



Annual Report

2022



Wilderness Kids Josiah, Paris, Jeremiah, Rodrick, and Luis watch the sunset during our first Summer Peak Experience trip in June 2022.



Ben, 12, takes a break while hiking along the Potomac River.



Marwa, 12, enjoys the sleep system she set up.



Madina, 12, cools off during a hike in White Oak Canyon.

Wilderness Kids Alexandria provides life-enriching experiences in nature to teenagers from under-resourced families in Alexandria, Virginia. We are the only organization doing this work in Alexandria.



Sama A. and Sama H. (both 12) enjoy the tent they built.



Jeremiah, Rodrick, and Josiah (all 12) canoe on the Shenandoah River.



Kaleb, Josiah and Rodrick (all 12) take a break from rock climbing.

Wilderness Kids Values

We set our efforts upon a foundation of seven values that inform everything we do.

Nature is Home: We are at home in the natural world. Nature nourishes us physically, mentally and spiritually; in turn, we take care of nature.

Equity in Community: Ours is a diverse community that values equity and respectful inclusion. Equity refers to both fairness and ownership--we each take ownership of our community, and we simultaneously claim the benefits and accept the responsibilities that come with such ownership. We lead and we serve in our communities.

Curiosity: What is this tree? What stars will I find in the sky tonight? Which bird is calling now? We seek the answers to these questions not because the answers are inherently important, but because the curiosity, observation, and learning that leads to those answers yields a lifetime love of learning.

Quality: How can I build a fire that will light easily? How can I climb that rock face? How can I best tie a tarp to keep myself dry in the rain? Developing skills is about cultivating an attention to detail, an appreciation for quality. A fire well-built, a rock-face skillfully climbed, or a tarp well constructed translates throughout life to quality and confidence in all of one's efforts.

Mindfulness: Behind everything we see, hear, touch, taste, and smell, there is a blank canvas upon which those sensations are etched. By taking the time to be quiet and slow down, we become better tuned to the worlds around us and within us, and come to the understanding that silence and calm can foster peace in our own lives.

Gratitude: We are thankful for the people and places in our lives, even in hard times. We take note of how practicing thankfulness can change our perspective on life's ups and downs.

Creative Expression: We express ourselves in innumerable ways--through, art, poetry, prose, photography, music and more. In this way, we find our voice, gain confidence, and learn to share our ideas with the world.

A Recipe For Thriving

2022 was the first full calendar year of operations for Wilderness Kids Alexandria. And what a year it was! You can check out our “By the Numbers” page in this first ever annual report to know how many kids we served, on how many days, and even get an estimate of how many PBJ sandwiches we consumed!

But to understand our impact this year requires more than numbers. It requires knowing, for example, that:

- 7th grader Josiah swore he’d not go on a high ropes course; and then knowing he simply didn’t want to come off that course at day’s end.
- Rodrick, Luis, Paris and other intrepid students paddled eight miles on the Shenandoah the first time they ever sat in a canoe.
- 6th graders Katy and Madina or 7th graders Ronmy and Jeremiah shared a tent at night though they did not share a mother tongue – and still they figured out the intricacies of teamwork and of living in a tight-knit community where we care for one another.

And so many other similar stories of challenge, effort, and accomplishment.

Many young people are not thriving these days. We all know that middle school and high school can be challenging. As teenagers, we each experiment with ideas about how the world works and what our identities and roles are – and might be – within that larger world. We explore these big questions even as our bodies transform from those of children to those of adults.

Imagine moving through this challenging time of life:

- amidst a global pandemic that forces isolation upon us;
- while navigating social media that leads so many of us – and especially teens – to unhealthy comparisons of our lives with the idealized lives of others.
- while spending 90% of our time indoors (which is what the average American teen does, according to a recent EPA study).

All of this is a recipe for non-thriving.

Wilderness Kids steps in to offer alternatives to our young people:

- Community, instead of isolation;
- Acceptance and inclusion, instead of comparison;
- Fresh-air adventure, in lieu of indoor screen-time.

We believe this is a recipe for physical, mental, and emotional thriving.

We are excited to share this recipe with even more teens in 2023. We are expanding our After-School Program from two to four days per week. Our Spring 2023 is chock-full of Weekend Outings and, with the imminent addition of a Weekend Program Coordinator to our staff, we hope to grow the program even further in the Fall. Finally, our Summer Peak Experience Program will offer a full 31 days of programming this summer, compared to just nine last year.

I hope you enjoy this Annual Report. Please don’t hesitate to reach out with questions or comments or to ask to join us on the trail. We’d love to have you. Thank you – to our parents, our volunteers, our donors, and our partners – for all you’ve done to make this first year so wonderful.

With gratitude,

Jerry Casagrande
Founder/Executive Director



What we do

Wilderness Kids Alexandria pursues our mission through the following three programs.



After School

In 2022, we ran our After School Program two times per week for middle-school students at Francis Hammond Middle School. The focus of the After School program is building a community of trust among our students; introducing environmental science, camping, and stewardship; and having fun outdoors. After School is also where our students are introduced to our Weekend and Summer Programs.

Building Trust. Damare, 12, performs a trust fall

Weekend Outings

Our Weekend Outing Program enables our students to take their connection with nature a step further, to gain new understanding of our environment, and to acquire and practice new skills, like climbing, paddling, and sailing. In 2022, our students climbed at Carderock, sailed on the Chesapeake, and hiked in Prince William Forest, among many other adventures.



Honing New Skills. Rebekah, 15, "sends it" at Carderock.



Summer Peak Experience

Summers allow us to give students an even deeper experience of nature through electronics-free, multi-night camping trips, during which students learn to live outside - setting up camp, helping to cook dinner and clean up afterward, setting a campfire, and hanging a clothes line. Along the way, they hone their climbing, paddling and backpacking skills and build community and appreciate nature's gifts.

Celebrating Peak Moments. Luis, 12, celebrates making it to the top of Big Schloss.

2022 By the Numbers

600

Student-Hours of After-School Programs...with 80+ individual students over the course of 44 sessions.

Students who participated on weekend outings...over the course of 14 trips to 13 different natural spaces in the greater DMV area.

44

126

Peanut butter & jelly sandwiches eaten (approximately)...during the course of 9 summer days of camping by a total 11 students and during Weekend picnics

2310

Vertical feet climbed...by our students during three rock climbing trips in 2022.

Volunteer hours logged...by 27 volunteers who drove, fed, belayed, encouraged, talked to, listened to, and connected with our students.

236

Thank you

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



Jay climbing at Carderock.



Marcela gets Luis, 12, ready to climb.



Stephen hiking at Mason Neck.



Linda hiking at Mason Neck.



Madelyn with Jose, 12, boating on the Potomac.



Jim roasts marshmallows with students



The group learns about mushrooms from Deborah while hiking.



Jose climbing at Carderock.



Haley and educator Paige identify plants on the trail with Katy and Ronmy, both 12.

Thank you

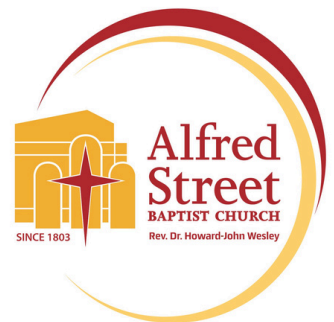
To the businesses and organizations
who supported us through 2022.



Westminster
Presbyterian Church



Wilderness Kids have a cook-out.



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



Thank you

To the many donors who supported us with gifts from \$10 to \$100 to \$1000 to many thousands of dollars. We appreciate your enthusiasm and support.

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Sama, 12, takes a break on the ropes course.



Josiah, 12, explores Luray Caverns.

Gerald Holden
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Ann & David Douglas
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Hadhram, 12, examines shells at Mason Neck Park beach.



Paris, 13, gets ready to climb at Raven's Roost.

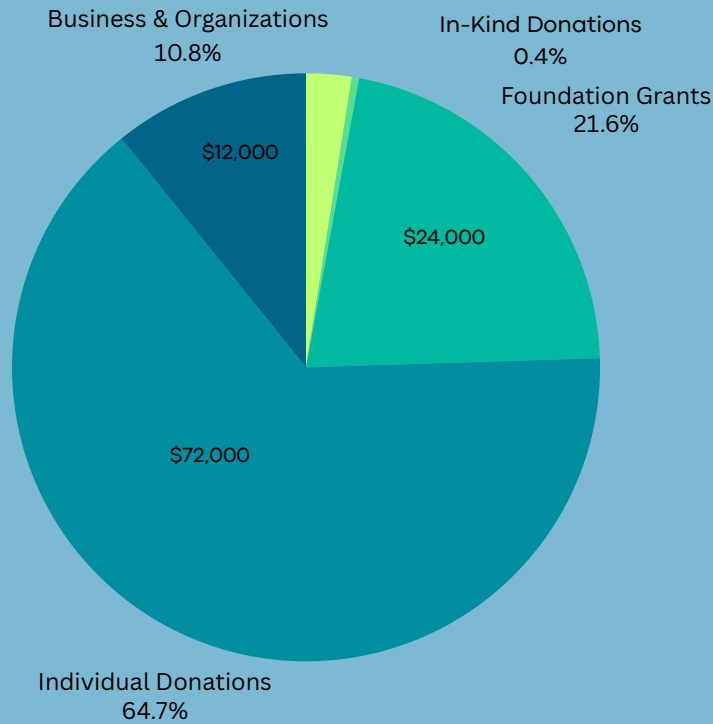
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Wilderness Kids hikes in Prince William National Forest amidst a fresh layer of snow.

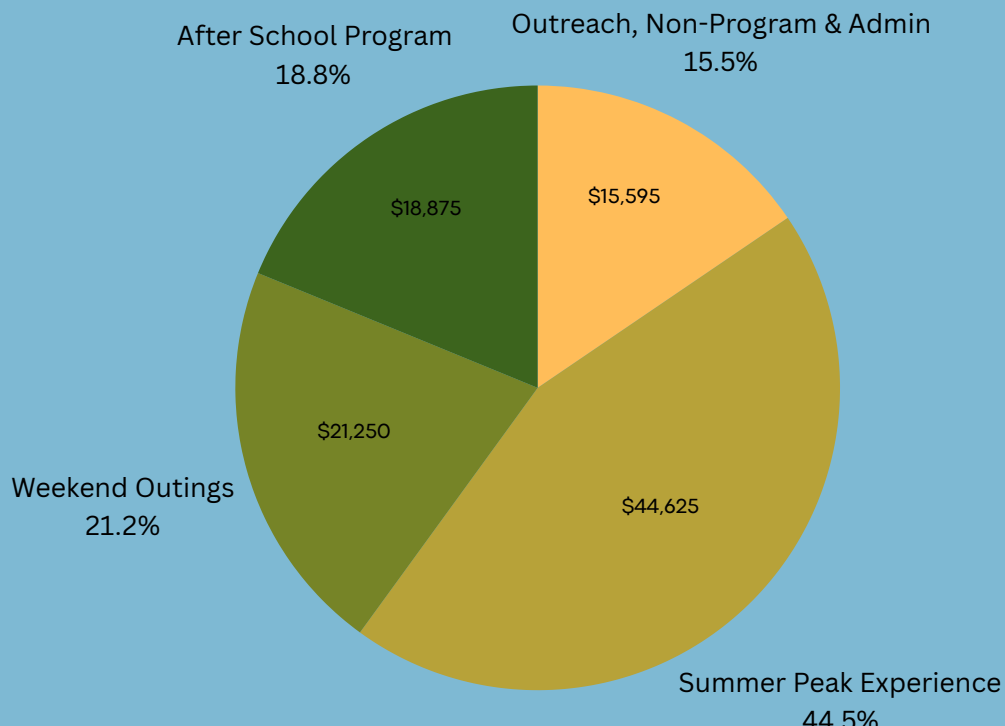


How Your Gifts Are Used

2023 Budgeted Sources of Income (\$111,250)

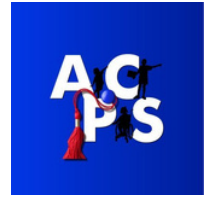


2023 Budgeted Uses Expenses (\$100,346)



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.



Ronmy, 13, Katy, 12, and Luis, 12 hike up Big Schloss.



CHESAPEAKE BAY FOUNDATION
Saving a National Treasure



Organizations whose logos appear above (clockwise from upper left): Alexandria City Public Schools LINK Club, Communities in Schools, International Academy, Alexandria City Public Schools, Movement Gym Crystal City, Space of Her Own, American Alpine Club, Shenandoah River Outfitters, South Block, Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Gallaudet University, Chesapeake Region Accessible Boating (CRAB), Potomac Appalachian Trail Club Mountaineering Section, and iEScala! DC.

Keep up with us @WildKidsAlex



We get **teenagers** into...

Hiking

Paddling

Climbing

Sailing

Connecting

Exploring

Leading

Serving.

We get teenagers into **nature**.



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