



# 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 Ronny 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



**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

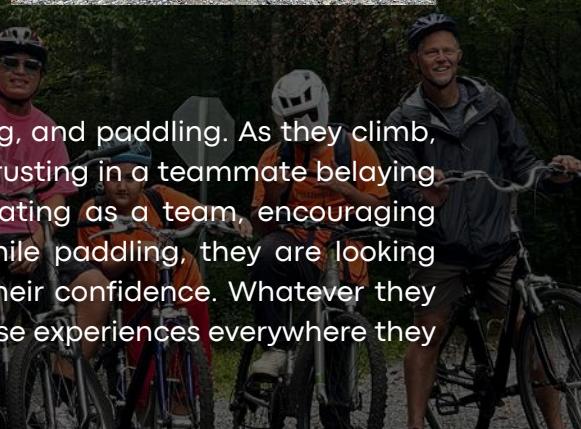
Most of our students report that without Wilderness Kids, they would spend much more time indoors, often on screens. An ever-increasing body of research shows that time in nature reduces stress and anxiety, elevates physical and emotional health, and improves our ability to interact socially. We get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

# A YEAR OF

## WEEKEND OUTINGS

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



JANUARY

MARCH

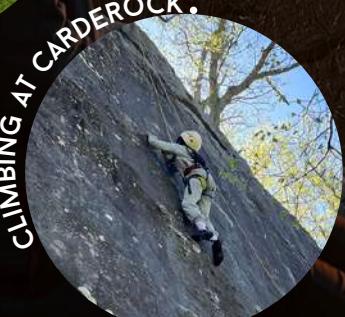
MAY



FEBRUARY



APRIL



JUNE

## 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.



JULY



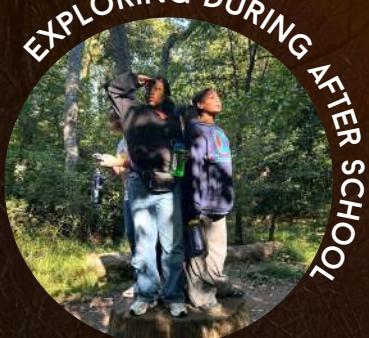
SEPTEMBER



NOVEMBER



AUGUST



OCTOBER



DECEMBER



## 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

18 NIGHTS SLEPT UNDER THE STARS

21 CAMP FIRES MADE

7 CAMPING TRIPS

17 MILES BIKE ON THE VIRGINIA CREEPER TRAIL

20 STUDENTS ATTENDED A CAMPING TRIP

500+ S'MORES EATEN (APPROXIMATELY)

9 AFTER SCHOOL SESSIONS

634 STONES SKIPPED

1 MASSIVE LEAF PILE JUMPED IN

63 AFTER SCHOOL STUDENTS

49 DAYS OF AFTER SCHOOL

15 ALEXANDRIA PARKS EXPLORED

10 STUDENTS TOOK SWIMMING LESSONS

19 SKILL OUTINGS

5 RIVER SAFETY & RESCUE CERTIFICATIONS EARNED

1 SKILL COHORT CAMPING TRIP

17 SKILL COHORT STUDENTS

107 PROGRAMS IN 2024

15 STUDENTS SKIED FOR THE FIRST TIME

24 BIKES RIDDEN

11 TRAILS HIKE

32 WEEKEND OUTINGS

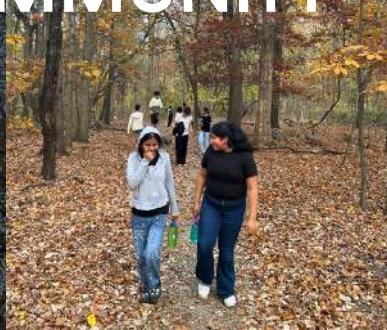
9 HORSES RIDDEN

72 STUDENTS GOT OUTSIDE ON A WEEKEND

200+ PB&J SANDWICHES MADE

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



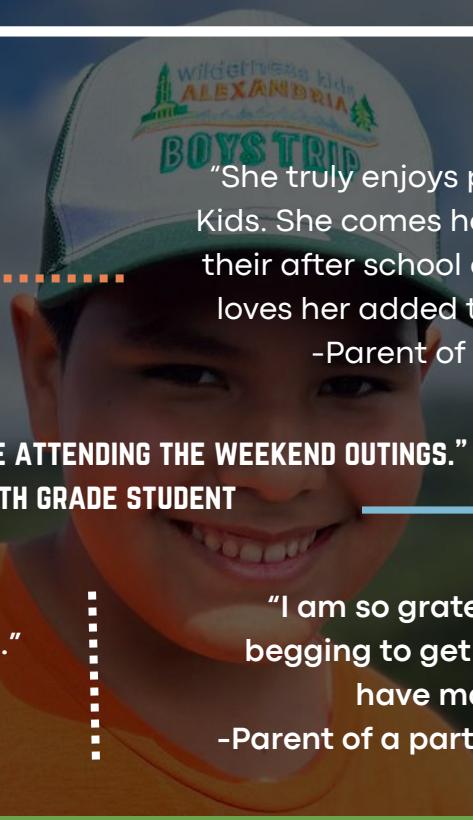
## WORDS

“

**“I enjoy every moment.”**

**-10th grade student**

”



**“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.

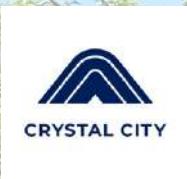
Madelyn Giblin  
Marc Grunberg  
Maria Rodriguez  
Maya Alexander  
Meg Hathaway  
Meggan Engelke Ros  
Melanie Parks  
Melissa Rojas  
Mika Naylor  
Pam Hunt  
Paul Hunt  
Roberta Cullen  
Robin Noonan Price  
Rolo Arrieta  
Sara Wengers  
Sarah Souliere  
Sathy Gunawardhana  
Scott Cullen  
Sergei 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



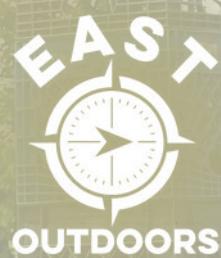
CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION  
Saving a National Treasure



MASSANUTTEN



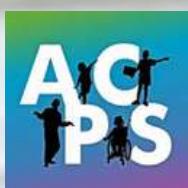
Grovespring Farm



# BUSINESSES



## & ORGANIZATIONS



JEN WALKER TEAM  
SPREAD KINDNESS BUILD COMMUNITY

corcoran  
MCNEARNEY

ALEXANDRIA  
TOYOTA

LATHAM  
LATHAM & WATKINS



WADE || GRIMES || FRIEDMAN  
MEINKEN || LEISCHNER PLLC

BAKER BOTTs LLP

Old Town Smiles

TARTAN  
PROPERTIES



COMPASS  
JAMES  
CROWE  
703-856-8244

SIMPSON  
REAL ESTATE. DONE RIGHT.



Los Tios  
Grill



The Motley Fool.



# DONORS

Aaron & Ama Adams\*  
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Ananda Charitable Fund  
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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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Enderson Garcia  
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Sheila & Richard Gardner\*  
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Cara George  
Karen & Tim Graf\*  
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Mike Gritton & Kathy Atwood\*  
Marc, Rachael, & Russell Grunberg  
Wayne Grunberg  
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Enrique Gutierrez  
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Peter & Jill Holbrook  
Margaret Holding\*  
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Joseph Hunt  
Paul & Pam Hunt\*  
Mary Hunt-Miller  
Laura Jackson & Tim Cleary\*  
Lisa Jacobs & Paul Brinkman\*  
Heather Jelks  
Daniel Jurayj and Kate Silbaugh\*  
Eleanor Keare  
Polly Kelekis\*

# DONORS CONT.

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Anna Kiss  
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Gayle Reuter  
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Emily Rotert



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\*  
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Stephanie & Damon Wright\*  
Sara Yessenow  
Cara Zappala  
Sarah Zapsky  
Craig Zingerline  
Diane Zipursky  
Matching gifts from  
Mastercard,  
Microsoft &  
Washington Gas

# LOOKING

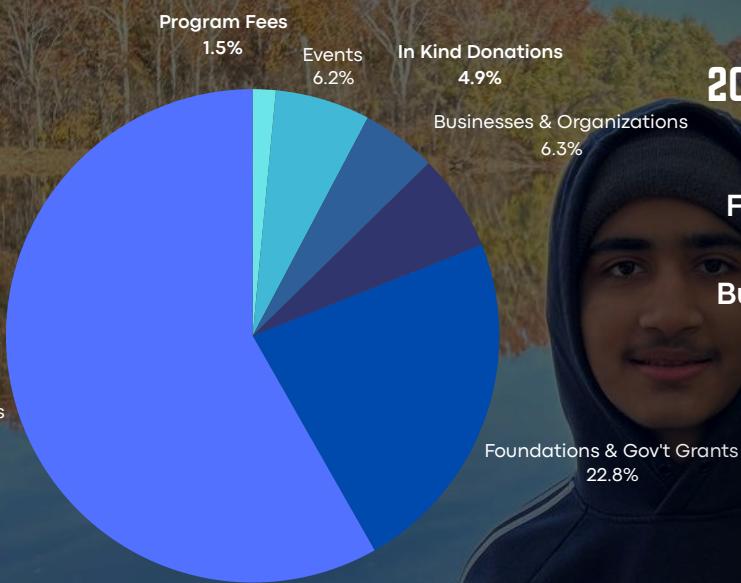


# BACK

## 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

Admin, Outreach & Program

16.2%

After School

14.6%

Summer

35%

Weekends & Skill Cohorts

34.1%

# LOOKING FORWARD



## BUDGETED 2025 INCOME & EXPENSES

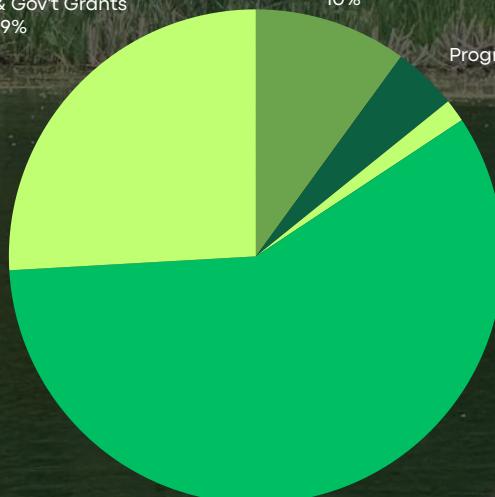


Foundations & Gov't Grants  
25.9%

Events  
10%

Businesses, Organizations  
& In-Kind Gifts  
4.2%

Program Fees  
1.5%



Individual Donations  
58.4%

### 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

Admin, Outreach & Program  
9.9%

After School  
14.5%

Summer  
40%

Weekends & Skill Cohorts  
35.6%



# OUR TEAM



## 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

## STAFF

Jerry Casagrande  
Executive Director

Elizabeth Waugh  
Director of Programs  
& Communication

Matt D'Anieri  
Outdoor Adventure Manager

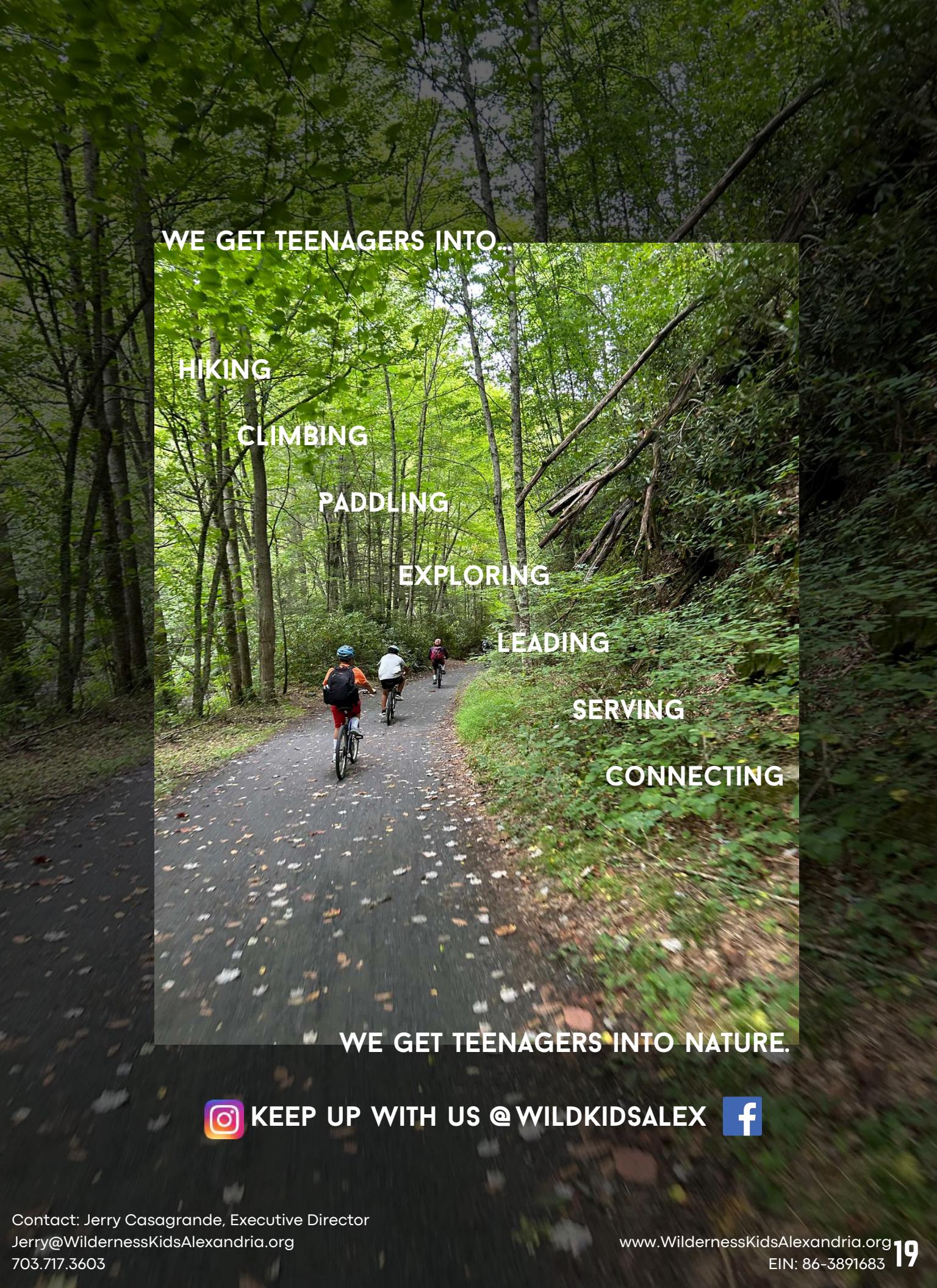
Lauren Walker  
Program Coordinator

Carl Brown  
Outdoor Educator

Tori Shi  
Outdoor Educator

## ADVISORS

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



WE GET TEENAGERS INTO...

HIKING

CLIMBING

PADDLING

EXPLORING

LEADING

SERVING

CONNECTING

WE GET TEENAGERS INTO NATURE.



KEEP UP WITH US @WILDKIDSALEX

