Dear Friends,

In 2017, you raised the work of nature connection to new heights. Advances in education, psychology and child development continue to grow the body of research that confirms what many of us know from direct experience: time spent in nature makes children (and adults) smarter, healthier, happier and more likely to care for the environment.

A few years back, I happened to be wandering down the trail just far enough back from two seven year-old children to overhear this priceless exchange:

*Child 1, whispering:* “Do you know what they're doing at Wilderness Youth Project?”

*Child 2, leaning in curiously:* “What?”

*Child 1, proudly:* “They're re-releasing children into the wild!”

I have heard the role of nature in education described as the warp and weft of the fabric, not the fringe. Nature is the strong basis on which we parents and educators weave our teachings. For all the generations humans have been here on the planet, nature was the primary source and the context for what we need to know.

As your support continues to grow Wilderness Youth Project, we are building and sustaining that strong foundation of nature connection, especially for the children in our community who are most in need.
From our smooth integration with half of the Santa Barbara school district’s elementary schools that serve mostly low-income students to the largest cohort of scholarshipped summer campers, and from our partnership with Storyteller Children’s Center for very low income and homeless preschoolers to our after school program at Police Activities League, we believe that Santa Barbara is a leader in the global movement to reconnect children with nature. This means our wonderful community gets even better.

The Thomas Fire and consequent Debris Flow tragedies have changed the face of our community. The healing power of nature will be part of what supports us all as we move forward together.

In gratitude,

DAN FONTAINE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
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.

Who We are...

15 Full-time Staff
34 Part-time Staff
73 Volunteers
10 Vans
Key Accomplishments

250 Students served during the school day in '16-'17

942 Youth Served

54% of Elementary Schools in SBUSD (Fall 2017)

33% Latino/a

33% with disabilities

478 Summer Campers

575 Total number of scholarships given

$332 Average amount of scholarship given

10 school & agency partnerships:
- Police Activities League
- Storyteller Children’s Center
- Goleta & Santa Barbara Schools

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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.

**In schools:**
As of Fall 2017, elementary students at Adelante Charter School, Adams, Franklin, McKinley, Monroe, Notre Dame and St. Raphael’s all get to take part in the Bridge to Nature school day program. That means 343 students ventured out one day each month for four hours during class time for hands-on, student-centered learning, relevant real world problem-solving, inquiry, and interaction with the natural world.

**And after school:**
With 33 different programs meeting from western Goleta to Montecito, children from Kindergarten through high school explored the wondrous places of wild character nearby.

**And during summer:**
478 young people from ages 4-18 adventured to Gaviota, the Santa Ynez River, Carpinteria’s bluffs and points in between and beyond, rediscovering the essence of childhood: freedom, curiosity, learning and play outdoors.

**And in early childhood:**
94 preschool-age children became Woolly Bears, Chickadees, and Bumblebees, cultivating a heightened awareness of the subtleties of nature. They directed their own learning and cultivated a sense of place. These opportunities for growth provide a foundation for physical, emotional and social intelligence that lasts a lifetime.

**And with partner agencies:**
As of 2017, Storyteller Children’s Center serves 42 of our community’s most vulnerable young children, 90% of whom live in poverty. Wilderness Youth Project picks up there twice a week, building a bridge to nature for some of the youngest children most in need of this work. In the spring, we join forces with Storyteller staff to provide a weekend family campout at the beautiful Arroyo Hondo preserve, with support from First Five and the Land Trust for Santa Barbara County.

Partnering with the Police Activities League extends our reach to underprivileged teens in the school year, as well as the many summer campers who receive transportation services. San Marcos High School’s AAPLE Academy benefits from a year-long personalized outdoor leadership program run by Wilderness Youth Project.

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_All people should spend more time outdoors because you can find different kinds of animals or plants and it is also good for your heart._

-5TH GRADER AT ADELANTE CHARTER SCHOOL
It is widely accepted that nature makes kids smarter, healthier & happier.

New research emerged in 2017 that confirmed that spending time in nature can*:

CREATE better academic performance, boosting performance in reading, writing, math, science and social studies.

ENHANCE creativity, critical thinking and problem solving.

HELP children focus their attention

INCREASE engagement and enthusiasm, promoting motivation to learn.

IMPROVE behavior, increasing impulse control and decreasing disruptive behavior.

*https://tinyurl.com/y8qp5c38
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.

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

WYP uses affirmative action considerations in our outreach and staffing. We strive to mirror our service area, including socioeconomic status, ability, ethnicity and culture.
“Of the many high-quality programs offered to students in the area, Bridge to Nature has by far been the most engaging, informative and inspiring. Their lessons of local nature, the environment, and the natural wonders surrounding them everyday provide learning that schools alone cannot provide. Thank you WYP!”

-DR. EMILIO HANDALL, FORMER ASSISTANT SUPERINTENDENT OF SECONDARY EDUCATION, SBUSD

“Chase often gets nervous or fearful of trying new things. On his last day of WYP camp, when he knew the plan was to go kayaking, he was panic stricken. I actually drove to the harbor in case he needed to get picked up early, but I hid so that he wouldn’t see me. I was so impressed to see what happened next: Mario had built up his confidence, and he calmly went out and had a great time on the kayaks with the rest of the campers. At pickup time he ran up to me, filled with pride for overcoming his fear.

We agreed that from here forward, every time he is scared to do something he can look at his WYP tee-shirt and remember the joy of overcoming his fears. This program is great at building independence and confidence.”

-KRISTINA HOLDREN, MOM OF CHASE, AGE 10

“At Montecito Bank & Trust, we know that our children are the future of our communities. That is one of the reasons we dedicate our time and financial resources to give back to local programs that benefit our community’s youth. Nonprofit organizations like Wilderness Youth Project provide experiential learning opportunities in nature which encourage their adventurous spirits and enrich their appreciation of the great outdoors. Aren't we all happier and healthier when we make the time to get outside and explore the world around us?”

-CHAIRMAN AND CEO, JANET GARUFIS

“My son, Oscar, is full of life and now, thanks to Wilderness Youth Project, full of information about nature. He is constantly teaching me things I didn’t know about creatures. Our favorite time together is in the ocean. He is now even more comfortable in the waves and has an even deeper connection to the beach because of all the time he spends there with his WYP friends. It is an amazing program and we are so grateful to have it in Santa Barbara.”

-LAURA CAPPS, MOM OF OSCAR, AGE 6
Wilderness Youth Project has a **stable and growing base of funding.** WYP has the infrastructure to support our growing capacity needs.

**Through individual donors:**
365 generous supporters contributed their resources to make sure nature connection and mentoring reaches low-income children, those with disabilities and other groups less likely to access this kind of program.

**And foundations:**
Grants from family foundations, community foundations and regional groups committed to nature connection made up half of our fundraised dollars.

**And skilled staff and volunteers:**
Our 4:1 youth-to-counselor ratio affords our participants a high quality of mentoring typically unavailable in youth services. This low ratio, along with the flexible nature of our programs, also allows for individualized attention by our highly trained staff. As one participant said, “I like WYP because they make sure we’re safe but they let us be free.”

**And our board of directors:**
Who volunteer their time to make sure that the strategic vision of Wilderness Youth Project has the support it needs.

**And our first Bridge to Nature Campaign and Moon Dance:**
During which 80 new donors joined the family of Wilderness Youth Project supporters and 171 merry makers joined us under the full moon to celebrate our $250,000 campaign success.

**And through our Endowment Fund:**
Which provides resilience and sustainability, ensuring that nature connection is in Santa Barbara to stay. In 2017 we exceeded our initial goal of $250,000. Planned giving, bequests, and gifts to the endowment will plant seeds for a healthy future.

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**Endowment Value**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Value</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2015</td>
<td>$140,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2016</td>
<td>$213,939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2017</td>
<td>$317,371</td>
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**Revenue:** $1,439,042*

**Expenses:** $1,128,256

- *2017 revenue includes funds raised in 2017 but restricted for use in future years.
Wilderness Youth Project is a collaborator in leading the national nature mentoring and nature connection movement.

“Why 21st Century Children Need Nature / Por Que Necesitan Los Niños La Natureleza en el siglo XXI,” hosted by Wilderness Youth Project at Franklin Elementary school, brought together a bilingual panel of educators to share research, case studies and stories. The benefits of outdoor activity, play and a sense of place were shared with a focus on ways parents can encourage and participate in time in nature.

Wilderness Youth Project joined the Channel Islands Regional Science Initiative as a Science-rich Educational Institution, and participated in the Leave no Child Inside coalition of Santa Barbara. We continue our movement - building partnership with the national Children & Nature Network.

“One reason we are ‘moving the needle’ on test scores is because of our commitment to student engagement and experiential education, especially in the STEM subjects. As we implement Common Core and a focus on process, Wilderness Youth Project helps us to provide the real life inspiration and information these students need to learn.”

- MICHAEL MACIOCE, ADELANTE CHARTER SCHOOL TEACHER
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.