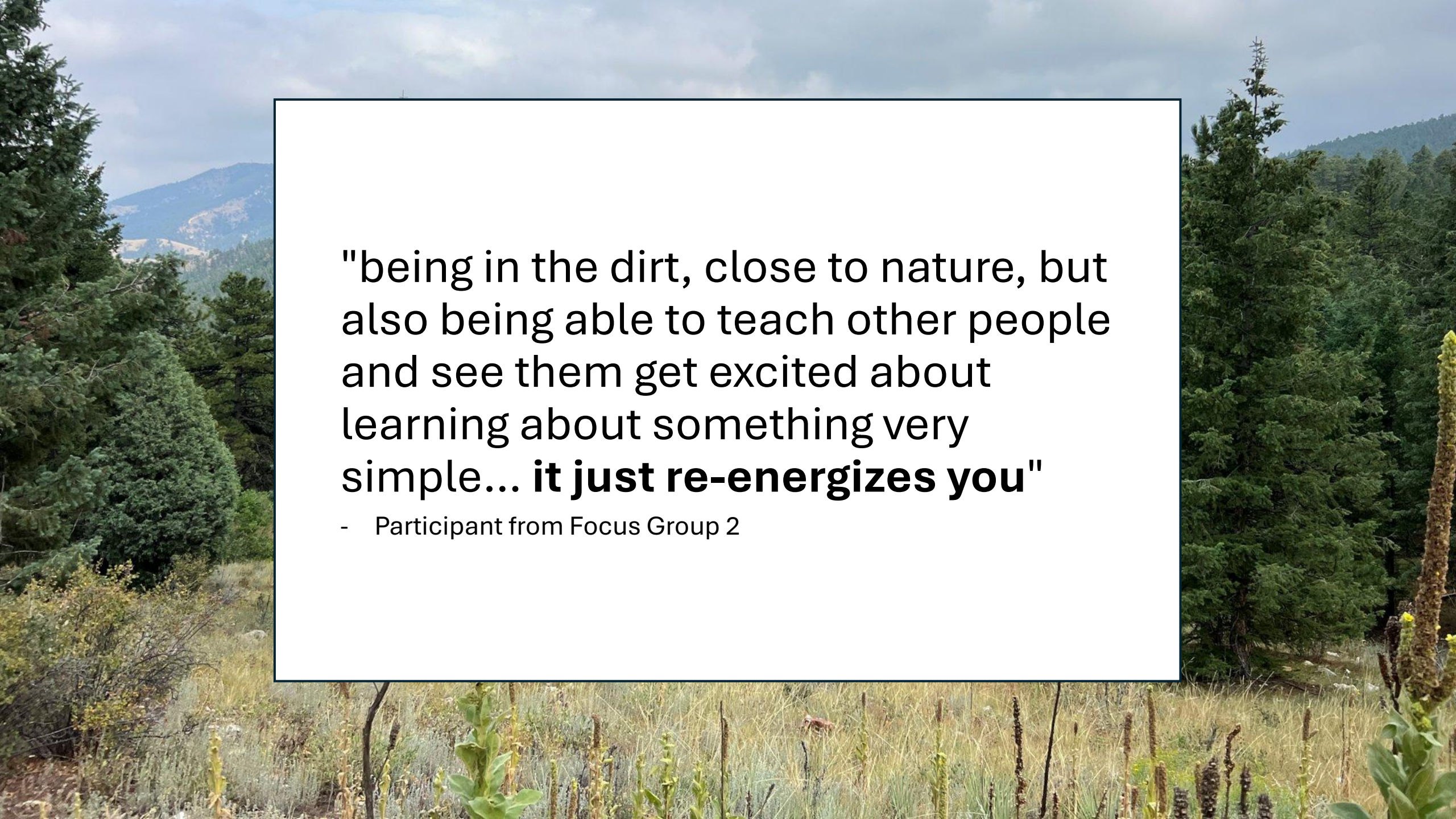
Limited authority

Park violations

Safety concerns


Scheduling conflict

Entitlement among park visitors



"being in the dirt, close to nature, but also being able to teach other people and see them get excited about learning about something very simple... **it just re-energizes you**"

- Participant from Focus Group 2



"I keep coming back because **we've developed a whole new set of friends, a community,** we've got, you know, our Tuesday, Thursday trail crew. **We have get-togethers outside of our work,** and, you know, it's just a very pleasant experience."

- Participant from Focus Group 2

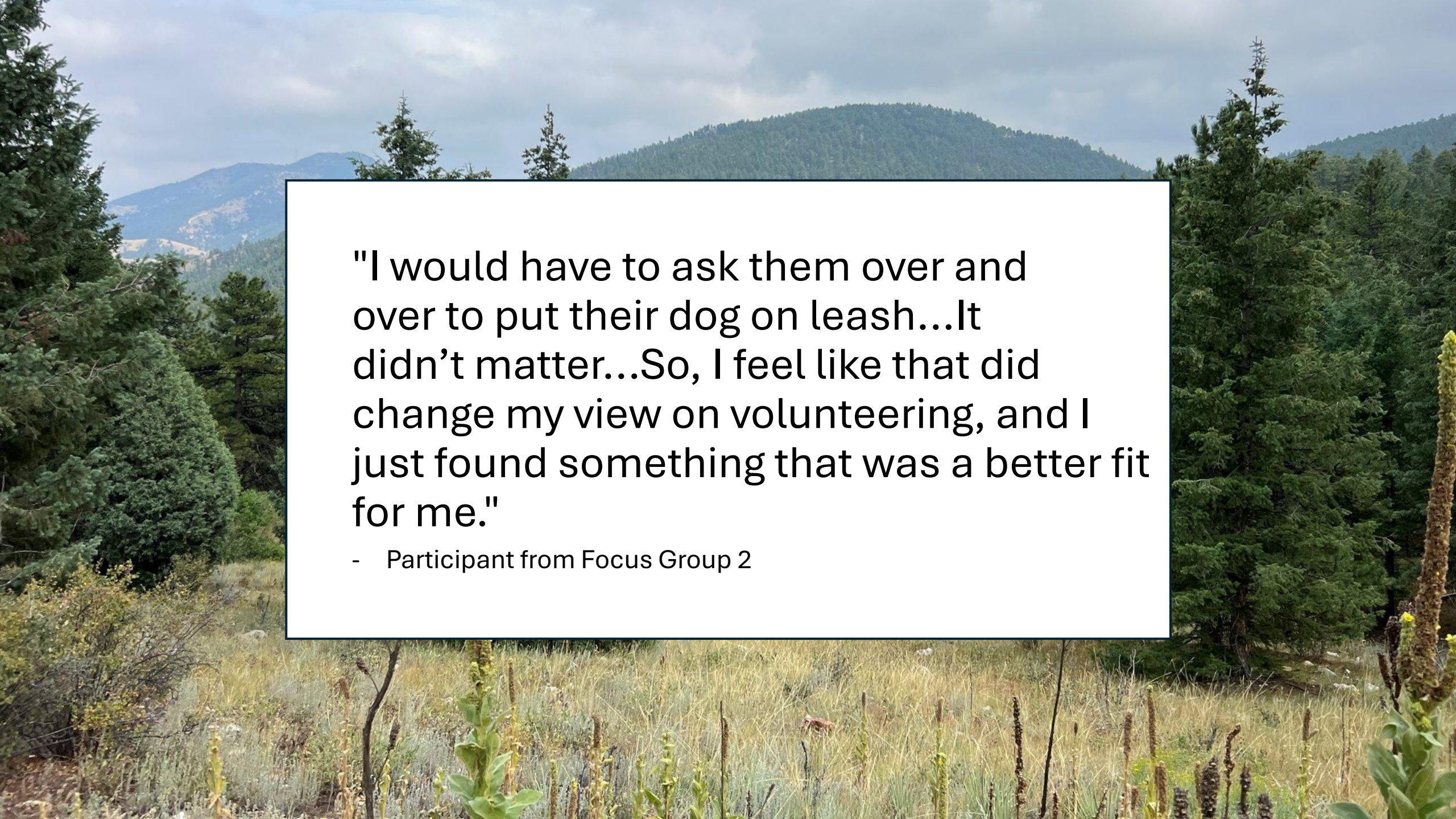
Recognizing the Challenges of Volunteering

The breadth and depth of the challenges volunteers experience regarding park interactions, training, personal safety, and logistics

Within this theme, **three components** were identified:

1. *Training and Safety*
2. *Logistics*
3. *Challenges with Park Visitors*





"I would have to ask them over and over to put their dog on leash...It didn't matter...So, I feel like that did change my view on volunteering, and I just found something that was a better fit for me."

- Participant from Focus Group 2

Summary of Findings

Volunteering with JCPOS provides a sense of mattering, which helps to create meaningful experiences that improve volunteers' mental health and wellbeing

- Factors that fuel this sense of mattering were volunteers' ability to...
 - Practice environmental stewardship
 - Access an environment for personal growth
 - Cultivate community connections (external & internal)
 - Make a positive impact on their community
 - Have a balanced ratio in the volunteering challenges (97% to 3%)

Next Steps/Actionable Outcomes

- Providing recommendations to JCPOS staff based on volunteer feedback
- Developed a survey question bank as a resource to JCPOS staff to conduct broader surveys about volunteer experiences

Original Focus Group Question	Survey Question Type	Survey Question with Response Options
<p>1. What made you decide to volunteer with JCPOS?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe: What personal interests, hobbies, or experiences influenced your decision to become a JCPOS volunteer? 	Multiple Select	<p>1. What factors influenced your decision to volunteer with JCPOS (select all that apply)?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Seeking new opportunities in retirement • Contribute to the community • Visibility of JCPOS volunteer opportunities • Continuing education • Professional development • Personal enjoyment • Environmental stewardship • Other (please specify)
<p>2. What do you find most rewarding about volunteering?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Probe: Among the rewards of volunteering we discussed, which one is most important to you? <p>What do you find least rewarding about volunteering?</p>	<p>Likert Scale:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strongly Agree • Agree • Disagree • Strongly Disagree 	<p>2. To what extent do you agree with the following:</p> <p>“I find ____ a rewarding aspect of volunteering”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Being part of a community • Volunteering networking

Key Takeaways

- "This experience **enhanced my ability to facilitate focus groups** to generate qualitative data, conduct a narrowed literature review, and translate research findings into organizational recommendations for volunteer programs."
- "It was a stretching experience for me to facilitate a focus group and learn how to **navigate discussion to generate data**, which is a skill I hope to bring to future public health work."
- "This opportunity helped me understand how to properly conduct a larger scale, more complex project. It also helped me let go of the need to always try and manage everything. I learned to **trust that people will show up in the process** to get things done effectively, timely, and holistically. "
- "My previous experience was mostly in quantitative data analysis, so being able to gain in-depth experience with qualitative analysis was a great learning opportunity. After I graduate this December, I would like to **use both skills in my career and do more community health assessments.**"
- "I appreciated the opportunity to deepen my skills in qualitative data analysis, which is a skill I know will be essential in my future public health work. I also found it meaningful to collaborate with a team on this project, as **public health relies heavily on cross-sector collaboration/teamwork to achieve effective, sustainable health outcomes.**"

Insights for Building Community-Academic Partnerships

- Prepare students to partner and collaborate for community health improvement and workforce development
- Co-design curricula and projects with community partners
- Acknowledge and incorporate community partners' context expertise
- Emphasize the development of practical deliverables
- Increase participants understanding of the relationship between public health and open spaces

Thank you!

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