



2021-2022

ANNUAL
REPORT



Creating Connections to Nature, Self, and Community

OUR MISSION

Blue Sky Fund is on a mission to provide transformational experiences for Richmond area youth through outdoor education.

OUR VISION

We will give every young person the opportunity to discover themselves by actively engaging the natural world.

OUR PROGRAMS

Explorers
Grades 3-5

Outdoor
Adventure
Clubs
Grades 5-8

Outdoor
Leadership
Institute
Grades 9-12

Blue Sky Fund aims to help children achieve academic success, especially in the sciences, through active outdoor education that is appropriate for their current science curriculum, and develop character and leadership through outdoor experiences that expand horizons, increase confidence, and build collaboration skills.



Letter from our Executive Director and Board President

TO OUR LOYAL BLUE SKY SUPPORTERS,

Thanks to your generosity, Blue Sky Fund provided over 2,300 students in the Richmond area with a cumulative 45,000 hours of outdoor time and nature-based experiential learning last school year!

While the past years haven't been without challenges and uncertainty - we have had much to celebrate. We returned to in-person programming after a year of virtual, saw the positive difference learning in nature provided students, and reached a major milestone of 15 years providing outdoor education!

Blue Sky Fund programming continues to create connections to nature and community for all our students. Blue Sky introduced youth, many for the first time, to green spaces around Richmond; helped youth to look inward and feel empowered through mindfulness and meditation in outdoors spaces; and built a culture of teamwork by including students in expectation setting each program day. Through this our team experienced first hand, the continued positive impacts of our programming as it helps grow the self-esteem and resilience of our Blue Sky students.

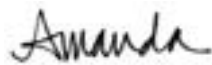
Through all this one thing has remained clear - Blue Sky has continued to create transformational experiences for youth in the Richmond area and we could not have accomplished this without our community of support.

On behalf of Blue Sky Fund, thank you to our generous donors, our tireless staff, and our dedicated volunteers for ensuring we can continue this work, now and long into the future!

Sincerely,



Margo Webb
FY 23 Board President



Amanda Payne
Executive Director



**Please consider investing
in our students' resilience
by making an online gift.**

[DONATE NOW](#)

Explorers

GRADES 3-5

Blue Sky Fund Explorers provides educational programming during school hours that creates hands-on outdoor experiences through nature-based science lessons that enrich Virginia Standards Of Learning (SOL) in 14 Title I Richmond Public Schools (RPS).



“Blue Sky is AWESOME and their programs are so impactful! I’m an RPS teacher who is lucky enough to have Blue Sky work with my students a few times a year. The activities are so much fun and provide an experience that I simply can’t while inside the four walls of my classroom. The work Blue Sky does makes a huge difference for RPS students!”

— Kat Shearer, RPS teacher

Explorers

In September 2021, after a year and a half of virtual instruction, Explorers was one of the first nonprofit programs to be back in-person on RPS school grounds.

We adapted our activities and field investigations to learn and explore in the outdoor areas at each of the schools we serve. It quickly became apparent that our students also needed more social-emotional support as they worked to reconnect with their peers after an extended period of isolation.

Thankfully, after Spring Break, we were given permission to resume off-site field investigations! This included visits to Shalom Farms, Bryan Park, and Forest Hill Park. Returning to our foundational program by getting off school grounds and into our local green spaces allowed students to translate classroom science lessons to the outdoors and to understand their relation to the natural world and the surrounding environment.

We also placed an increased focus on mindfulness practices as a means of building resilience skills. Based on observations and feedback from teachers, students, and staff, Blue Sky is helping students fill social and academic gaps that were exacerbated by their time spent in virtual learning and isolation.

2,283 Total number of students served in 2021-22

14 Title I Richmond Public Schools served

34,245 hours of nature-based science education

193 Field investigations

69% of students served ended the year with a grade of B or higher*
*a 10% increase from our last year of grades data

Classroom teachers report students having a positive Explorers experience in nature 94% of the time

2021-2022 EXPLORERS CURRICULUM

3RD GRADE:
Simple Machines, Ecosystems, Animal Adaptations, and Soil & Water

4TH GRADE:
Oceans, Plant Reproduction, Watersheds, Weather, and the Solar System

5TH GRADE:
Energy, Matter, Light & Sound, Rocks & Fossils, and SOL review

Outdoor Adventure Clubs



GRADES 5-8

Outdoor Adventure Clubs are weekly after-school outdoor programming focused on developing confidence and resilience in mastering new skills by introducing students to activities such as rock climbing, hiking, canoeing, and biking.



“Despite being an inside person, Blue Sky has helped me explore the adventurous side of myself & helped me think outside my comfort zone.”

— Kirsten, OAC participant

Outdoor Adventure Clubs

For the 2021-22 program year, we were able to resume our traditional Outdoor Adventure Clubs around Richmond.

During our Outdoor Adventure Clubs, middle school students are introduced to a variety of outdoor adventure activities, as well as a variety of outdoor spaces and resources in our city. One of the greatest benefits of the OACs is captured through participants' change in perspective of nature. Before programming, students rarely want to be outside, but by the end they were excited for any outdoor adventure. Students shared that they "learned that I like being outside," and that "nature is really cool once you learn about it!" We have had students enjoy being outside with us so much that they wished they had more time, or try to stay as long as possible and we have to do our best to get back to school without being late.

These outcomes can be seen due to three key components of the program:

1. Participating in skill-based learning activities in a non-competitive format.
2. Collaborating and team-building is built into every session by starting with the five-finger agreement of encouragement, accountability, respect, commitment, and safety.
3. Increasing the focus on mental health through mindfulness and reflection.

116 Total number of students served in 2021-22

6 partner organizations

88 after-school sessions

6,960 hours of outdoor programming

Our OACs focus on creating lots of first experiences for students across all the outdoor skills we teach.

OVER OUR 2021-22 PROGRAM YEAR, THESE OUTDOOR ACTIVITIES INCLUDED:

Animal Tracking
Biking
Dip Netting for Macroinvertebrates

Fire Building
Fishing
Geocaching
Hiking

Outdoor Cooking
Plant and Animal Identifying (VA Flora and Fauna)
Rock Climbing

... and through it all, Team Building

Outdoor Leadership Institute

GRADES 9-12

The **Outdoor Leadership Institute** is a year-long leadership program for rising high school students across the Richmond metro area. It is designed to build confidence, multicultural teamwork, leadership, and community involvement through a 2-week summer wilderness experience and 10 group community service projects.



“VCU Rice Rivers Center shared that they were impressed by the OLI participants’ hard work and by how “they come through the OLI program and have deep conversations with each other. Blue Sky creates a safe space where students can be themselves and ask questions.”

Outdoor Leadership Institute

Our 2021 - 2022 Outdoor Leadership Program looked a bit different than past years.

In a pivot from our traditional 5-day overnight expedition to Grayson Highlights, Blue Sky connected OLI students to our incredible green spaces closer to home while lowering the risk of COVID-19 spread. This resulted in 10 day trips over a two week period where they explored and hiked in various parks in the Greater Richmond region! This ranged from canoeing at Pocahontas State Park to seining for fish at York River State Park to hiking around Belle Isle.

Service Saturdays provided additional time to be in nature while supporting our community. Activities included partnering with Keep Virginia Cozy to pick up litter off the Richmond Slave Trail, bagging oyster shells at the VCU Rice Rivers Center, and creating a mural with Hamilton Glass and Oakwood Arts to commemorate the Richmond Planet.

These experiences in new places fostered opportunities for everyone to learn different skills. Participants took advantage of this time to truly connect with each other and with nature. By the end of the trips, they left empowered and confident that they can accomplish their goals, even when pushed outside of their comfort zone.

23 Total number of students served in 2021-22

4,600 hours of outdoor programming

During the 2021-22 program year, each OLI participant committed to:

200 hours in the outdoors

60 hours of community service

CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR 2022 OLI 1.0 GRADUATES!

Antwon Lathern

Ellie Torrence

Martin Gable

Arjun Iyyapillai

Geo Morton

Samuel Lee

Axel Nevarez Carrillo

Lili Reagan

Serena Barr

Ella Young

Marie Lofty

Tegan Lafland

And thank you to our 11 OLI Alumni students who came back to join us during Service Saturdays during the 2021 - 2022 year.

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Bellevue Elementary School

Bellemeade Park

Boys and Girls Club
of Metro Richmond

Canopy Adventure Park

Chimborazo Elementary School

Eco-journaling with Natalie Stickle

Elizabeth D. Redd Elementary School

Fairfield Court Elementary School

Franklin Military Academy

Friends of the James River Park System

George W. Carver Elementary School

Ginter Park Elementary School

Hamilton Glass

Henrico County Parks and Recreation

Henry L. Marsh, III Elementary School

J.H. Blackwell Elementary School

James River Park System

Keep Virginia Cozy

Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens

Maymont

Miles J. Jones Elementary School

NextUp - Henderson STEM Academy

NextUp - MLK STEM Academy

Oak Grove-Bellemeade
Elementary School

Oakwood Arts

Overby-Sheppard Elementary School

Park 365 - SOAR 365

Peak Experiences

Pine Camp

Pocahontas State Park

Powhatan State Park

Richmond City Parks & Recreation

Richmond Grows Gardens

Richmond Public Schools

The Robinson Theater

Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club

Shalom Farms

Swansboro Elementary School

University of Richmond-Lora Robins
Gallery of Design from Nature

VA Oyster Shell Recycling Program

VCU Ram Bikes

VCU Rice Rivers Center

Virginia Capital Trail

Virginia State Parks

Westover Hills Elementary School

Woodville Elementary School

Yoga with Erin Lingo

Volunteers

75 volunteers

420 hours worked

\$12,579

Value of Volunteer Hours

**Based on VA 2021 average hourly rate
of volunteer hours at \$29.95/hour*

\$25,000+

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Michael Roe
Emily Rose
Kelsey Rosenbaum
Hunter Ross
Scott Ross
Julie Rosson
Catherine Roth
Daphne Rowan
Cash and Susan Rucker
Suzanne Ruder
Robert Ruttenberg
Chad Sadler
Jennifer Salazar
Salesforce
Kelsey and Dave Salley
Sallie Plumley Studio
James Sanderlin
Nathan Sargent
John Scaife
Donna Schaar
Ron Schmitz
Haze Schmolderness
Megan Schultz
Ford Scott
Melody Scott
Micah Sedillos
Gabrielle Seibert
Jonathan Seigel
Aimee Selleck
Serif Supply

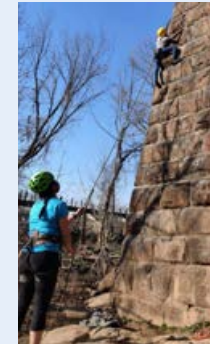
Nancy Seubert
Lynn Seuffert
Rachel Shannon
Kimberly Shell
Joey and Kate Sherrard
The Shugart Family
Leara Shumate
Mira Signer
Rebecca Sims
Singlestone Consulting
Hannah Sjovold
Richard and Mary Kate Skeppstrom
Jack and Kirsten Slagle
Katie Slusher
Betty Smailes
Sarah Smith
Susan E. Smith
Zac Smith
Kiana Snekcim
Cierra Sowers
Julia Sowers
Dorothy Spencer
Michael Stafford
Elizabeth Staver
Jared Stepp
Natalie Stickle
Debbie Stocks
Debra Stoner
Butch Strawderman
Karisa Strickland
Katy Stuck
Tyler Sumner
Alison Sural
Gail Sutherland
Ashley Sutton
Natalie Sympson
Lauren Taggart
Incy Teoh
The Cleaning Fairy
The Good Question
Bluegrass Band
Michael Thibodeau

Paula Thompson
James Thomson
Stacey Tibbs
Thomas Tillery
Carole Todd
Lara Todd
Martha Tomlin
Trevor's New Day Foundation
Paige Trivett
Karen Tsang
Christopher Turner
Hannah Turner
Jonathan Turner
Kathleen and Marshall Turner
Sarah Turse
Beverly Tuttle
Jessica Unmussig
US Energy Foundation
Pieter Van Saun
Jacobb and Monica Van Scyoc
Tony Van Vugt
Lauren Vanderbilt
Gabrielle VanEck
Gerad Vangrinsven
James Vonesh
Rebecca Vonesh
Andrew Vorenberg
Valerie Voss-Heinz
Ava Wagner
Katherine Wagner
Kristin Walinski
Mallory Walsh
Megan Walther
Allison Walton
Adrienne Webb
Amy Webb
Margo Webb
Ian Weber
Gail Webster
Steven Weiss

Andrew Westerhouse
Sara Wheeler
Michael and Serena Whisenhunt
Philip and Sarah Jane Whisenhunt
Sara White
Cal Whitehead
Harrison and Brooks Whitten
Amy Wilkinson
Matt Wilson
Murray and Lauren Withrow
Nick Wolfe
Chris Wong
Mit Wood
Paula Wood
Ali Woodworth
Lillie Wright
Raghav Wusirika
Rebecca Yarbrough
Young Chefs Academy - Richmond
Jennifer Zeile
Carolyn Ziemer
Eric Zwemer

“All thanks to Blue Sky, I had the best adventures in my school year. We went to a lot of places and saw a lot of things...I hope I can sign up again next year and have more fun!”

— OAC participant

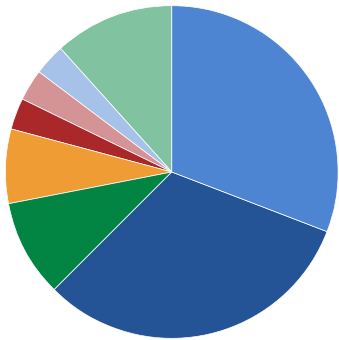


* Donor-advised funds made through The Community Foundation for a Greater Richmond.

Financials July 1, 2021 to June 30, 2022

FY 2022 financials as reported on audited year end statements of revenues and expenses.

Income



Grants \$254,900

Individuals \$260,878

Board \$78,752

Events \$58,113

Earned Income \$26,302

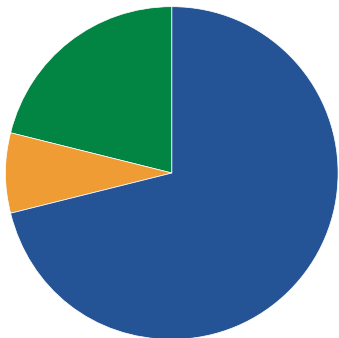
Corporations & Faith-based Organizations \$26,262

In-Kind \$24,409

PPP Loan Forgiveness \$94,707

Total Revenue: \$824,323

Expenses



Programs \$530,085

Fundraising \$155,667

General Management \$57,827

Total Expenses: \$743,579



Join Blue Sky Fund on the path ahead to connect youth in the Richmond area to the positive impact of learning in nature!

From outdoors science education to skills-based activities, we look forward to continuing to advance equity in the outdoors by developing diverse groups of environmental stewards and leaders in our community.



Get involved this year in the following ways:

DONATE

Make a donation with ongoing impact by setting up a recurring monthly gift online at

blueskyfund.org/donate

MATCHING GIFT

Increase the impact of your gift by registering for your corporation's matching gift program

VOLUNTEER

Experience the transformative power of our outdoor programming firsthand by signing up to volunteer at

blueskyfund.org/get-involved/volunteer