



ANNUAL REPORT

2024

A YEAR OF



FIRSTS

A YEAR OF



CONNECTIONS

A YEAR OF



GROWTH

TABLE OF



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LETTER FROM



**"THERE IS SOMETHING INFINITELY HEALING IN
THE REPEATED REFRAINS OF NATURE."**

**- RACHEL CARSON,
CONSERVATIONIST & SCIENTIST**

THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Welcome to our 2024 Annual Report. This third year of operations was another wonderful one for our students and our organization.

In short, we served 136 unique students this year, delivering 49 After-School sessions, 32 Weekend Outings, 19 Skill Cohorts Sessions, 7 Camping Experiences in spring, summer, and fall.

On the following page, "Our Why" explains the importance of our work; but, in her words above, Rachel Carson gets to the heart of the matter: we offer nature's healing refrains to our students.

In 2024, we offered these refrains to students such as:

- Arafa, Douaa, and Ronmy who thrilled to the speeds and turns of their first skiing experience.
- Adil, Jimmy, Sandra, Dara, and Oscar, dedicated participants in our Paddling Skills Cohort, who worked diligently on their kayak rolls and completed a course on water and river safety.
- Stacey, who stretched herself in 2024 with swim classes and her first-ever overnight trip - both big milestones for this student!

It was a year of growth and change for Wilderness Kids as an organization as well. In 2024, we:

- Grew our Board of Directors to 12 Members, including a full slate of officers. We've established Board committees that meet regularly to focus on Risk Management, Events & Fundraising, and to ensure All Voices are heard and respected.
- Hired an Outdoor Adventure Manager, Matt D'Anieri, who brings his classroom teaching and wilderness leadership experience to the team.
- Ran a consistent and high-performing paddling cohort, made possible by our partner Team River Runner and led by our Program Coordinator, Lauren Walker.
- Received donations from nearly 200 individuals and financial support from more than a dozen foundations, businesses and other organizations.

All of this progress enables new growth in 2025. Led by our Program Director, Lizzie Waugh, we will continue to offer and grow our existing programs while also:

- Launching the Adventure Club at ACHS.
- Delivering our first ever Spring Break programming.
- Hiring our first ever Wilderness Kids Student Intern.

Of course, none of this is possible without the generous financial support that so many of you offer; without the extraordinary lengths you go to in volunteering with us; or, parents, without your dedication to getting your kids up in the morning and out the door on a cold (or hot) Saturday or Sunday morning to hike, paddle, bike or climb with us.

On behalf of all of us at Wilderness Kids, thank you for all you give.

Jerry

OUR MISSION



**WILDERNESS KIDS EXISTS TO PROVIDE
LIFE-ENRICHING EXPERIENCES IN NATURE TO
TEENAGERS FROM UNDER-RESOURCED FAMILIES
AND UNDER-SERVED COMMUNITIES IN
ALEXANDRIA.**

**85% OF YOUNG PEOPLE REPORT BEING HAPPIER AFTER
BEING IN NATURE.**

Source: Natural England 2021

Most of our students report that without Wilderness Kids, they would spend much more time indoors, often on screens. An ever-increasing body of research shows that time in nature reduces stress and anxiety, elevates physical and emotional health, and improves our ability to interact socially. We get young people out into the healing refrains of nature.

**84% OF EMPLOYERS VALUE SOFT SKILLS SUCH AS
FLEXIBILITY, COMMUNICATION, PROBLEM-SOLVING, AND
LEADERSHIP.**

Source: Forbes Magazine

Our students are learning so much more than climbing, camping, and paddling. As they climb, they are planning, executing, failing, and trying again, all while trusting in a teammate belaying them. While camping, they are living, working, and communicating as a team, encouraging those who are struggling, and finding their own strengths. While paddling, they are looking forward, finding paths, keeping an eye on peers, and building their confidence. Whatever they do outside, they take the values, life skills, and attitudes from those experiences everywhere they go.

**GENERATION Z IS THE LONELIEST GENERATION THE WORLD HAS SEEN, WITH ISOLATION
RATES HIGHER THAN BOTH MILLENNIALS AND MEMBERS OF GENERATION X.**

Source: "Isolation Among Generation Z in the US," Bowler, Abby. 2020.

At Wilderness Kids, our students come together regardless of language, race, ethnicity or neighborhood. In summer especially, they cook, sleep in tents, gather water, and build fires together. In doing so, they stitch the fabric of a rich community and combat isolation and loneliness. Furthermore, they are accompanied by our caring staff and volunteers, building a community that spans generations.



OUR WHY

A YEAR OF

WEEKEND OUTINGS

Students embark on day-long outdoor adventures in the DMV area. They hike, bike, paddle, swim, climb, and more!

CLIMBING COHORT



JANUARY

ROCK CREEK PARK



GMD OBSERVATORY



MARCH

BLUEBELL FESTIVAL HIKE



HORSEBACK RIDING



MAY

MOUNTAIN BIKING



FEBRUARY

SKIING AT MASSANUTTEN



SWIMMING COHORT



APRIL

ROPES COURSE GALLAUDET UNIVERSITY



CLIMBING AT CARDEROCK



JUNE

SANDY POINT BEACH



AFTER SCHOOL

Students explore Alexandria parks and are introduced to paddling, fishing, climbing, and nature art.

PEAK SUMMER EXPERIENCE

Campers immerse themselves in nature, camping in state and national parks on overnight and multi-day trips.

GIRLS TRIP NIAGARA FALLS



HIKING AT WEVERTON CLIFFS



POTOMAC WATER TAXI



BIKING TO THE MONUMENTS



CABINEERING



JULY

SEPTEMBER

NOVEMBER

AUGUST

OCTOBER

DECEMBER

ZIPLINING



EXPLORING DURING AFTER SCHOOL



RS&R COURSE



LEAF PILE AT MASON DISTRICT



SKILL COHORTS

Students deepen their skills in outdoor adventure activities such as climbing, swimming and paddling in these dedicated cohorts that meet regularly.

ADVENTURES

BY THE



NUMBERS

How do we measure our success? By the number of student hours spent outside (over 2,300!)? The number of individual students served in a year (136)? Perhaps success can be found in the number of **smiles** made, **journals** scribbled in, or **shooting stars** spotted.



COMMUNITY



Throughout 2024 we supported, celebrated, and collaborated with our partners in the community. Take a look below at our shared adventures.

EVENTS



MLK SERVICE EVENT



PATAGONIA
MOVIE NIGHT



SECOND ANNUAL MUSIC FESTIVAL FUNDRAISER



GIVING BACK



HIKE FOR HER



JONES POINT PARK
CLEAN-UP



TEAM RIVER RUNNER
BIATHLON



DYKE MARSH
CLEAN-UP

HIKES



ALEXANDRIA
SEAPORT FOUNDATION



SPACE OF HER OWN



YOUNGINS
IN PROGRESS



LIBERTY'S PROMISE

IN THEIR



WORDS

“

“I enjoy every moment.”

-10th grade student

”

“She truly enjoys participating in Wilderness Kids. She comes home with a new story about their after school adventures each week. She loves her added time in nature each week.”

-Parent of a 7th grade student

“HE HAS GROWN IN MATURITY SINCE ATTENDING THE WEEKEND OUTINGS.”

-PARENT OF AN 8TH GRADE STUDENT

“I’ve made a lot of friends.”

-7th grade student

“I am so grateful to you all. He had been begging to get outside, and your programs have made him so hopeful!”

-Parent of a participating high school student

“She wants to take walks now, which never was part of her routine. She loves climbing rocks & mountains.”

-Parent of an 8th grade student

“Our daughter is loving being part of Wilderness Kids Alexandria!”

-Parent of a 6th grade student

“I’M PROUD OF WHAT I’VE BEEN ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH IN MY SKILL COHORT.”

-9TH GRADE STUDENT

“Thank you very much for all the trips because many times we as families do not have the resources to take them to places.”

-Parent of three Wilderness Kids students

VOLUNTEERS

Amy Cheung
Amy Fong
Ann Principato
Ava DeGraaf-Zembik
Bedo Maximillian Caceres
Bella Ponzi
Carol Clayton
Catherine Blejski
Charlie Rawls
Chris Ros
Chris Smith
Christina Potts
David LeBlanc
David Jose Laboy
Deborah Bombard
Edoardo Buenaobra
Haley Behre
Haley Burrous
Jay Hall
Jess Weber
James Crowe
Jimmy Blejski
Joanna Bopp
Jon Harvey
Jonathan Fetterolf
Kay Sidhamed
Kendall Henry
Kevin Gilliam
Kevin Grim
Kevin Klein
Laura Jackson
Linda Critchfield
Linda Harvey



Thank you to our tremendous volunteers who make our outings possible and give their all to our students.

Madelyn Giblin
Marc Grunberg
Maria Rodriguez
Maya Alexander
Meg Hathaway
Meggan Engelke Ros
Melanie Parks
Melissa Rojas
Mika Naylor
Pam Hunt
Paul Hunt
Roberta Cullen
Robin Noonan Price
Rolo Arrieta
Sara Wengers
Sarah Soulliere
Sathy Gunawardhana
Scott Cullen
Sergei Nekhai
Spencer Lekki
Stephen Price
Tae Casagrande
Tara Casagrande
Tim Boone
Tim Critchfield
Tom Hungar
Valerie Cowan
Wesal Stephan
William "Duff" Duffy
Xander Aguirre
Zachary Blejski

PROGRAM

Thank you to the organizations and programs who have partnered with us to connect with students, provide amazing experiences, and gain access to nature and activities.

PARTNERS



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION
Saving a National Treasure



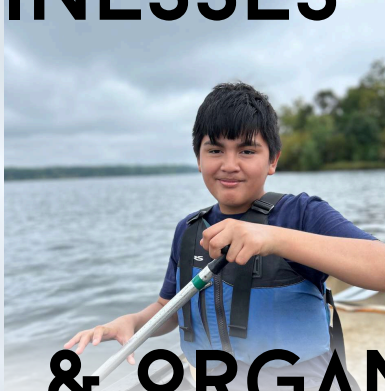
MASSANUTTEN



Grovespring Farm



BUSINESSES



So many businesses and organizations - small and large, within Alexandria and beyond - contribute to the work we do. **Thank you** to each and everyone of you - the workers, the managers, the owners, the congregants. We appreciate you and your gifts.

& ORGANIZATIONS



DONORS

Aaron & Ama Adams*
 Wendy Adams
 Seema Ahmed
 Maya Alexander*
 Douglas Alexander
 Ananda Charitable Fund
 Cindy Lyons Anderson
 Theo & Terry Androus*
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 Mai Bah
 Steve Banashek
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 Greg Barrett
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 Tim Boone
 Joanna & Michael Bopp*
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 Russell Bradley
 Chad Breckenridge & Joy Drachman*
 Vahid Brignoni
 Yoland Brignoni
 Derek Brown & Deborah Hellman*
 Cindy Brown & Lee Hansley
 Edoardo Buenaobra
 Gerardo Capiel*
 Hal & Devin Cardwell
 Greg Casagrande*
 Rebecca Casagrande*
 Jerry & Tara Casagrande & Family*
 Amy Cheung
 Brad & Julie Coburn
 Dave & Danielle Cogar*
 Katherine Comfort
 Valerie Cowan
 Linda & Tim Critchfield*
 Jim & Megan Crowe*
 Scott & Roberta Cullen*
 Amanda Daniels
 Marc Defrancis*
 Zachary Desmond
 Rick Dotson

Thank you to the many donors who gave to Wilderness Kids in 2024. Special thanks to those donors (marked with *) who have given to Wilderness Kids three years in a row!

Monique Doussard & Alex Jovovic*
 Jennifer Dreyfus
 Shane Erskine
 Mario Escarcega
 Amanda Farinelli
 Mike Finn & Christy Counts-Finn*
 Lauren Fisher Correia
 Kimberly L. Fondren
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 Marc, Rachael, & Russell Grunberg
 Wayne Grunberg
 Jess Grunberg & Brett Ornstein
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John Nakahata & Pam Smith
Dawn Neuendorffer*
Steve & Tracy Nicklesburg
Steve Price & Robin Noonan-Price*
Kelley O'Dell
Rashmi Pappu
The Park-Choi Family*
Heidi & Marc Parsont
Melody Passemante Powell
Gerry Patterson & Suzy Tomai
Matthew Payne
Cynthia Louise Perry
Joanne & Josh Petty*
Brooke Pinkerton
Mike & Emily Porterfield*
Ann Principato
Debra Raggio
Charlie Rawls & Deanne Maynard-Rawls*
Gayle Reuter
Richard & Kimberly Rinkema*
Emily Rotert



DONORS CONT.

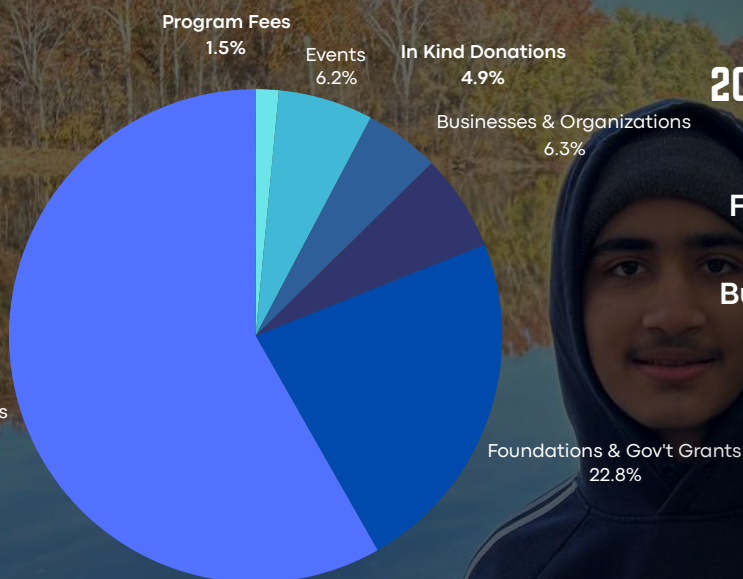
Janine Rubitsky
Justin Sadegh
Joan Salute*
Shanna Samson
Eric Schiffman*, in memory
of Mike Lim & Dennis Capio
Carrie Schumann
Old Town Smiles
John & Elizabeth Shaw*
Victoria Shi
Sarah Shore
Kay Sidahmed*
Don & Stacey Simpson
Jeff & Tee Sindler*
Carla Sloane
James Smith
Ann Smith
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Robert Stackhouse
Craig & Heather Stouffer
Paul Surgenor
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Team River Runner Fort
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Andrea Waters
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Neil Weissman*
Shay Wester
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Rosie & Mark Wiedemer*
John Wilcox
David & Melynda Wilcox
Stephanie & Damon Wright*
Sara Yessenow
Cara Zappala
Sarah Zapolsky
Craig Zingerline
Diane Zipursky
Matching gifts from
Mastercard,
Microsoft &
Washington Gas

LOOKING



BACK

HOW YOUR GIFTS WERE USED

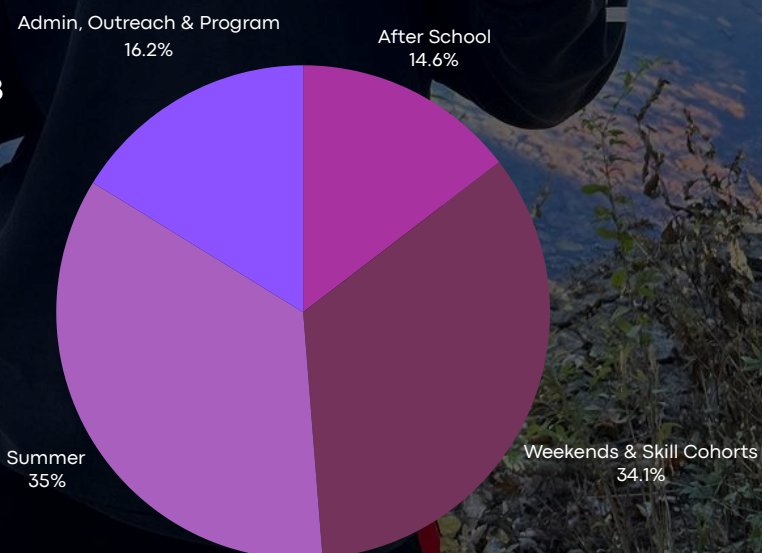


2024 REVENUE (TOTAL \$242,232)

Individual Donors: \$141,389
Foundations & Government Grants: \$55,000
Businesses & Organizations: \$15,300
Events: 15,053
Program Fees: \$3,625
In-Kind Donations: \$11,865

2024 EXPENSES (TOTAL \$208,349)

After-School Program: \$31,711
Weekend Outings & Skills Cohorts: \$70,668
Summer Programs: \$72,546
Administration, Outreach, and Non-Program: \$33,423

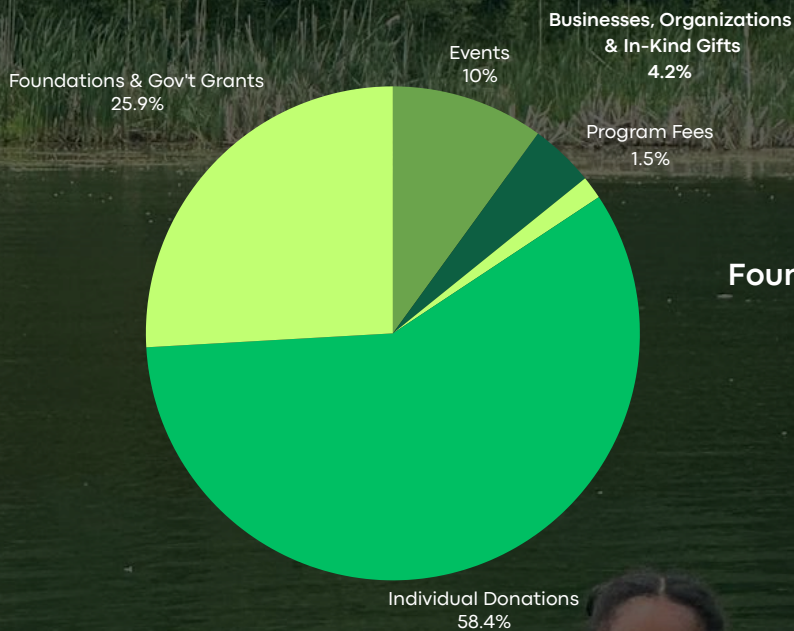
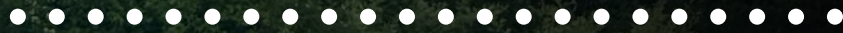


LOOKING



FORWARD

BUDGETED 2025 INCOME & EXPENSES

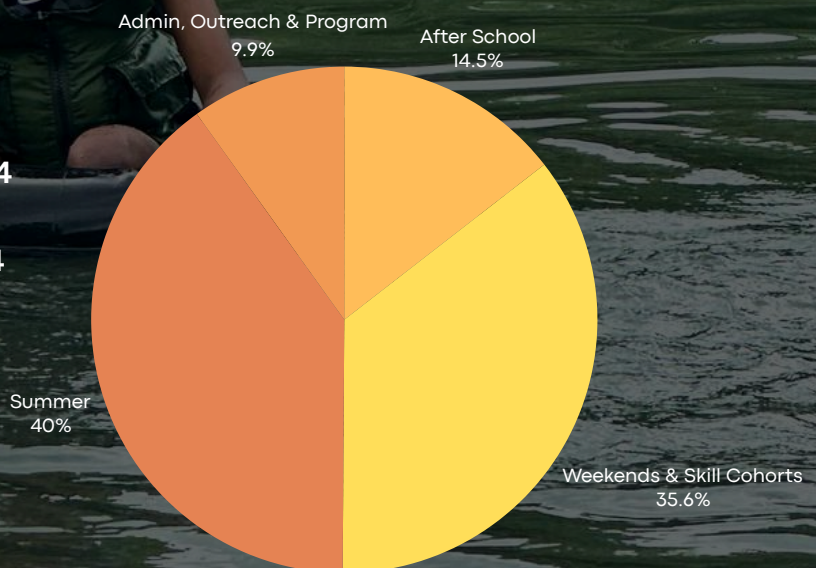


BUDGETED FY 2025 REVENUE (TOTAL \$250,750)

Individual Donations: \$146,500
Foundations & Government Grants: \$65,000
Businesses & Organizations: \$10,500
Events: \$25,000
Program Fees: \$3,750

BUDGETED FY 2025 EXPENSES (TOTAL \$239,293)

After-School Program: \$34,761
Weekend Outings & Skills Cohorts: \$85,294
Summer Experiences: \$95,713
Admin, Outreach & Non-Program: \$23,524



OUR TEAM

STAFF

Jerry Casagrande
Executive Director

Elizabeth Waugh
Director of Programs
& Communication

Matt D'Anieri
Outdoor Adventure Manager

Lauren Walker
Program Coordinator

Carl Brown
Outdoor Educator

Tori Shi
Outdoor Educator

ADVISORS

Ken Zweig, MD,
Volunteer Medical Advisor
Partner
Northern Virginia
Family Practice

OFFICERS

Jerry Casagrande, Chair
Founder & Executive Director
Wilderness Kids Alexandria

Enrique Gutierrez, Vice-Chair
Office Manager
Embassy of Spain

Michael McMillan, Treasurer
Associate Professor
UMD School of Business

Shanna Samson, Secretary
Deputy Director
DC Deputy Mayor for Education

DIRECTORS

Maya Alexander
Community Engagement Manager
Alliance for the Shenandoah Valley

Deborah Bombard
Retired Physician Assistant

Joanna Bopp
Learning Specialist
The Langley School

Amy Cheung
Independent Consultant for
Electrical Engineering

Zachary Desmond
Organizational Effectiveness
Consultant

Marc Grunberg
Talent Operations Manager
Deloitte

Paul Hunt
Partner
Latham & Watkins LLP

Ann Principato
Retired Counselor
Gallaudet University

WE GET TEENAGERS INTO...

HIKING

CLIMBING

PADDLING

EXPLORING

LEADING

SERVING

CONNECTING

WE GET TEENAGERS INTO NATURE.



KEEP UP WITH US @WILDKIDSALEX

