MISSION

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

PROGRAM GOALS

1. Help children achieve academic success, especially in the sciences, through active outdoor education that is appropriate for their current science curriculum.

2. Develop character and leadership through outdoor experiences that expand horizons, increase confidence, and build collaboration skills.
I am ten years into my Blue Sky journey. I spent the summer of 2006 dreaming, setting goals, and crafting a vision around how I believed outdoor education could impact the lives of young people in my neighborhood.

I wanted students to experience hands-on learning through field trips, street kids to escape into nature to discover peace and confidence in themselves, and teens to learn leadership skills and how to bridge divides through wilderness experiences. And I wrote down that the proof this vision was “working” would be if our participants were returning to take leadership of our programs.

I want to introduce you to some kids (and programs) who are also in various stages of their Blue Sky journey. Their stories follow the trail of Blue Sky programs and have been the true highlights of 2015.

You will meet Quianday, who chose to join an Outdoor Adventure Club in 7th grade after first encountering the outdoor world as a 3rd grader participating in our Explorers environmental field trip program. You will meet Alyssa, who first experienced Blue Sky on a rock climbing expedition, and then was accepted as a young leader in our Outdoor Leadership Institute during high school. Lastly you will meet Jon, a high school junior, who paddled 58 miles down the Rappahannock River during our alumni wilderness trip, and then trained to return as summer staff to lead the next generation of outdoor leaders.

I am beginning to see the evidence of success – Blue Sky hired back four former students as summer staff in 2015! But we still have a long journey ahead. There are more needs to be met and students who deserve to feel empowered, and we hope that you will find a way to journey with us as a participant, volunteer, donor, staff, or mentor.

In 2015, we caught a glimpse of our students growing up with us, and we crave more and more stories of young people emerging as servant leaders who can shape our communities, care for the environment, and encourage others to join them along the way. What’s the next step in your Blue Sky journey?

Lawson Wijesooriya
OUR CORE PROGRAMS

The Blue Sky Journey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>EXPLORERS</th>
<th>OUTDOOR ADVENTURE CLUBS (OAC)</th>
<th>OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE (OLI)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Number of participants</td>
<td>917</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Program frequency</td>
<td>Monthly</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Daily in the Summer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Elementary School</td>
<td>Middle School</td>
<td>High School</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hours spent with each child a year</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>209</td>
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<tr>
<td>Learned Skill</td>
<td>Science Exploration</td>
<td>Resiliency</td>
<td>Leadership</td>
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</tbody>
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2015 HIGHLIGHTS

1199 youth reached

49 partnerships built or maintained

Hired back our students as Junior Leaders
Our Explorers program offers elementary school students the opportunity to learn about nature by being in nature during their school day.

Have you ever been knee deep in the brackish water of the York River catching perch and crab in a seine net while surrounded by your entire elementary school class cheering you on? We make that happen. In partnership with Richmond City Public Schools, we provide monthly field trips throughout the school year to support and enrich the standard science curriculum. By traveling outside their urban environments to parks, farms, and riverside locations, students increase their understanding of science through hands-on learning and by exploring new places.

In 2015 we taught 917 3rd and 5th grade students monthly from 8 different schools and took them to 12 different sites in the City of Richmond and the surrounding region.

60% of students improved their science grades or maintained a B or above

75 Richmond City Public School teachers collaborated with Blue Sky Educators on our monthly science curriculum

99.6% of teachers referred back to Blue Sky lessons in their own classrooms
“Challenges are always hard and I give up sometimes, but challenges become easier with teamwork. Teamwork is about never giving up, always try one more time. Everybody has to work together, nobody can be out of the team and everybody should treat each other right.”
Our Outdoor Adventure Clubs offer middle school students the opportunity to meet weekly in the after-school setting to learn technical adventure skills, explore nature, and build character and teamwork.

Have you ever paddled down the James River to look for nests built by the recovering bald eagle population with your friends after school? We make that happen. Our trips enable students to discover the connections between their everyday life experiences and the great outdoors of our beautiful city! Club sessions are designed around a specific theme or skill and a series of club sessions will culminate in a weekend expedition that challenges our students to put their newfound skills into practice. During their time rock climbing, kayaking, and backpacking with us, our students build invaluable life skills such as resiliency. In 2015 we met with 71 students weekly at seven different club locations, mostly in Richmond’s East End.

**Resiliency:** learned skills that help students cope with traumatic experiences and stress

55% of students perceived themselves as more able to overcome challenges and setbacks after time in our OAC program.
“I love rock climbing. I can do a 5.9 now! My first day I tried to do it but I almost fell off. I was kinda scared because I started to fall backwards. I thought I was just going to fall, but then she caught me in mid air. I like to be challenged. Even if I do fall down I’m always just going to get back up.”
Our Outdoor Leadership Institute provides intensive leadership training opportunities to high school students from a diverse cross section of Richmond during the summer.

Have you ever overcome a challenge so great that once you conquered it you gained a better appreciation for what you can handle and the importance of teamwork? We make that happen. Crews of students complete a 24 mile 5-day wilderness expedition to summit Mount Rogers. This trip builds confidence, inspires commitment, and fosters multicultural leaders with an appreciation for diversity and giving back. Crews continue to meet monthly for one year to complete meaningful community service projects and environmental advocacy. In 2015 we led a girls crew of 6 and a boys crew of 9 to the top of Mount Rogers. We also led a co-ed alumni crew of 10 on a paddling trip through the Rappahannock River.

540 hours of community service completed by participants

Mount Rogers: students summited the tallest peak in Virginia with an elevation of 5,728 feet

Leadership Training: students take turns making critical decisions for the team from navigation to rationing food
“The first night of the trip was the first time I walked away thinking that leadership wasn’t just trying to corral a bunch of people to do what you wanted them to do, but it was working with people to and for an end goal that is unanimously wanted.”
LEADERSHIP STAFF

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Executive Director

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Academic Program Manager

Steven Cottam & Tabitha Pitts
Adventure Program Managers

Amanda Payne
Business Manager

Brett Stonecipher
Assistant Adventure Program Manager

Sarah Jane DeHart
Volunteer Coordinator and Program Instructor

Emily Montgomery & Jenny Kuykendall
Site Coordinators - Explorers Program

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Community Volunteer
FINANCIALS

INCOME

Grants $222,560
Individuals $186,135
Board $76,350
Events $34,169
Corporations & Churches $26,027
Earned Income $25,358
In-Kind $7,921
Total Revenue $578,520

EXPENSES

Programs $342,108
General Management $82,229
Fundraising $71,329
Total Expenses $495,666

2015 financials as reported on audited year end statement of revenues and expenses
THANK YOU VOLUNTEERS

Blue Sky would like to extend a warm thank you to all of our volunteers in 2015.

We can do so much more because of you!

194 Volunteers
1206 Volunteer Hours
$30,029.40 Value of Volunteer Hours*

*based on VA 2014 average hourly value of volunteer hours at $24.90
Blue Sky Fund is extremely grateful for the generous contributions received in 2015. The following names are listed in recognition of their loyal support and generosity.

**DONORS**

Blue Sky Fund is extremely grateful for the generous contributions received in 2015. The following names are listed in recognition of their loyal support and generosity.

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Blue Sky Fund would like to thank our 2015 program partners. We are grateful for your commitment to the community and for your involvement in our programs. With your help we were able to provide exceptional experiences for 1,199 students.

PARTNERS

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Anna Julia Cooper Episcopal School
Armstrong High School
Bellevue Elementary School
Blackwell Elementary School
Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro Richmond
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U-Turn Sports
Urban Hope
VCU Outdoor Adventure Program
Virginia Outside
Watermarks Camp
Woodville Elementary School
YMCA of Richmond
York River State Park
At the beginning of 2015, we set out to develop a strategic plan for Blue Sky Fund that would take us to the “next level.” We also established an ambitious fundraising target to support our programs. Well, not only did we identify our strategic goals and begin to implement our “Version 2.0” strategic plan, but we also impacted hundreds of kids through our programs thanks to our unprecedented fundraising success.

And now the journey continues.

Our plan for 2016 is to continue to expand our programs to reach more of Richmond’s youth and to deepen our relationship with the students we have the opportunity to reach.

Our hope is that the kids we meet and serve in elementary school will continue their Blue Sky journey with us by participating in an Outdoor Adventure Club offered at their middle school. And we hope that we will inspire many of these boys and girls to take on new challenges in high school through our Outdoor Leadership Institute. Finally, some of those same students will blaze their own Blue Sky journey by graduating from OLI, applying to be a junior counselor, and joining our staff.

We have established challenging goals for Blue Sky Fund. But we know with the continued strong financial support and the efforts of our loyal volunteers, we can achieve these goals and provide outdoor learning opportunities for Richmond youth that allow them to blaze new trails they never thought were possible.

We hope you will help us preserve and grow our programs so that our Outdoor Adventure Clubs and Outdoor Leadership Institute can be an option for every 3rd grader we taught this year.

On behalf of the Board of the Blue Sky Fund, THANK YOU to our generous donors, our tireless staff, and our dedicated volunteers for the tremendous success that we achieved in 2015!

Connell Mullins

CONNELL MULLINS
A LETTER FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT