3/7/2015

Hello Woodland Park Zoo and Seattle/King County Leaders,

I am writing on behalf of myself and my almost 8 year-old daughter, Stella, to ask you to send Bamboo and Chai to a sanctuary. We have decided that the elephants need the help of the children of the Seattle. We are beginning a campaign called Art for the Elephants.  We plan to get as many Seattle children as possible to create art asking you to do right by Bamboo and Chai. Below, please see the first piece of art, created by Stella Church, age 8.

We are a city that cares. Sending the elephants to a Zoo is not in line with our moral values. The elephants need space, freedom and friendship. We are not against zoos, and indeed have been members of the Woodland Park Zoo for most of Stella’s life. We have not renewed our zoo membership because of our concerns about the elephants. Stella and I both now firmly believe that elephants are a species that do not belong in zoos. **We will never again be Woodland Park Zoo members if the zoo sticks by it’s decision to send Chai and Bamboo to the Oklahoma City Zoo. We hope other Seattle area families will join us in this resolution.**

Stella first became passionate about elephants because of Bamboo, Chai and Watoto. Her interest in them led us to research elephant behavior. I recall that when we first saw Chai rocking from side to side, we thought it was sweet that she was dancing. We now know that this is a self-soothing behavior, helping her to cope with stress, confinement and boredom. We have learned so much about elephant behavior, intelligence and the dangerous threats the species faces. **I understand completely the zoo’s educational mission and have seen it’s effect on my own daughter, but the education and conservation mission needs to keep the well being of the animals at it’s core or it becomes hollow.**

Stella is clearly committed to animal conservation and her youngest activism was on behalf of the elephants. At her 3rd birthday party, she collected donations to send in for elephant rescue. She is now about to turn 8 and says that, for this birthday, she wants the children of Seattle to stand up for Chai and Bamboo and help them get to the home they deserve.

We believe the Woodland Park Zoo has made the right decision by deciding to close the elephant exhibit, but absolutely the wrong decision about where the elephants should go. Our understanding of and relationships with the animals of our planet is evolving rapidly and zoos must evolve as well. The Zoo has an opportunity to innovate new educational methods, perhaps in partnership with the sanctuaries. How wonderful it would be for kids to hear the story of Chai and Bamboo’s journey to freedom and to be able, through the power of the internet, to observe them in their new community. We have one of the best Zoos in the country and the idea that we would be closing the elephant exhibit only to send the elephants someplace worse is deeply disturbing and morally unsound. If you stick by this bad decision, you will be breaking the heart of at least one young animal lover and it is possible you will be leaving an entire generation of Seattle area children disenchanted with and disdaining of the Zoo. Please send Chai and Bamboo to a sanctuary.

Sincerely, Lisa Decker (age 38) and Stella Church (age 7)