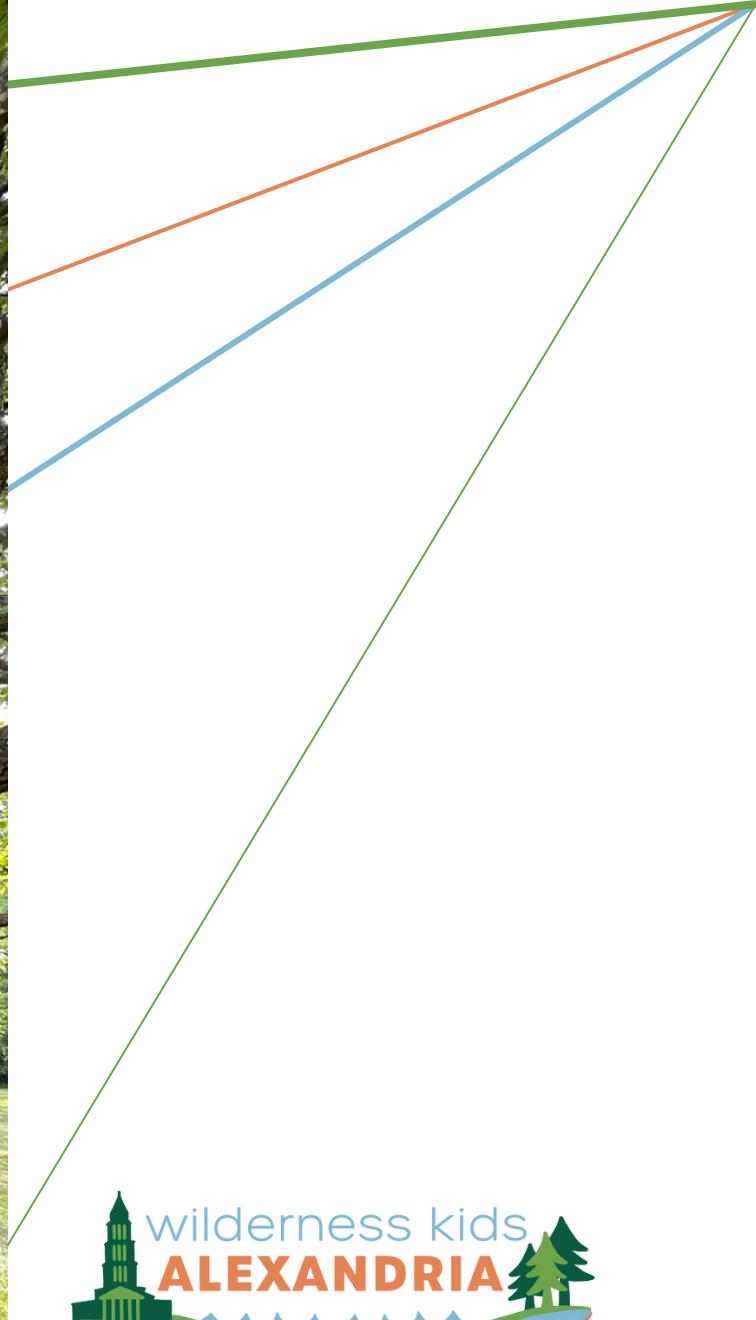




Xavier, 13, Luis, 14, Sandra, 13, and Parvin, 13, climb a tree during a summer adventure to Grayson Highlands.



ANNUAL REPORT

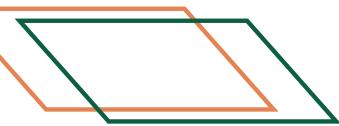
2023



Adriana, 12, relaxes on the shore of the Potomac during after school.

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7
Waterfalls
touched

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Wilderness Kids Family,

We are excited to share our second Annual Report with you, looking back at the work we accomplished, and the growth our students experienced, in **2023**. Organizationally, Wilderness Kids achieved a number of milestones last year. Among other things, we:

- **Expanded our After-School Program** to GW Middle School and grew both our Weekend Outing and Summer Peak Experience Programs.
- **Launched a new Skills Cohort Program**, for students especially interested in one activity - such as climbing or paddling - or in need of a critical outdoor skill, such as the ability to swim.
- **Achieved significant organizational objectives**, including hiring our second full-time staff person, Lauren Walker, as our Program Coordinator; moving into a lovely office at Fairlington United Methodist Church; purchasing a van that gives us more flexibility to get our students outside year-round; and holding our first-ever Strategic Planning Session to lay out a direction for the coming months and years.

We did all of these things, and more, because we know how impactful it is for our students to get into nature. Outward Bound cites a study showing that the average American young person, spends just four minutes per day in unstructured outdoor play. That's too little by far.

In 2023, Wilderness Kids students were outside for hours and hours, some of it structured, for example in climbing or paddling sessions. Other times were less structured: we regularly offer students time to roam a forest trail, stop to check out the mushrooms growing on a tree, the chipmunk scampering along a fallen log, bluebells blooming beside a trail. To paraphrase poet Mary Oliver, **what else should they do with their one wild and precious life?**

In this report, you'll be able to enjoy photos and descriptions of many of the things our **100-plus students** did this year, but here is a quick sampler:

- **Hadram, Sandra, Juan, Bella, Jennifer** and **Paris**, ages 12 to 14, explored the caves of West Virginia.
- **Walter** and **Luis**, ages 13, among others, ventured on a solo night hike on our first Weekend campout.
- **Rebecca, Parvin, Paris, Sandra**, and **Lubi**, ages 12 to 16, ventured on our first ever Summer All Girls Trip, rafting the whitewater of the mighty Youghiogheny River!

We thank you for all your support and, to the parents of our students, we thank you for your trust. We look forward to a wonderful 2024, building this community in the great outdoors.

With gratitude,
Jerry

MISSION STATEMENT



Carlos, 14, rappels down Raven's Roost in Shenandoah.

Wilderness Kids Alexandria provides life-enriching experiences in nature to teenagers from under-resourced families and under-served communities in Alexandria, Virginia.

We are the only organization doing this work in Alexandria.

3
Caves
explored

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.

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.

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.

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.



Walter, 14, journals while hiking in West Virginia.

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.

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.

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.



A WORD FROM THE PROGRAM DIRECTOR

The very first Wilderness Kids Alexandria after school session took place on a crisp Wednesday afternoon in **October 2021**, on a dilapidated soccer field behind Francis Hammond Middle School. We shared the field with other members of the community, soccer teams and dog-walkers. The field was often littered with trash, despite our frequent trash clean-ups. Many of the students attending had just begun their middle school journey, and were skeptical of the benefits of spending time in nature.

Two years later, in October 2023, our after school students had a very different experience. After the last school bell rang, they met our educators and piled into the “**Wld Kids**” van, and drove to Belle Haven Marina, where they kayaked the waters of the Potomac River and Dyke Marsh. They paused by the shore to munch on clementines and to bird-watch, laughing as they splashed each other. Our educators didn’t drill them on their math homework, or discuss which colleges they should consider applying to (both important topics). **We simply existed, and indulged their curiosity in the environment around them.**

Many of the students who were with us in October 2021 are now preparing to enter high school (some already have!). As a young organization, we are growing with them, carving out a programming path in the landscape of Alexandria resources that best serves our students and their needs.

Our Outdoor Educators are there to guide our students, but it is often the students who set the course. As they attend **After School (pg.6)**, then **Weekend Outings (pg. 7)**, then their first **Summer Peak Experience (pg.8)**, they gain exposure to numerous activities and ways of being outside. They begin to naturally gravitate towards the activities, programs, and places that inspire them the most.

For some students, this means joining our **Skill Cohorts (pg. 9)** to deepen their knowledge of an activity, and hone their skills. For others, it means taking their family to visit a park they were introduced to during a weekend outing. Soon, many of our students will be looking for jobs and leadership positions, to build their resumes for college or work, and to prepare them for life after graduation. As their skills and needs advance, so will our program offerings.

We hope you stay on this journey with us and our students. The trail has been beautiful and winding, but as avid hikers, we know there are many, many more miles to go.

With peace,
Lizzie



Students from Francis Hammond Middle School show off their carved pumpkins during an After School session on Halloween.

78 Days of After School

AFTER SCHOOL PROGRAM

In 2023, we ran our After School Program three to four times per week for middle-school students at Francis Hammond and George Washington Middle Schools. Every week, students visit a local park that is also accessible by walking or public transportation. As their familiarity with these local greens spaces grows, so does their confidence in nature. 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.

105 **14** **43** **26** **1,000+**

After school
students

Alexandria
parks visited

Kayaks
paddled

Halloween
pumpkins carved

Clementines peeled
and snacked on

**“My daughter has come out
of her shell since she
started your programs.”**

-7th grade parent



Anna, 12, fall intern Veshean, Program Director Lizzie, and Sandra, 13, kayak at Belle Haven Marina. Kayaking was a new addition to After-School programming in 2023.



Everin, 15, hits the trail fearlessly on a mountain bike.

26

Weekend Outings

WEEKEND PROGRAM

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 2023, our students climbed at Sugarloaf Mountain, sailed on the Chesapeake, and hiked the Billy Goat Trail, among many other adventures. As they participate in weekend programs throughout the school year, they gain experience and exposure to the activities that we explore even further during Summer Peak Experiences.

358

Students attended weekend outings

1678

Student-hours in nature

8

Trails Hiked

29

Pairs of ice skates worn

180+

PB&Js made and munched on

"I want to thank Wilderness Kids Alexandria for bringing teens outdoors rather than them being inside on the phone. We have lots of things to do."
- 10th grade student.



Bella, Paris, Juan, Hadram, Sandra and Jennifer triumphantly covered in mud after caving in West Virginia.

7

Camping Trips



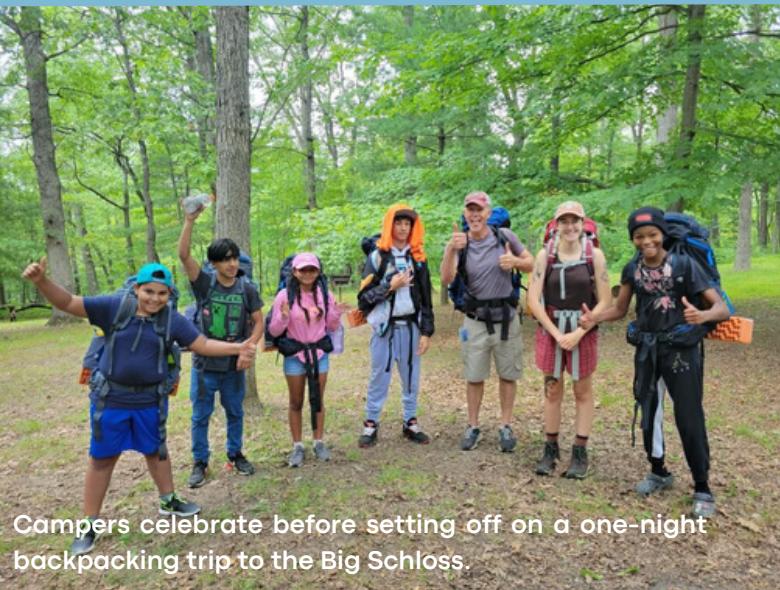
Students and staff on the first annual Girls Trip paddle the waters of the Youghiogheny.

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. The first annual Girls Trip was introduced this summer, giving our female students a chance to strengthen the bond between nature and girlhood.

5 45 15 17 9 500+

States Visited	Summer Students	Nights slept under the stars	Miles biked on the Virginia Creeper Trail	Wild horses seen	S'mores made (approximately, probably more!)
----------------	-----------------	------------------------------	---	------------------	--



Campers celebrate before setting off on a one-night backpacking trip to the Big Schloss.

"I feel accomplished after spending my first night away from home. Thank you to Wilderness Kids for bringing us here!"
- 9th grade student

SKILLS COHORTS

1 Belay certification

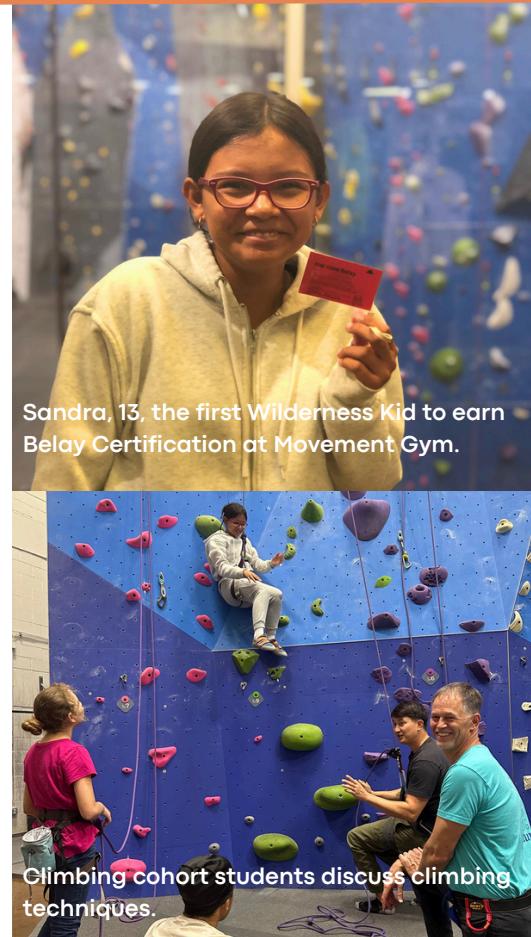
72 Knots tied

100+ Routes climbed

In October 2023, we held the opening session of our first **official Skills Cohort, Climbing Club**. As students are exposed to various outdoor activities through our after school and weekend programs, many find a particular activity that unlocks a passion. Our Skills Cohorts offer students the opportunity to follow their passions and grow their skills. In March, 2024, we look forward to starting a **Paddling Cohort** to enable students to follow their passions for kayaking, canoeing, paddle-boarding, and rafting.

Some skills are not just fun to have, but truly essential. That is why in March 2024, we also will be starting a **Swim Cohort**. Our goal is that, eventually, every Wilderness Kids student will feel comfortable and safe in the water.

"Thank you for teaching my children new things."
- Parent of three Wilderness Kid students



MUSIC FESTIVAL



Activity tables entertained families with crafts and games.



Attendees enjoy live bands at the Music Fest!

6 Bands played live music

25 Faces painted

\$14,000+

Raised for our programs

At Wilderness Kids, we love nature (obviously). But do you know what we also love? **Live music!** On a blustery Saturday in September, 200-plus members of the Wilderness Kids Community - students, families, volunteers, donors, and new aficionados - came out in force to show their love of six local bands and to rock the afternoon away. When folks weren't swaying to the music, they could play cornhole, take part in facepainting, work on arts and crafts, and so much more.

Generously sponsored by a number of local businesses, the event raised over **\$14,000** to help get more students outside, more often. Stay tuned for more information about the **2024 2nd Annual Wilderness Kids Music Festival!**

381
Volunteer
hours

VOLUNTEERS

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

Alexandra Budz
Amy Fong
Ava DeGraaf-Zembik
Bedo Maximillian Caceres
Carol Clayton
Caroline Brachman
Catherine Blejski
Charlie Rawls
Chris Ros
Christina Potts
Corey Hils
David Jose Laboy
Deborah Bombard
Elizabeth Delange
Gerald Holden
Haley Burrous
Heather Hutchinson
Jay Bishop
Jenny Considine
Jenny Nicholson
Jess Weber
James Crowe
Jimmy Blejski
Joan Salute
John Harris
John Schiavo
Jon Harvey
Jonathan Fetterolf
Jorge Maddonado
Jose Rodriguez Perez
Jung Kim
Keith Barritt
Kevin Gilliam
Kevin Grim
Laura Jackson



Leila Desotelle
Linda Critchfield
Linda Harvey
Madelyn Giblin
Marc Grunberg
Margaret Lekki
Maria Rodriguez
Mario Escarcega
Marisol Morales
Maya Alexander
Meg Hathaway
Meggan Engelke Ros
Melanie Parks
Melissa Rojas
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Michele Loesch
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Pam Hunt
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Sara Wengers
Sarah Soulliere
Scott Cullen
Sergei Nekhai
Spencer Lekki
Stephen Price
Tae Casagrande
Tara Casagrande
Tim Boone
Tim Critchfield
Wesal Stephan
Xander Aguirre



Students knot their arms in a team-building communication game during an after school session.

7
After
school
groups

BUSINESSES & ORGANIZATIONS

Thank you to the businesses and organizations who supported us through 2023.



**Jen
Walker
Team**
SPREAD KINDNESS
BUILD COMMUNITY*



LATHAM
LATHAM & WATKINS

Old Town Smiles

BAKER BOTT'S LLP



ting

SIMPSON
REAL ESTATE. DONE RIGHT.

**JIM
CROWE**

ALEXANDRIA
TOYOTA

tara casagrande
yoga + mindfulness

ALEXANDRIA CHILDREN'S THEATRE
ACT
Come Play With Us!

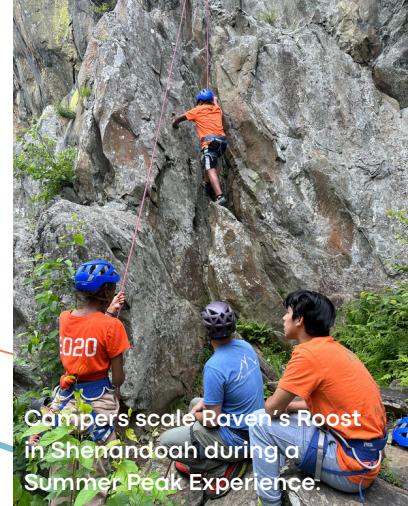


**CLARKE
SAMPSON**
INSURANCE | REAL ESTATE
SINCE 1946



2310

Vertical
feet
climbed



PROGRAM PARTNERS

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.



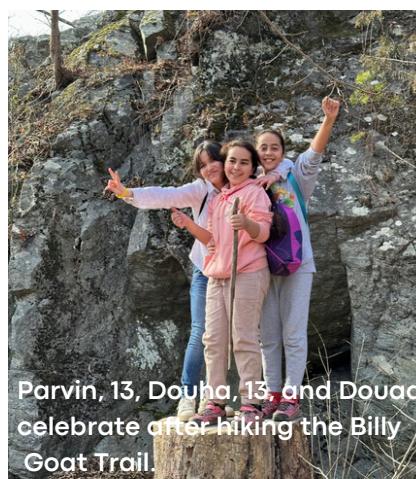
Organizations whose logos appear above (row by row, from upper left): Alexandria City Public Schools LINK Club, Communities in Schools, International Academy, Alexandria City Public Schools, Movement Gym Crystal City, Space of Her Own, American Alpine Club, Alexandria Seaport Foundation, Trails for Youth, Chesapeake Region Accessible Boating (CRAB), Burgundy Farm Country Day, Potomac Appalachian Trail Club Mountaineering Section, Washington Sailing Marina, Delta Sigma Theta Sorority Northern Virginia Alumnae, and iEscala! DC.

DONORS

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.

(2023 donors listed alphabetically)

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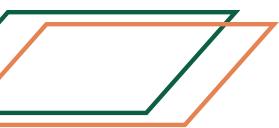


Rebecca Casagrande
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18

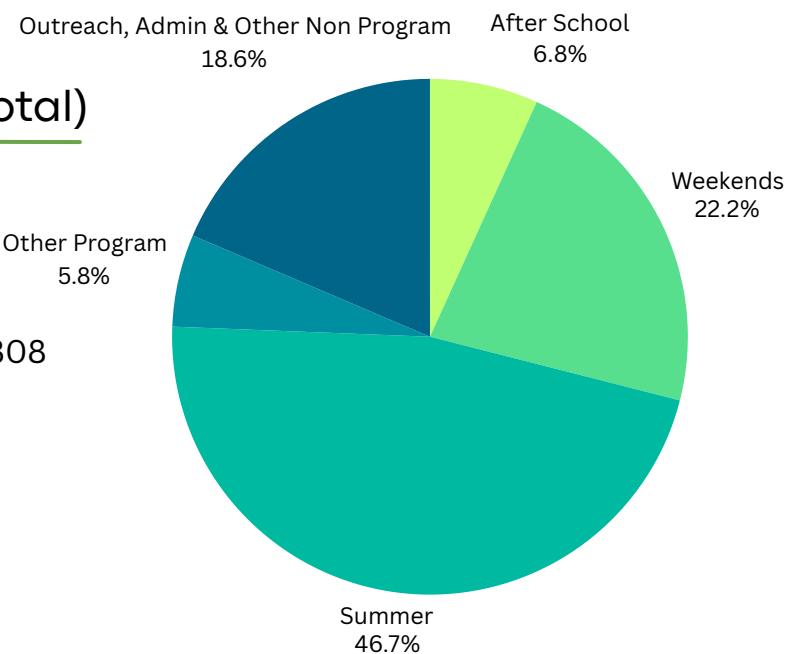
Miles
paddled



HOW YOUR GIFTS WERE USED

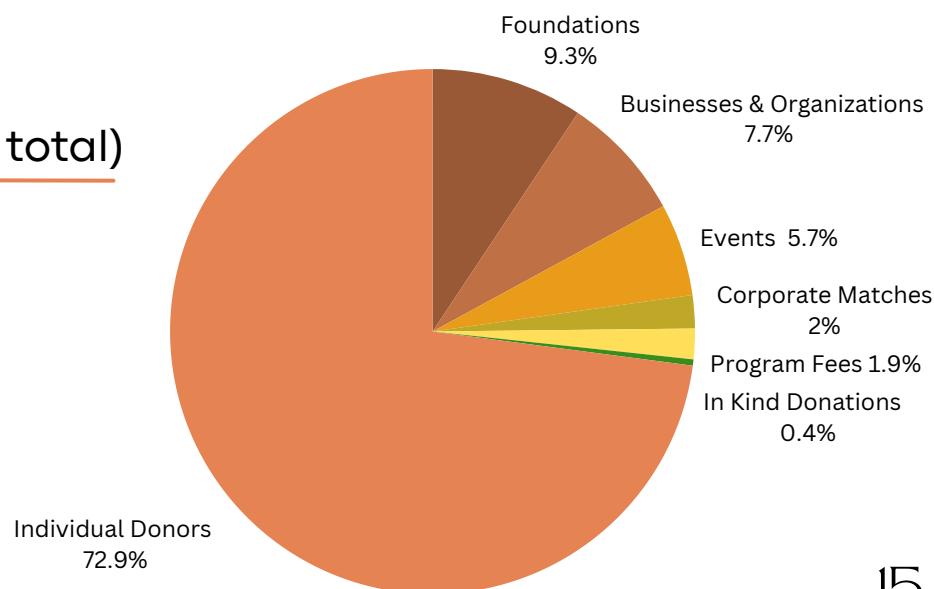
2023 Expenses (\$103,925 total)

After School - \$7,051
Weekends - \$23,029
Summer - \$48,483
Other Program - \$6,035
Outreach, Admin & Other Non Program - \$19,308



2023 Revenue (\$131,567 total)

Individual Donors: \$95,922
Foundations - \$12,300
Businesses & Organizations - \$10,180
Events - \$7,500
Corporate Matches - \$2,690
Program Fees - \$2,475
In Kind Donations - \$500





24

Bikes
ridden



Students practice a balance exercise on mountain bikes.

BUDGETED 2024

EXPENSES

2024 Expenses (\$200,360 total)

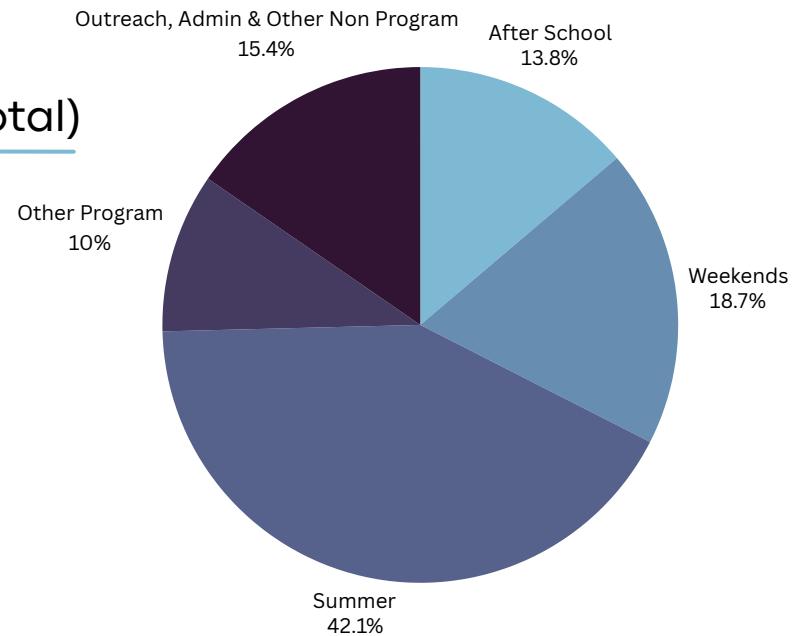
After School: \$27,708

Weekends: \$37,550

Summer: \$84,253

Other Program: \$20,000

Outreach, Admin & Other Non Program: \$30,849



2024 Revenue (\$214,250 income)

Individual Donors: \$118,000

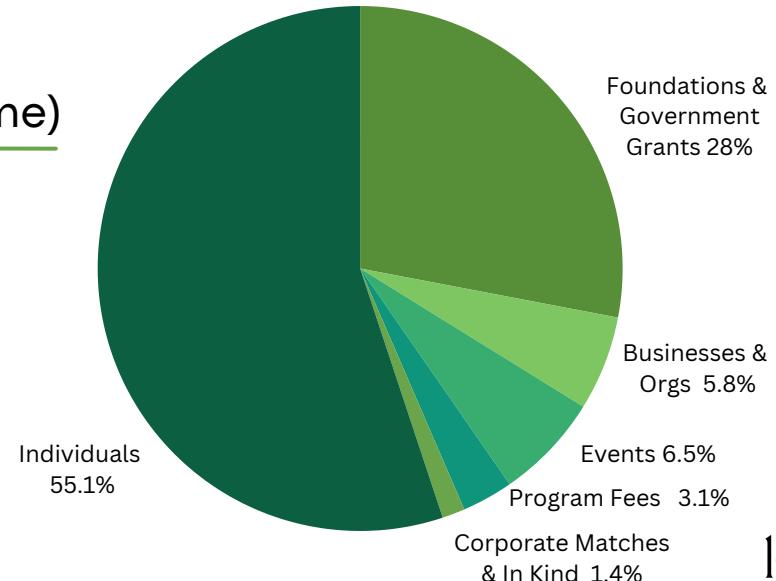
Foundations & Government Grants: \$60,000

Businesses & Organizations: \$12,500

Events: \$14,000

Corporate Matches & In Kind Donations- \$3,000

Program Fees: \$6,750





Students from Francis Hammond Middle School pause for a moment of quiet during a winter after school session.

130

Program
days

Keep up
with us
@WildKidsAlex



FOLLOW OUR JOURNEY

We get teenagers into...

Hiking

Climbing

Paddling

Connecting

Exploring

Leading

Serving

We get teenagers into nature.