WILDERNESS
YOUTH PROJECT

smarter
healthier
happier

2016
Annual Report

Nature Connection

WILDERNESS YOUTH PROJECT

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Dear Friends,

"All children need nature. Not just the ones whose parents appreciate nature. Not only those of a certain economic class or culture or gender or sexual identity or set of abilities. Every child."

Was 2016 the year that "nature connection" became a household term? It's hard to pinpoint a moment, but nowadays it is broadly understood that nature makes children smarter, healthier and happier. At WYP, 2016 was a best-ever year in terms of our core values: we increased our program capacity by 30% while expanding our demographic diversity and maintaining our sound fiscal and operating strategies.

Mentoring in nature is a simple but profound idea with proven benefits. After seventeen years offering WYP programs in this diverse community, we are proud of our track record: safety, striving for equity, preserving our low mentor-to-youth ratio, staff excellence, and, most fundamentally, your support. In 2016 we added Bridge to Nature, partnering with Title 1[1] schools in Santa Barbara to make WYP a part of the school day for 300 students, and Woolly Bears, a multi-day early childhood program, in response to the community's interest.

Every moment of inspiration, curiosity, discovery and connection emerges from the foundation of our community of supporters, be they donors, volunteers, teachers and principals, grant-makers, parents or friends. The return on your investment in WYP is measured in moments, captured by stories and pictures, which we share with you here in our annual report. We hope that these moments carry a message of hope and transformation through nature connection, and that they convey to you the return on your investment in WYP.

In gratitude,

DAN FONTAINE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

[1]WYP strives for equity, working to include students from diverse backgrounds of ethnicity, ability and socioeconomic status. Our goal is to mirror the demographics of Santa Barbara and Goleta.

Spending time in nature makes children smarter, healthier and happier.

MISSION

The mission of Wilderness Youth Project is to foster confidence, health, and a life-long love of learning for young people and families through active outdoor experiences and mentoring.

VISION

Wilderness Youth Project envisions teaching the next generation of children to be peaceful, respectful and confident stewards of our world.

2016 Key Accomplishments

WYP is at our best (and biggest) by the following measures.

Mission Delivery: 73% of parents' responses to last survey reflected improvement in their children's experiences in the 4 categories of:

- Individual (self-confidence)
- Interpersonal (respect for others and conflict resolution abilities)
- Physical (physical confidence and agility)
- Environmental (respect for the natural world)

New Programs:

- Woolly Bears, a 3-or-4 day per week early childhood program
- Bridge to Nature, serving 11 (mostly 4th grade) classrooms

Financial Stability:

- Endowment Fund created[1]
- Responsible yet ambitious growth in program delivery and budget

Fundraising success:

- 2016 fundraising up 35% over 2015

Number of students served:

- 974 students in school year programs in 34 weekly programs
- 418 summer campers in 55 weeks of programs

Diversity and inclusion: advancing our goals of reflecting the demographics of the community we serve:

- 2016 demographics represent major advancement of our goal to reflect the community we serve.
  - 40% Latina/o / Hispanic
  - 65% very low, low, moderate income
  - 10% students with disabilities/ special needs

Staff:

- Executive team has been working together for 8 years
- 12 full time staff
- 30 part-time/ seasonal staff
- 100 volunteer positions
- Bilingual staff (English-Spanish): 2 part-time/ seasonal staff members, 4 full time

[1] Visit wyp.org/donate to contribute to our Endowment Fund and learn about planned giving options

Strategic Plan

Our work toward the "nature connection bottom line" is organized into a Strategic Plan with **five values that each have specific and measurable goals.**

Since the plan was established in 2013, **79% (59 of 75) of objectives have been completed,** with an end date of Fall 2018.

1

Wilderness Youth Project is recognized as an asset in children's lives at every K-12 campus on the south coast of Santa Barbara County.

Big news! Wilderness Youth Project's time-tested transformative work reached 300 more low-income youth in 2016. WYP launched Bridge to Nature in the fall, partnering with six local elementary schools (eleven classrooms) which serve a high percentage of low-income students. Santa Barbara is often direly misperceived as an enclave of the white and wealthy. **In fact, the Santa Barbara Unified School District serves a majority of Hispanic/ Latino students, and faces a serious achievement gap.** 78% of our elementary students are Hispanic/ Latino and 61.5% of district schools are in Program Improvement. **One in five children in Santa Barbara lives in poverty.** Given the severity of this situation, numerous efforts are under way in our community to support youth development, to close the achievement gap, and to create pathways to success for the children of our community.

WYP is building a Bridge to Nature that will help make Santa Barbara elementary students smarter, happier and healthier through professionally facilitated time and experiences in nature. After a successful five-year pilot, this program expanded to six area elementary schools and has wide community support. When this program is fully implemented, students throughout the district will be inspired curious learners who have an "experience bank" to draw from in school and in life.

"WYP has been a positive experience for our students, and one that they would otherwise not get. I love how they come back and are so excited and want to share how their day went. They are bringing what they are learning in WYP to the classroom; they are writing narratives about WYP, understanding science through hands-on learning and vocalizing how happy they are and how much they love to be outdoors. Thank you very much for what you all are doing."

-MARLEN LIMON, 4TH GRADE TEACHER, FRANKLIN ELEMENTARY

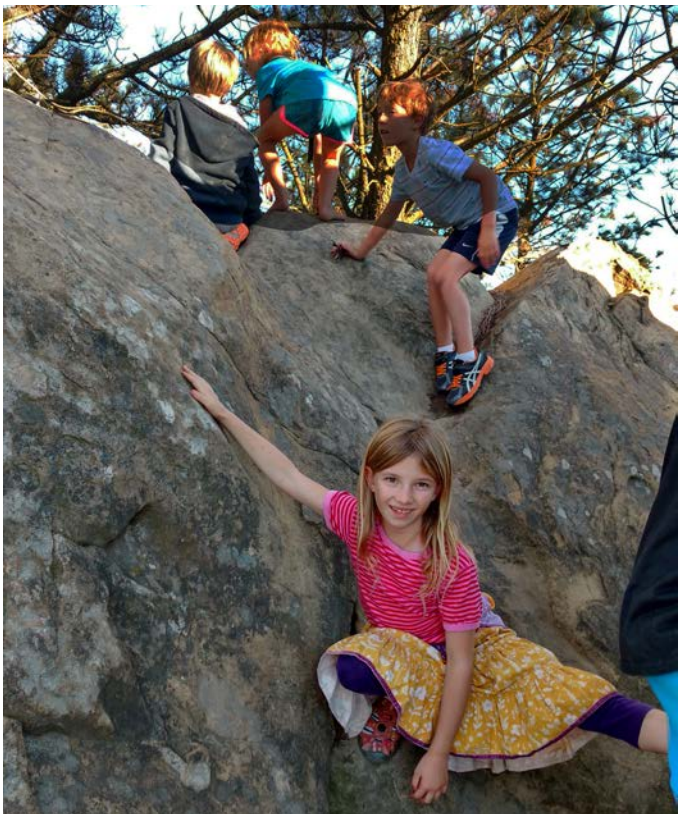
Testimonials

" I chose WYP to give my grandson a taste of nature, and he's been going for four years. Last summer he went on a four day backpack trip with WYP, and he loved it! Now he doesn't want to go to any other camp. WYP has been terrific for him. The staff knows how to give kids what they need — to get their hands dirty, to explore plants, rocks, and bugs. Thank you, WYP, for instilling a love of the natural world in my grandson!"

-JOAN EASTON LENTZ, AUTHOR OF "A NATURALIST'S GUIDE TO THE SANTA BARBARA REGION

"My brother likes to stay inside on the computer, and he doesn't like to get dirty, but I love to play outside. It's because I've been in WYP since I was little. When I grow up, I want to be a WYP counselor."

-LAUREN, A 9-YEAR-OLD SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENT



"This camp was a breakthrough. He was simply filled with joy, happiness and acceptance. He wants to do this camp every single day of his life."

-GUARDIAN OF A 6-YEAR-OLD CAMPER

"In the past, Audrey's reluctance to try new things could make family outings challenging. After WYP camp this summer, she has a positive attitude about new adventures, is engaging more comfortably with family, and is excited to tell her story of the day. Participating in WYP gave her a sense of connection, gratitude and peace that I haven't seen in her before."

-MOM OF AUDREY, AGE 7

2

It is widely accepted that nature makes kids smarter, healthier & happier.

***"Research shows** that when children engage in free, spontaneous play outdoors, they adapt more readily to their culture, to society, and to the world. They build fine and gross motor skills. They learn to negotiate and solve problems. They stretch their imagination."*

- JOE FROST, UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS PROFESSOR

The most exciting research from 2016 in the nature connection for kids field came out of England. The Natural Connections Demonstration Project, begun in 2012, presented a final report with compelling evidence for the value of nature in kids' lives.

A few highlights:

95% of children surveyed said outdoor learning makes lessons more enjoyable

90% said they felt happier and healthier

93% of schools said outdoor learning improves pupils' social skills

92% of schools said it improves pupils' health and wellbeing and engages them with learning

3

Wilderness Youth Project reflects the demographics of the south coast at all levels of the organization.

Our core values of equity and inclusion demand that we make the benefits of WYP available for a constituency that reflects the demographics of our community. We strive to mirror our service area, including socioeconomic status, ability, ethnicity and culture.

Bridge to Nature is a significant boost to our efforts in this area: meeting students during the school day overcomes barriers of communication, access and transportation.

This story from a 2016 summer camp embodies the experience we aspire to provide for children from all walks of life:

"My six year old son E.J. loves WYP and has attended for several years. He is not one to express happiness verbally, and before this summer I had never seen him hug an adult other than me. This summer, while in camp, he told me:"I want to go this camp every day!" I have never seen him be so freely happy with himself. We look forward to continuing E.J.'s love of WYP and all the positive experiences you have brought to his life."

4

Wilderness Youth Project has a stable and growing base of funding.

WYP has the infrastructure to support our growing capacity needs.

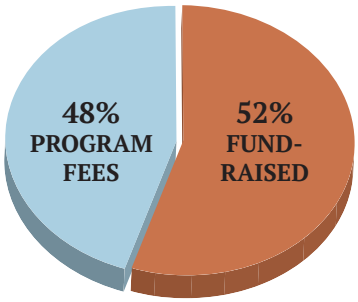
Growing 30% in one year was a major endeavour, one made possible by visionary support from key local funders and donors and strategic leadership by our board of directors. WYP continues to rely on a sustainable revenue mix, with 50% of our revenue from program fees and 50% from fundraising.

Additionally, our balance sheet has been growing steadily. The creation of our new Endowment Fund of $250,000 represents a major increase on our financial resilience. WYP averaged 15% growth annually before 2016, and closer to 30% for 2016, which is well above the industry average of 10.8% for organizations of our size.[1]

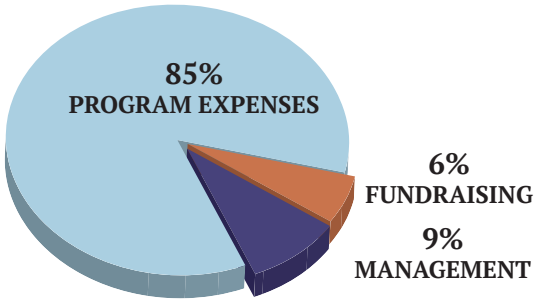
One parent, who is also a donor, shares her reasons for giving to WYP:

"My daughter has really developed a sense of self and self confidence and learned to interact with peers in a different environment without the preconceived ideas of each other that develop in our local communities and schools growing up together. As a result, she really got to be herself. I see an increased sense of confidence built on her WYP experience. The best reason to contribute to WYP is that many children will not otherwise have the opportunity to participate in this life-changing program."

Total Income: $1,190,748



Total Expenses: $954,065



[1] Source: Fundraising Effectiveness Project

Wilderness Youth Project is a collaborator in leading the national nature mentoring and nature connection movement.

2016 saw WYP join a local collaborative of Science-Rich Educational initiatives, a joint effort to unite local groups towards the aim of building nature connection into childhood for all of our community's children. WYP also participates in Santa Barbara's Leave No Child Inside initiative.

In November, the world lost the "Godfather of Biophila", Stephen Robert Kellert. Dr. Kellert's research at the Yale Institute for Social Ecology taught us the following:

"Beyond a vague awareness that the 'outdoors' is good for kids, we are only starting to explore the role of nature in learning and development… Findings in health care, education, work, recreation and community indicate that contact with nature remains vital to child development, and it may not be possible to find a substitute.

Children develop quantitative skills by counting insects and flowers; gain materials knowledge from playing in grass and mud; intuit physics from how creek water responds to obstacles and opportunities. In recognizing hills, valleys, lakes, rivers and mountains, they learn geological form. In engaging with other life from redwood trees to hedgehogs, they encounter an endless source of curiosity, emotional attachment and a motivation for learning. In adapting to the ever-changing, often unpredictable natural world, they learn to cope and problem-solve."

We aspire to honor Dr. Kellert's legacy by carrying on the work of nature connection for children.

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Since 1999
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