Dear Friends,

The highlight of 2019 was Wilderness Youth Project’s 20th anniversary and all the ways we celebrated, from reaching our peak program capacity (to date) to hosting our first ever gala. WYP started as its own nonprofit in 1999 with one van. When I became the director in 2008, we had three vans. Now we have a fleet of 12 vans and 37 programs per week during the school year. We are out there, a lot, with kids, all over the place, all year long.

Nature connection is for everybody, but WYP’s growth in the community didn’t happen in any sort of straight line. Before WYP became its own nonprofit in 1999, it was a program at Transition House serving homeless families; we exclusively served children who could never afford to pay for our programs.

The branch of WYP for families who could afford to pay for programs grew itself. As WYP started to approach ten years old, the fee paying branch was so big that the tree became lopsided, and we decided to double down on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. We wanted the demographics of the children in our programs and the demographics of our staff (and volunteers and board) to mirror the demographics of the people who live in our service area (Goleta to Carpinteria).

Richard Louv’s book, Last Child in the Woods, has now reached a large enough audience that we don’t have to explain what nature connection is anymore. Other organizations are now using the term. Researchers are documenting the phenomenon of Nature Deficit Disorder. More and more peer organizations continue seeking partnerships with us. Other organizations even started asking if we could train their staff in our mentoring approach. Most importantly, the philanthropic community now values our work even more, and is giving more generously to it.
Now we have programs for students in the AAPL Academy at San Marcos High School, and for preschoolers at Storyteller Children’s Center; at Peabody Charter School and the Police Activities League; at Cleveland Elementary and Crane Country Day School; and after-school programs meeting out of Tucker’s Grove and the Rose Garden for kids from almost every other school. Nature connection isn’t just for everyone, it’s now being adopted as a priority by everyone.

On average, participants spend 65 hours with us per year. Some spend as little as 35 hours. Others spend over 500 hours with us in a year. In order to connect deeply with nature, each other, and ourselves, we need this time. Any connection is only as strong as the time we give it. Additionally, the quality of time is equally important, so we need our group sizes to be small enough that everybody gets to know each other as individuals. Most group sizes range from 9–15 children, and have 2 paid staff and one volunteer.

I am so grateful. I’m honored to be a part of Wilderness Youth Project. I’m thankful for the parents that have shared their children with us. I’m thankful for the funders that have enabled us to take children outside who would not have the opportunity otherwise. I’m thankful for the staff, past and present, of Wilderness Youth Project who have facilitated so much magic in the world. And I’m thankful for this incredible, beautiful landscape that we live on. As recreational users of the rich lands of Santa Barbara, we honor the Chumash; the native communities that came before us to this land. This beautiful place we call home would not be so great if not for their long held and ongoing connection to this pairing of land and sea.

In gratitude,

DAN FONTAINE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Who We Are

MISSION
The mission of Wilderness Youth Project is to foster confidence, health, and a lifelong 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.

All children need nature.
Not just the ones whose families have privilege and easy access to nature. Not only those of a certain race or economic class or culture or gender or sexual identity or language or set of abilities. Every child and every family.

We acknowledge that the nature connection movement has perpetuated a system of segregation and unequal access to the outdoors that prevents Black, Indigenous, and other people of color from attaining the same levels of access to the benefits of time in nature.
Racism and anti-Blackness underpin all aspects of society. This is why the nature connection movement must be intersectional. We must recognize and dismantle our own complicity in the systems that perpetuate oppression and exclusion.

Wilderness Youth Project (WYP) aims to promote justice, equity, diversity and inclusion. We do this through building affirmative action practices, cultural competence, diverse multilingual staff and outreach, multilingual communications and scholarships based on financial need.

Our goal is to mirror the demographics of Santa Barbara and Goleta.

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Night Owl Ball

In Fall 2019, over 250 supporters joined us in celebrating 20 years of nature connection at the Night Owl Ball. This evening of moonlit dancing, artisan cuisine and outdoor experiences raised over $100,000 to help more children experience the essential benefits of time in nature.

New Board Members

This year we welcomed Graciela Cabello and Lena Morán to the Wilderness Youth Project’s Board of Directors.

Graciela has a diverse background that includes over twelve years of combined experience in conservation, movement building, community engagement, and communications in the corporate and nonprofit sectors. She holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration from California State University, East Bay. Graciela is currently the director of youth and community engagement at Los Padres ForestWatch—a nonprofit dedicated to protecting wildlife, clean water, and public lands on the Central Coast. Prior to joining ForestWatch, she was the founding national director of Latino Outdoors, a national organization supporting Latino engagement, leadership, and advocacy in the areas of outdoor recreation, and conservation.

Lena is a native of Mexico City, Mexico and was raised in Santa Barbara from the age of six. Lena holds a Bachelor's Degree in Liberal Studies and a Master's Degree in Education with an emphasis on Social Justice and Leadership, from Antioch University Santa Barbara, where she did research on the topic of children who are used as interpreters. Her thesis focused on the creation of an evaluation system of interpretation and translation services in school districts. After being part of the Language Justice Network for three years, Lena joined the Just Communities team in Spring of 2015 and currently serves as the Director of Programming and Language Justice. Lena is a licensed trainer for The Community Interpreter International, a program of Cross Cultural Communications. Lena resides in Ventura County and loves spending time with son Antonio and her partner Eddie.
Highlights

Santa Barbara Independent Cover Story
WYP was featured as the cover story in the October 3 Issue of the Santa Barbara Independent. The article celebrated highlights from our last 20 years of nature connection, and featured stories from staff, past participants, and supporters.

Connection Luncheon
In Spring 2019 we hosted our first-ever “connection luncheon” to tell stories about the impact time in nature has on children in Santa Barbara.

We were joined by former La Cuesta High School Principal, Kathy Pfeifer, and former participant/current director at Police Activities League, Judith Lugo. Both shared honest stories about the struggles some children in our community face, and the impact that time in nature with Wilderness Youth Project has made on those children.

SMARTER
Spending time in nature

HEALTHIER
makes children

HAPPIER
**Key Accomplishments**

- **418** Students served during the school day in 2018-19
- **565** Summer Campers
- **65** Average hours a participant spends with WYP in one year
- **1,200** Youth Served
- **37** School-Year programs
- **$560,488** Total amount of scholarship given
- **68%** Receive Scholarships
- **41%** Latinx
- **8%** Children with disabilities

**BRIDGE TO NATURE**

- At **10** Elementary Schools in Santa Barbara Unified School District
  - Police Activities League
  - Storyteller Children’s Center
In schools:
Elementary students at Adelante Charter School, Adams, Cleveland, Franklin, McKinley, Monroe, Notre Dame, Peabody, Santa Barbara Community Academy and St. Raphael’s all get to take part in the Bridge to Nature school day program. That means 418 students built an “experience bank” that supports English language arts, science, executive function, social-emotional, and other learning.

And after school:
With 19 different programs meeting from western Goleta to Montecito, 393 children from Kindergarten through high school explored the wondrous places of wild character nearby.

And during summer:
565 young people 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:
54 preschool-age children became Woolly Bears and Chickadees, cultivating a heightened awareness 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:
Storyteller Children’s Center serves 29 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 (PAL) 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. Sharing Wilderness Youth Project mentoring techniques with UCSB’s environmental education class has a double benefit: college students experience nature connection themselves and bring it to the children they teach, and many choose to join our volunteer force.

The Bridge to Nature School Day program provides a 3.5-hour nature-based mentoring program for students in 4th grade at Santa Barbara schools where over half the kids receive free school lunch. One day each month, every student heads out during class time for hands-on, student-centered learning, relevant real world problem-solving, inquiry, and interaction with the natural world.
Kids who come to Wilderness Youth Project...

- Feel Connected To Nature
- Are Physically And Mentally Healthier
- Have Higher Self-Esteem
- Are More Cooperative With Others
- Are Good Problem-Solvers
- Feel More Capable And Confident
- Are More Creative
- Do Better In School
- Have Good Self-Discipline
- Are Tomorrow's Conservation Leaders
“So there we were...sitting in a grove on the south side of Lake Los Carneros. It was a warm day, but not overwhelming. We’d just walked about 10 minutes from the van to our home base under some coast live oaks. We got out our lunches, and sat down.

I took a seat next to Alex, and looked over. He had sweat dripping off of his face, and was taking labored breaths. Upon first glance, I made the assumption that he was not having a good time- he looked uncomfortable, and perhaps out of his element.

“Alex, how ya doin’?” I asked.

A pause, and more deep breaths. “You know, my mom is not living.”

Another pause, this time to let it sink in what he’d just revealed to me. I was about to offer my condolences, when he continued-

“She doesn’t go outside. You know, if she found out what I’d just done- gone on this hike- she’d be mad. She thinks I will hurt myself. She thinks it’s dangerous. So we stay inside.”

Another pause, and we both begin to look around at our surroundings- the rest of the class chatting away and sharing lunch, the first hints of green grass pushing through our rain-soaked earth, the oak leaves rustling in the wind, and sunlight dancing among us all.

“This- this is living. My mom isn’t really living.”

-ANN BUMBY, STAFF AT WILDERNESS YOUTH PROJECT

Six-year-old to mom after the first day of program:

“Mom, can you see anything different about me?”

Mom, looking...: “You’re taller?”

Child: “I’m happy!”

-SIX YEAR OLD PARTICIPANT

“It’s just fun! It’s fun for the adults, it’s certainly fun for kids but for me I had a great time. I haven’t played mushroom tag in like 60 years. I like the idea of getting kids out there at this early age so that then they have this level of confidence, this level of experience that they can draw on throughout their lives- it can just make their lives entirely different. There are a lot of worthy causes out there, but not everybody connects with all of them and for me this is the one I probably connect with, most closely, of anything I’ve been involved with in the past.”

-ROBERT DEACON, PROFESSOR EMERITUS UCSB DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL STUDIES
“One day this year I was out with a group of 4th graders in the Bridge to Nature program at Franklin elementary. While hiking over a hill at San Marcos Foothill preserve we came upon (and surprised) 3 coyotes that were walking down the same trail. Instead of running away, they just calmly walked ahead of us, glancing often to make sure we weren’t getting too close. The kids (about 5 or 6) got very quiet and low to the ground without our prompt. The coyotes then disappeared off trail and we ran to that spot where we saw them last. As I was looking, I saw two boys crawling around trying to sniff out the spot because “it is easier for us to smell where they were than to look for other traces” (they even had their eyes closed). They talked about this day for the whole school year.”

—MARIO MENDEZ, STAFF AT WILDERNESS YOUTH PROJECT
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 volunteer Laura Barley wrote:

“I spent about a year volunteering with Wilderness Youth Project, and it was enough to inform my future career path and to inspire me for a lifetime. The opportunity to bring youth into the wilderness, and to see the look on their faces as they encountered natural wonders, made me realize the extensive impact of environmental education.”

And through our Endowment Fund: Which provides resilience and sustainability, ensuring that nature connection is in Santa Barbara to stay. Planned giving, bequests, and gifts to the endowment will plant seeds for a healthy future.

Through foundations: Grants from family foundations, community foundations and regional groups committed to nature connection made up one third of our fundraised dollars.

And individual donors: Nature connection heroes like you made 853 donations 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 through our scholarship program. From a $3.36 donation from an 11-year-old participant, to an estate gift valued at $959,000, each donation makes a significant impact in supporting children’s health and wellbeing.

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.
2019 Total Expenses: $1,511,875

- Core Support: Administration 11%
- Core Support: Fundraising 13%
- Direct Expenses: Shared by Programs 76%
- Summer programs 30%
- After-school programs 30%
- School-day programs 40%

2019 Operating Revenue: $1,699,179

- Program Fees 36%
- Fundraising: Events 9%
- Fundraising: Donations 25%
- Fundraising: Grants 30%

2019 Total Assets: $2,542,291

- Donated Property 42%
- Capital Assets 5%
- Other Assets 5%
- Endowment 16%
- Cash 32%
2019 GIFTS

$250 and above

Kathy Abney
ACT for NIH
Peter and Rebecca Adams
Adams Legacy Foundation
Terri Allison
Amazon Smile
Kathy Ambrette
Anonymous
Anonymous
Anonymous
Henning Ansorg
Audacious Foundation
Monica and Timothy Babich
The Baltoro Trust
John Baran
Christopher and Molly Barnes
Maria and Tyler Barrell
Basking in Goodness
Byron and Robyn Beck
Ann Bennett
Gene Bettencourt
Penelope Bianchi
Claire and Rebecca Bjork
Judy Blankenship
The Borden Family Trust
Christine and Dave Bourgeois
James S. Bower Foundation
Rita and Timothy Brind'Amour and Alex Tate
Brittingham Family Foundation
Liz Brown
Guy and Deb Brown
Lalla Brutoco
Bryant & Sons, Ltd.
D.B. Buehring
William B. Burke
Bill Burton
Bernard and Melike Bush
Sara and Steve Caputo
John Case
Jennifer and Tom Caves
Carolyn Chandler
Channel Data Systems
Sherrie and Thomas Cipolla
City of Santa Barbara Parks and Recreation
Linda and Thomas Cole
Congregation B’nai B’rith
Roy E. Crummer Foundation
Lauren David
Cecil and Katherine De Mille
Nicoles and Zachary Dean
Deckers Outdoor Corporation
Yvonne DeGraw and Craig Prater
Paul and Renee Dektor
Brian Dempsey
John Dixon
Matt Dobberteen
Rob and Susan Dunton
Aaron and Valerie Edelheit
Brook and Jasper Eiler
Electronic Scrip
Ensberg Jacobs Design Inc.
Erickson Family Charitable Foundation
Carin and Kenan Ezal
Gina and Mark Fennell
Ferguson Foundation
Andrew Feshbach
Steve Finkel
First United Methodist Church
Claudia and Phil Flanders
Jean Fontaine
Brett Fontaine
Mandy and Robert Fontaine
Dennis Forster
Colleen and Ted Friedel
Ron and Sue Fritz
The Fund for Santa Barbara
Dennis and Setsuko Furuike
Jennifer Gagne
Jen Gamble and Jared Ficker
Emily and Tom Garcia
Blake and Cathleen Garnand
Kevin Gaunt
Barbara Gilkes
William and Charlene Glikbarg Foundation
Arlene and Michael Gomez
Goodwin Family Memorial
Harvey Bottelsen and Patsy An Grace
Janelle Green
Mirjana and William Hall
Doyle Hayes
Rachel Haymon
Hazel Heath Horton
Philanthropic Trust
Hearst Foundations
Sarah Hemmer
Marianne Henry
Herbert & Gertrude Latkin Charitable
Michelle Howard and Alissa Hummer
Josh and Yessica Holloway
Mark Holmgren
Michael Holmstrom
Hub International
Humphreys Family Foundation
Ann Jackson Family Foundation
Chris and Emily Johnson
Richard and Cheryl Joyner
Jules by the Sea
Eric and Tracy Kanowsky
Carrie Kappel and Carl Palmer
Melissa Katzenstein
Elizabeth L. Kilb
Kim Kimbell
Marlin Kipp
Kirby Jones Family Foundation
Michelle Knab and Shawn Erickson
Anna and Petar Kokotovic
Becky and Theo Kracke
Beryl and Neil Kreisel
Kurt and Leigh Legler
Let Them Play Foundation
Al and Barbara Lindemann
Rudi Lion
Jacqueline and Vince Liuzzi
LOA COM
Jim Lowery
M. Special
The Manger Scout Fund
Geoff Alexander and Andrea Marcus
Darcie Dierenfield McKnight
Vicki McPartland
Doris and Greg McPhee
Brian and Kristin McWilliams
Henry Manfredonia and Julie Meers
Arge and Miryam Mendez
Kelly and Tory Milazzo
Ways to Get Involved

This work is made possible by a community of partners and supporters. Volunteers, donors, and community ambassadors are all crucial for us to connect children with nature.

To find out more, visit wyp.org.
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