WILDERNESS
YOUTH PROJECT

2014

Annual Report

15 Years

WILDERNESS YOUTH PROJECT

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Dear Friends,

Happy Birthday to Wilderness Youth Project!

2014 marked our 15th year of bringing nature connection to the youth and families of our community. This report serves to celebrate with you, highlighting our achievements for the year through pictures and stories and conveying our goals for 2015 and beyond.

Young people who spend time outside are physically and mentally healthier. They do better in school and have higher self-esteem and self-discipline. They also cooperate better with others and feel more confident. We've witnessed these benefits. A strong body of scientific evidence identifies correlations between experience in the natural world and children's health and well-being.

Thanks to our supporters, Wilderness Youth Project is the the bridge to the benefits of nature for a diverse group of Santa Barbara's youth and families.

Gratefully,

DAN FONTAINE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

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.

2014

Key Accomplishments

At Wilderness Youth Project, Nature Connection is our bottom line. Stories (and pictures) are the best way to share our progress towards that bottom line with you.

We also evaluate participants' improvement in four categories:

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

52 weeks of summer camp

30 weekday programs (school year)

679 unduplicated youth served

52% of participants receiving scholarship

4:1 ratio participants to counselors

7 vans

49 employees and interns: 8 full time and 41 part-time/seasonal

9 Bilingual staff (English-Spanish): 2 interns, 5 part-time/seasonal staff members, 2 full time

8 Wilderness First Responders

72 program volunteers

8 board volunteers

wyp.org new interactive website launched

15th birthday featured in Noozhawk

Strategic Plan

As we celebrate fifteen years of connecting Santa Barbara's young people to nature, we have taken time to look back and celebrate our successes and to look forward to our vision of what the future holds for Wilderness Youth Project.

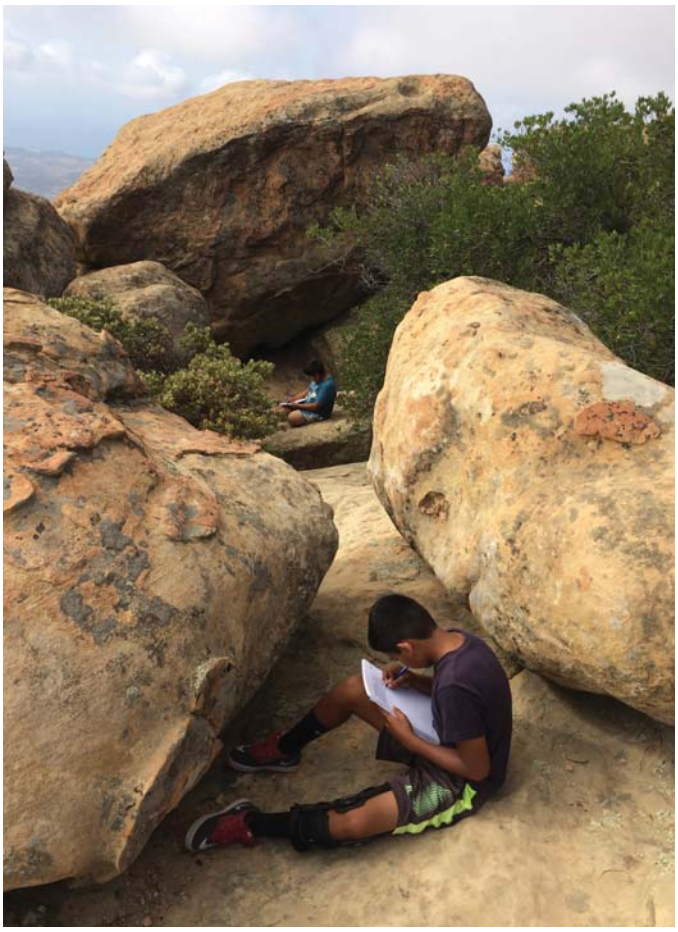
The last ten years have seen steady capacity growth, increased interest in the program and broad community recognition that nature is an essential ingredient in the lives of children.

In order to build on that momentum, our Board of Directors and key staff members have outlined a five year strategic plan organized into **five values with specific and measurable goals.**

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.

Recognizing that school is where the kids are, we work to build connections with schools throughout Santa Barbara and Goleta.



One example is our program at Adelante Charter School, where we take 6th graders outside every Thursday, allowing the benefits of nature exploration to support the curriculum.

"Adelante Charter School is seeing the results of a strong Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) focus, which emphasizes hands-on, student-centered learning, relevant real world problem-solving, inquiry and consistent opportunities for interaction with the natural world."
-MICHAEL MACIOCE, TEACHER

Whether we are taking participants outdoors as part of the school day, meeting them after school near campuses or helping train teachers to include nature in curriculum, we look forward to increasing our connection with the school community.

Testimonials

"Dear Wilderness Youth Project,

I am so grateful for the outdoor adventures the 6th graders at Adelante Charter School have experienced. I have known these students since kindergarten and watched them grow up as curious children full of wonder. The students were given the freedom to explore, play and interact intimately with the natural world in a way most had never experienced or thought possible. ***Students expressed a greater reverence and love for the natural world, they gained confidence in their own abilities to overcome challenges*** *and grew much closer as a class.*

My daughter, Mireya, grew tremendously over the year through her WYP experiences. She was "in her element". She has a better understanding of who she is and what really brings her joy. ***She is at her best outdoors and shared that she feels more "alive" when she has extended time in nature, something critical to understand about herself as she matures.***

Most of the children who attend Adelante live in poverty and have very few opportunities outside of school to interact with the natural world. ***Their experiences with WYP gave them such a unique opportunity for adventure and camaraderie with their peers.*** *I know the children will carry these experiences with them forever and I would expect will have the confidence to seek them out on their own.*

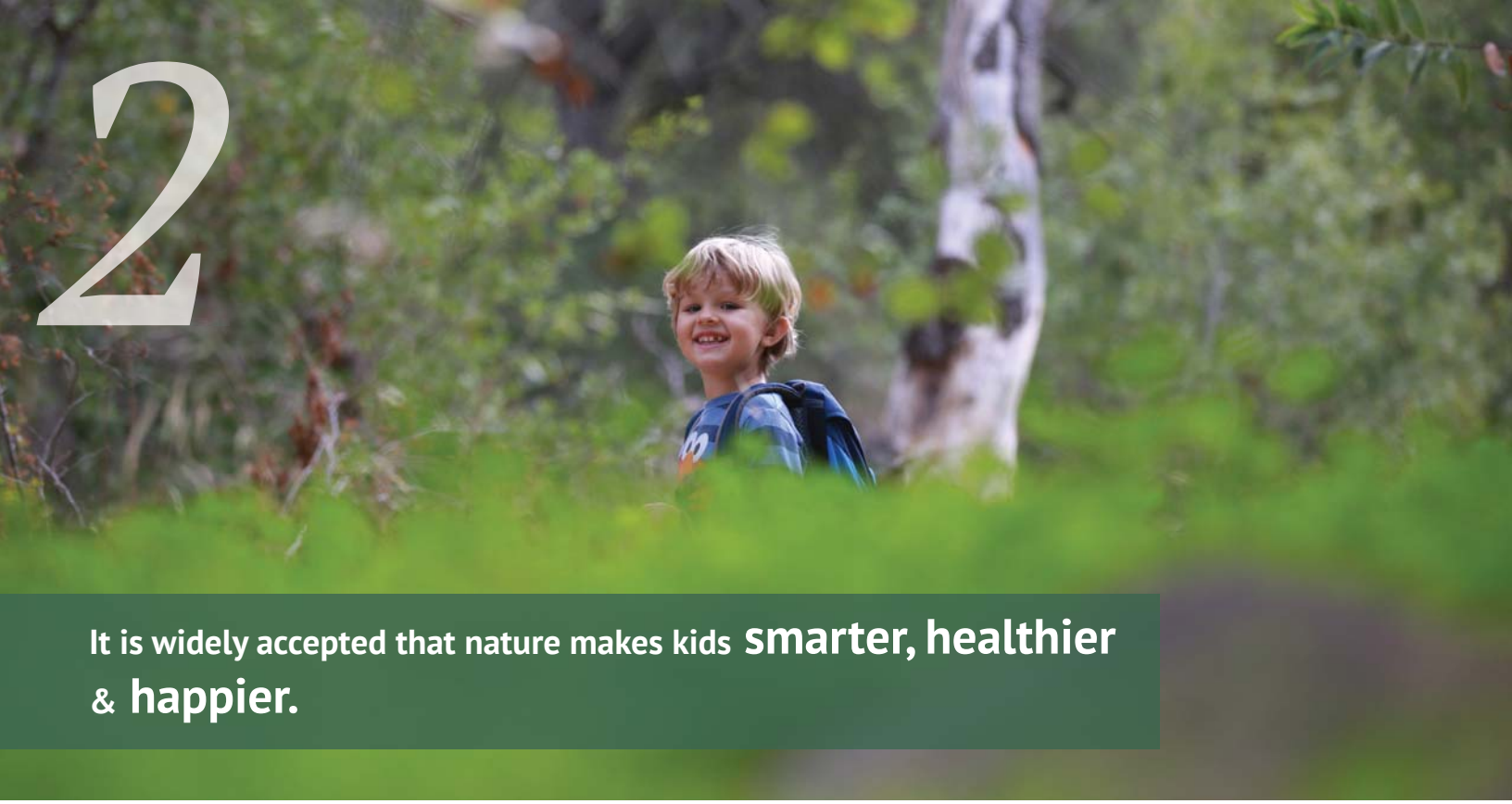
Thank you for providing this opportunity to the children at Adelante Charter School. As a parent, educator and community leader I am forever grateful!"

-HOLLY GIL, ELEMENTARY SCIENCE EDUCATION CONSULTANT & PARENT

"Thank you so much for the wonderful experience you facilitated for my 13-year-old. You created a safe space where she could be herself and yet also challenge herself to be more. She has struggled for quite some time in making social connections, yet she came back yesterday filled with gratitude and stories of camaraderie. I am truly grateful for this gift you have given her. I am sure it will be a favorite memory for many years to come."

-JENNIFER, PARENT OF A WYP PARTICIPANT

2



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

Best-selling author Richard Louv has brought nature deficit disorder to the forefront of global conversation. The International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN) passed a resolution stating that time in nature is a basic right of children:

"...children, since they are an inalienable part of nature, not only have the right to a healthy environment, but also to a connection with nature for their physical and psychological health and ability to learn and create..."

Wilderness Youth Project works to decrease Nature Deficiency Disorder and increase our own community's awareness of the need for nature through public lectures, our blog at wyp.org, workshops for adults and working together with other local agencies to share the vision of a nature-connected future for everyone in Santa Barbara.

3

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

We believe that all children benefit from nature. We strive to make the benefits of Wilderness Youth Project available for a constituency that reflects the demographics of our community, including socioeconomic status, ability, ethnicity and culture.

This means far more than "equal opportunity" to us. Inclusiveness requires an active effort on our part to create and maintain overlap between Wilderness Youth Project culture and the cultures that contain and surround us. In this way, our programs are nourished by diverse perspectives and our entire community benefits from the experiences we offer.

"As a Pediatric Occupational Therapist, I am very grateful for Wilderness Youth Project and the experience it brings to children of all abilities. Wilderness Youth Project provides groups where everyone belongs, and the children are supported to challenge themselves to the best of their ability.

The natural environment brings so many experiences to children that a classroom or therapy clinic cannot provide.

The children's sensory systems are awakened by water, leaves, rocks, sand, movement, wind and sticks.

They can visually track birds flying across the sky or seek out details to identify different species of animals in our environment.

They are balancing on rocks across a stream, skipping rocks in the water and climbing through a natural world obstacle course.

Wilderness Youth Project brings so much to all children. It is a wonderful gift that your group offers programs for children of all abilities and provides them with the opportunity to explore and learn in our amazing Santa Barbara environment."

-JULIE MEERS, OTR/L

4

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

WYP has the infrastructure to support our growing capacity needs.

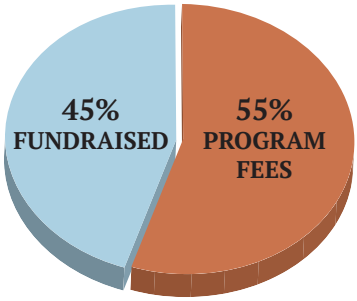
In 1999, when Wilderness Youth Project became a non-profit, 100% of our participants came from "at risk" backgrounds and needed full scholarships to attend programs.

Today, with broad interest from the community, we have achieved a mix of fee-paying participants, those who need some scholarship support, and full scholarship recipients. Our revenue is balanced between fundraising and program fees, which sets us up for economic resilience and balance.

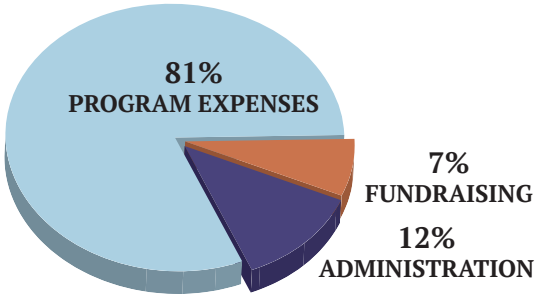
2014 saw a substantial increase in grant funding and continued support from community members.

In 2015 we are undertaking a major infrastructure effort to implement a relationship management database that will streamline our operations and improve the experience of our constituents.

Total Income: $861,490



Total Expenses: $843,113



We strive to reflect the demographics of our community and welcome youth with a range of abilities and backgrounds.

5

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

2014 represents a high water mark in Wilderness Youth Project's history of visibility in the Santa Barbara community.

With articles in local media, radio shows, national level exposure through the Children & Nature network, collaboration with sister schools and strong Board leadership, we are lending our voice to the movement.

In 2015 we are hosting David Sobel, renowned educator and author. Sobel advocates for nature education for the 21st century and says:

"WYP is doing EXACTLY what I've been talking about for the last twenty years as I work with educators towards outdoor education. You hit every single point I discuss as criteria for an effective outdoor education program."

WILDERNESS
YOUTH PROJECT

Since 1999

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Photos courtesy of **EMI Photography** and WYP staff.

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