



2022-23
**ANNUAL
REPORT**



**“I COULD LIVE
HERE, THIS IS
MY HOME NOW”**

— 5th grader from Bellevue ES

WELCOME

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.

PROGRAM GOALS:

GOAL 1:

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

GOAL 2:

Develop character and leadership through outdoor experiences that expand horizons, increase confidence, and build collaboration skills.



TO OUR LOYAL BLUE SKY SUPPORTERS,

Thanks to your generosity, Blue Sky Fund provided over 2,100 students in the Richmond area with a cumulative 40,000 hours of outdoor time and nature-based experiential learning last school year!

Looking back on our 2022–2023 program year, it's incredible all of the places our Blue Sky participants explored. In total, we visited over 50 unique green spaces throughout Virginia, and many of them multiple times. From green spaces right here in Richmond's East End to Mt. Rogers, Virginia's highest point, every trip highlighted how there is no replacement for the first hand experience in the outdoors.

From a 3rd grader experiencing a Blue Sky day for the first time and saying: "this is the best day ever! I don't want to leave!" to program alumni, Quianday Worthington returning for her second summer working for Blue Sky, we are so grateful to see the depth and breadth of how our programming has grown over the last sixteen years. These experiences would not be possible without our incredible community.

Please take a few minutes to read through this year's annual report. It represents how access to outdoor adventure and education benefits all Richmond, Virginia youth.

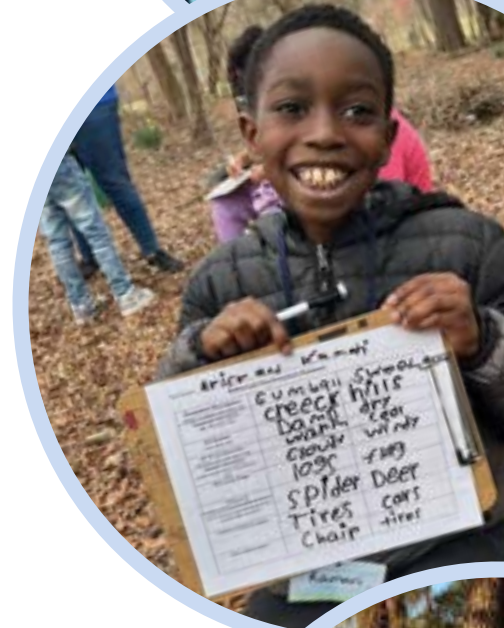
On behalf of Blue Sky Fund, thank you to our generous donors, our tireless staff, and our dedicated volunteers for ensuring we can continue this work, now and long into the future!

Sincerely,

Margo Webb
FY '23 Board President

Amanda Godbold Payne
Executive Director

DONATE NOW



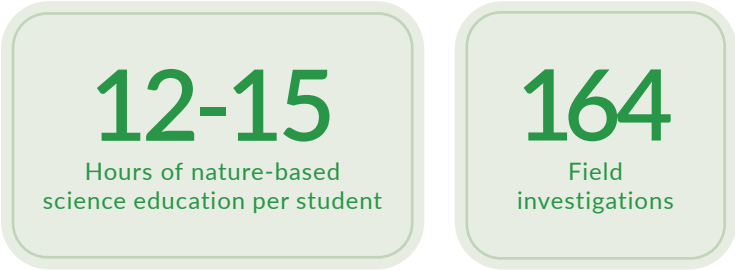
GRADES 3-5 EXPLORERS



OVERVIEW:

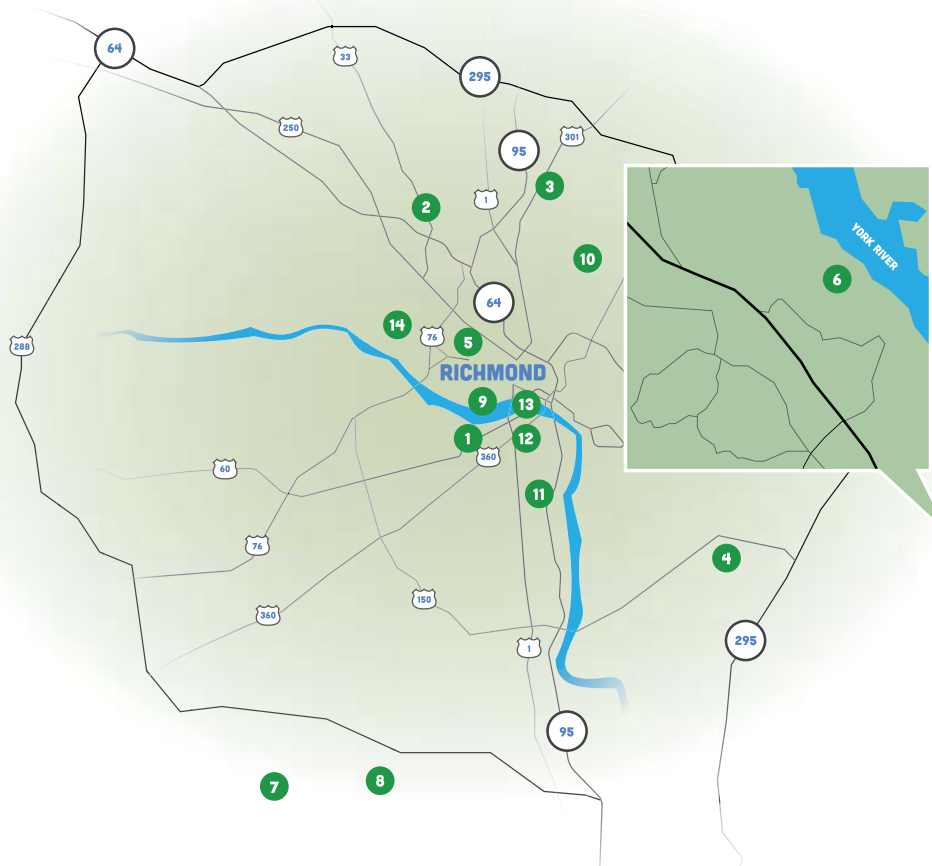
Blue Sky Fund Explorers provides educational programming during school hours that creates hands-on outdoor experiences through nature-based science lessons that enrich Virginia Standards Of Learning (SOL) in 12 Title I Richmond Public Schools.

2022-23 STATS:



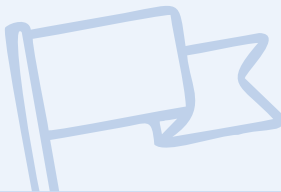
“WHEN WE WERE SITTING AND BEING QUIET WE WERE ACTUALLY BEING RESPECTFUL TO THE BIRDS SO THEY COULD HAVE PEACE”

— 3rd Grader from Miles Jones ES



EXPLORERS LOCATIONS:

1. Forest Hill Park
2. Bryan Park
3. Three Lakes Park
4. Dorey Park
5. Science Museum of VA
6. York River State Park
7. Pocahontas State Park
8. Camp Thunderbird
9. Maymont
10. Hidden Creek Park
11. Bellemeade Park
12. Ancarrow's Landing
13. Belle Isle
14. Shalom Farms (North & South)



Explorers

HIGHLIGHTS:

During the 2022-2023 program year, our Explorers Educators led 1,887 3rd through 5th grade students on 164 total outdoor experiences. Each of these trips occurred during school hours, getting students off school grounds and into green spaces for hands-on science education.

Through these trips, we received teacher feedback that students “really enjoyed getting to experience nature” and that we provide impactful experiences that teachers “cannot while inside the four walls of the classroom.”

We also saw the importance of learning in a new environment. Educators noted that getting out of classrooms and into nature allowed many student-centered perspective changes. Most notably:

2022-23 IMPACT:

91% of students agreed with the prompt that “My actions can change the environment”

93% of teachers report using or planning to use Explorers curriculum in the classroom

96% of the time teachers reported students having a positive Explorers experience in nature

Explorers programming provided students a chance to be curious. Curiosity is key to learning and provides students with motivation to try new things. This year, learning off school grounds really highlighted the increased interest in nature as kids asked more questions because they were THERE to SEE them. It also provided some wonderful moments for reflection.

Explorers programming also provided students a chance to learn through shared experiences. Being in a new learning environment helps create bonds as students and teachers step out of their comfort zone. This creates an opportunity for teachers and students alike to lean on each other for support.

These two changes really showcase the importance of place based learning in nature. Creating sparks of interest would not be possible without the support from many partners allowing Explorers to visit 14 green spaces throughout the year.



GRADES 5-8

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE CLUBS

OVERVIEW:

Outdoor Adventure Clubs are weekly after-school outdoor programming for City of Richmond middle school students focused on developing confidence and resilience in mastering new skills by introducing students to activities such as rock climbing, nature watching, biking, and more.

HIGHLIGHTS:

During the 2022-23 program year, our Outdoor Adventure Clubs increased participation from 116 to 217 participants. In addition to weekly and bi-weekly program days, OAC participants enjoyed five Saturday outings and the first overnight adventure since the pandemic began.

We especially loved seeing how our instructors leaned into program adaptability by giving students voice and agency in choosing their own adventures throughout the program year. This allowed participants to learn a mix of soft and hard skills including geocaching, biking, fire building, mindfulness & meditation, river safety, and more. Through these activities, the OAC program helps students to feel a greater sense of comfort and belonging in venturing outdoors, and encourages youth to engage in outdoor activities in the future.

As much as we enjoy teaching our students about outdoor adventures, we love learning from our students even more. The moments where we learn each other's favorite foods, what we're scared of, and what they want to be when they grow up shows us how magical it can be to see the world through their eyes.

2022-23 STATS:

217

Students participating

9

Partner organizations

328 After-School outings

60-120 Hours of outdoor programming

PROGRAM GOALS:

GOAL:

Develop hard skills relating to various outdoor adventure activities, and soft skills that help them interact positively with their peers.

"I like Blue Sky, they teach you how to manage yourself in the wild" - Makenzie

GOAL:

Visit a number of different outdoor spaces that allow students to learn about their environment and the relationship between themselves and nature.

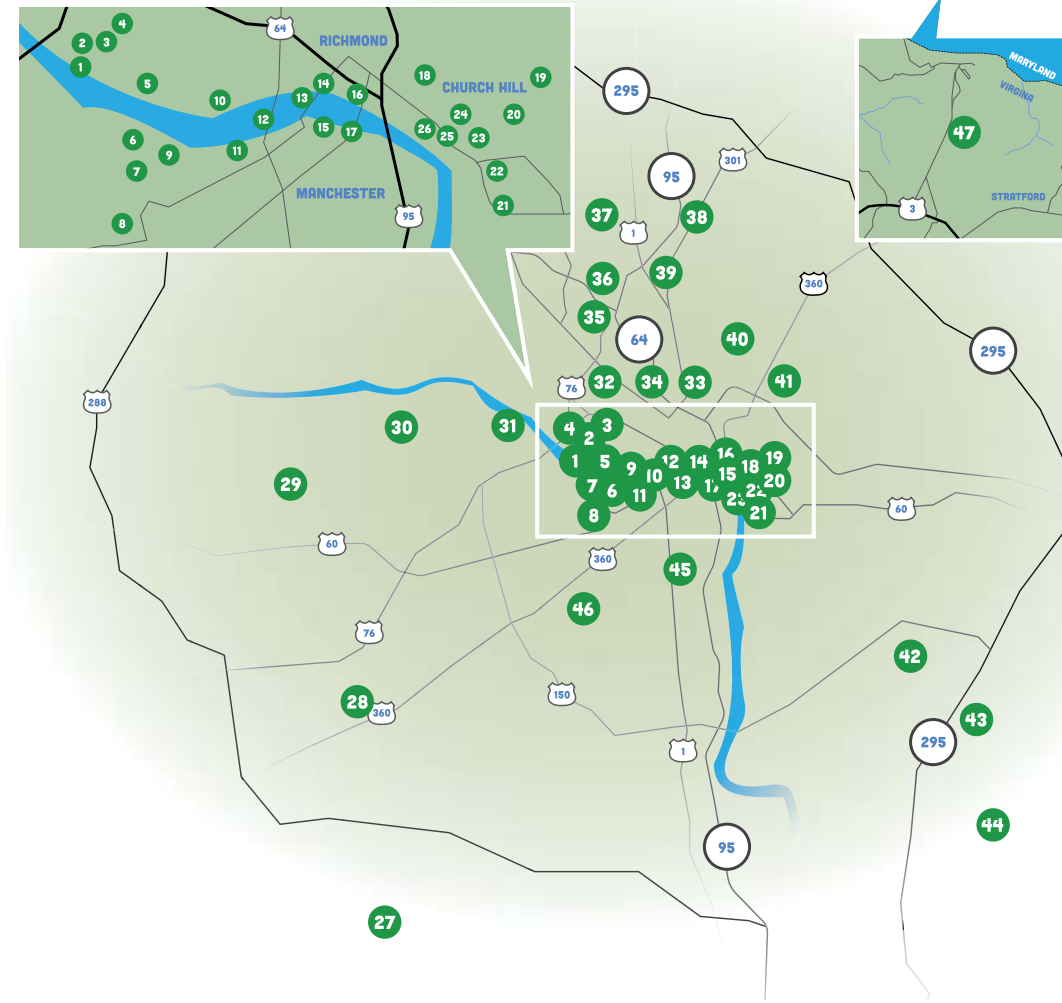
"That was my first time touching a snake" - Justice

GOAL:

Provide a safe after school environment that allows students to be heard, make friends, and be exposed to unique outdoor adventure experiences.

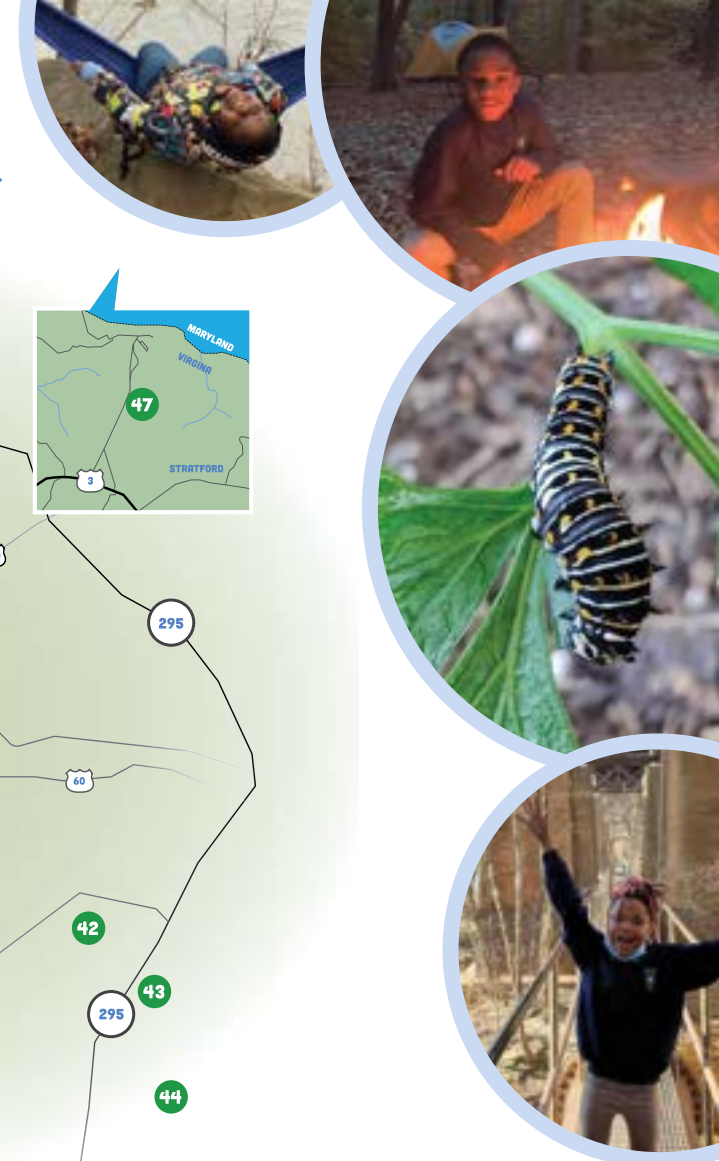
"I learned that I really like the outdoors and that I'm into trying something new!" - Micah

Outdoor Adventure Clubs



OAC LOCATIONS:

- | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| 1. Pump House Park | 16. James River Park Pipeline Walkway | 31. Pony Pasture Trails Richmond | 43. Virginia Capital Trail Parking Lot |
| 2. Carillon | 17. Floodwall Park | 32. Humphrey Calder Playground | 44. Deep Bottom Park |
| 3. Dogwood Dell Amphitheater | 18. Jefferson Park | 33. Abner Clay Park | 45. Bellemeade Park |
| 4. Byrd Park | 19. Oakwood Playground | 34. Peak Experiences (Richmond) | 46. Broad Rock Sports Complex |
| 5. Maymont | 20. Bill Robinson Park | 35. SOAR365 | 47. Westmoreland State Park |
| 6. 42nd Street Entrance | 21. Powhatan Playground | 36. Bryan Park | |
| 7. Forest Hill Park | 22. Gillies Creek Park | 37. Lewis Ginter Botanical Garden | |
| 8. Crooked Branch Ravine Park | 23. Chimborazo Park | 38. Three Lakes Park & Nature Center | |
| 9. Reedy Creek Trail Parking Lot | 24. Chimborazo Playground | 39. Pine Camp Arts and Community Center | |
| 10. North Bank Trail | 25. Libby Hill Park | 40. Ann Hardy Plaza Community Center | |
| 11. 22nd St Parking Lot | 26. Great Shiplock Park | 41. Hidden Creek Park & Recreation Center | |
| 12. Belle Isle | 27. Pocahontas State Park | 42. Dorey Park and Recreation Center | |
| 13. T. Tyler Potterfield Memorial Bridge | 28. Rockwood Park | | |
| 14. Brown's Island | 29. Peak Experiences (Midlothian) | | |
| 15. Manchester Floodwall Walk | 30. Lewis G. Larus Park | | |



GRADES 9-12

OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

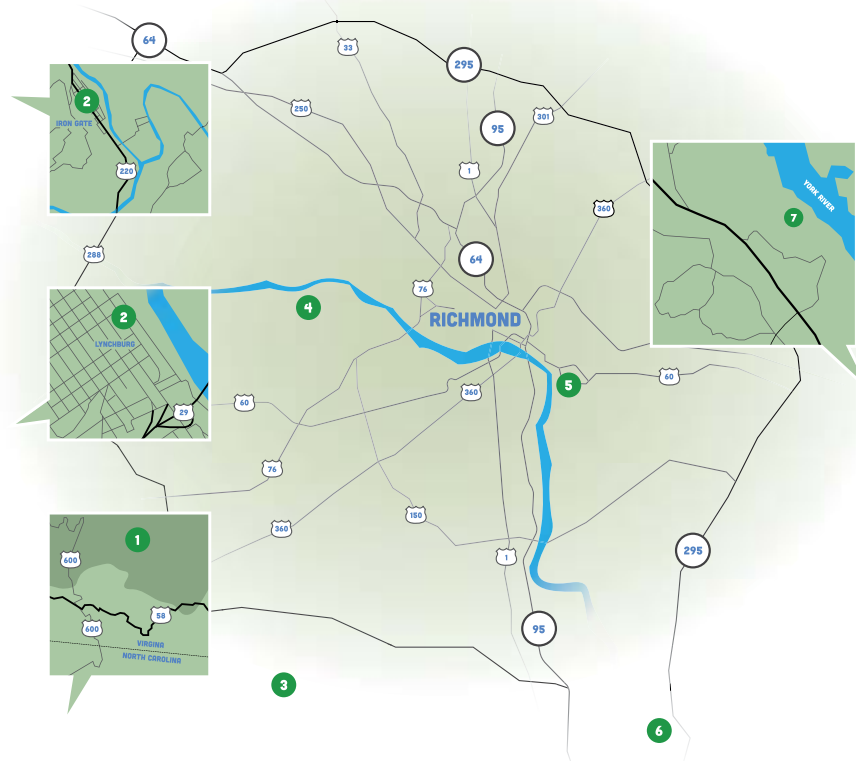
OVERVIEW:

Outdoor Leadership Institute is a year-long program for high school students from the Richmond area. This program brings together students from diverse economic and cultural backgrounds for an immersive 5-day wilderness trip and monthly community service projects, designed to foster individual growth, increase personal resiliency, and cultivate leadership skills.

“OLI HAS BEEN A GREAT WAY TO EXPERIENCE EVEN MORE NATURE WITH FRIENDS WHILE HELPING MY AND OTHERS COMMUNITIES ALONG THE WAY”

– Sam, Outdoor Leadership Institute

2022-23 STATS:



OLI LOCATIONS:

1. Mt. Rogers / Grayson Highlands
2. Cowpasture River in Iron Gate, VA to James River in Lynchburg, VA
3. Pocahontas State Park
4. Huguenot Flatwater James River Park System
5. Chimborazo Park
6. R. Garland Dodd Park at Point of Rocks
7. York River State Park



Outdoor Leadership Institute

HIGHLIGHTS:

During the summer of 2022, our Outdoor Leadership Institute returned to Grayson Highlands State Park for the first time since 2019! To ensure our 2021-22 participants got their Mt. Rogers' experience, we welcomed them back for a second year.

Eleven OLI participants jumped at the opportunity to summit Mount Rogers, the highest peak in Virginia at 5,730 feet. Along the way they saw lots of wild ponies, longhorn cattle, and many incredible views of the Blue Ridge Mountains. Participants shared that they couldn't believe they were in Virginia and they can't wait to take their families to Grayson Highlands.

This new experience in a new place fostered opportunities for everyone to learn different skills. Participants took advantage of this time to connect with each other and with nature. Having worked together for the past year, the group built strong bonds that allowed them to engage in difficult conversations and to collectively navigate physical and mentally taxing challenges. By the end of the trip, they left empowered and confident that they can accomplish their goals, even when they're pushed outside of their comfort zone.

Additionally, they completed ten Service Saturdays, totaling 40 hours of volunteer time each. Participants showed up to learn about and support various local organizations, including Pocahontas State Park, Keep Virginia Cozy, Peak Experiences, the Black History Museum and Cultural Center, Housing Families First, and Venture Richmond at Dominion Riverrock. These projects introduced participants to more of the Richmond community's needs and how they can take a leadership role to help support existing programs.

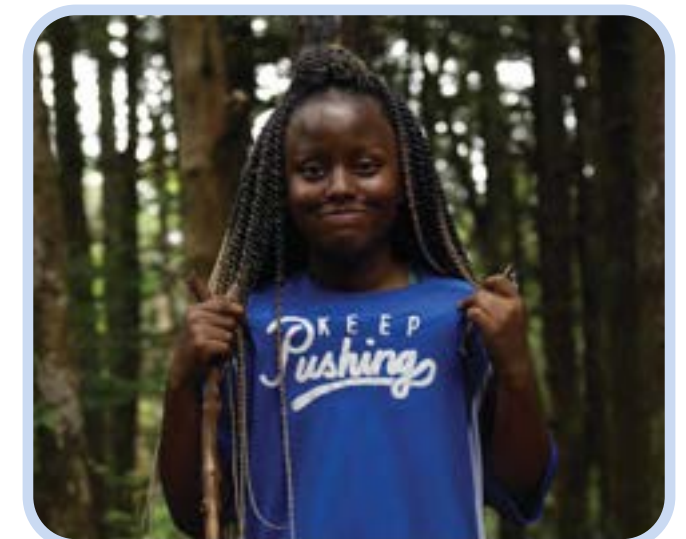
To round out the program, in June 2023 they embarked on a five day, 60 mile canoe adventure on the James River from the headwaters of the James to Lynchburg. We especially love seeing them using their big 'outdoors' voices, because when you are paddling through rapids and helping the other canoe pairs to find the right line, you

really have to shout. As Adventure Programs Manager, David Buenrostro, shared: "Canoe camping was incredible. Throughout the whole trip, the kids are deciding and leading - you really get to see their confidence grow."

After being a part of Blue Sky's Outdoor Leadership Institute for two years thanks to the pandemic, what do they have to say?

Lili said, "OLI has been such an incredible experience. It's really hard for people to leave their life and be a part of nature, with all of life that flies by around us. The Mt. Rogers trip was incredible. But I also enjoy all of the volunteer work that I have had the opportunity to do throughout the year. I love OLI and all that it has done for me."

And finally, Quianday an OLI Alum and OLI Guide, "It felt good to be back on Mount Rogers since my [first] backpacking [trip] six years ago. I was given the chance to stop & notice changes on the mountains & make new connections."



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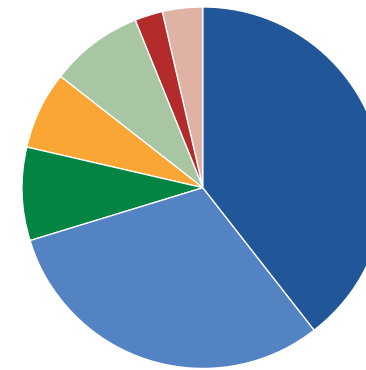
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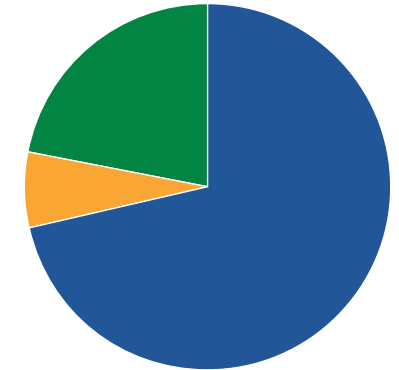
Logan Vetovec
Director, Health Sciences Community Engagement, VCU



INCOME:

- Grants: \$391,576
- Individuals: \$306,974
- Board: \$82,004
- Events: \$69,706
- Earned Income: \$83,084
- Corporations: \$24,156
- In-Kind: \$35,213

Total Income: \$992,713



EXPENSES:

- Programs: \$644,627
- General Management: \$61,011
- Fundraising: \$197,125

Total Expenses: \$902,763

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- | | | |
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| Bellevue Elementary School | Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens | The Robinson Theater |
| Bellemeade Park | Maymont | Salvation Army Boys and Girls Club |
| Black History Museum and Cultural Center | Miles J. Jones Elementary School | Science Museum of Virginia |
| Boys and Girls Club of Metro Richmond | MLK Boys and Girls Club | Shalom Farms |
| Chimborazo Elementary School | NextUp - Henderson STEM Academy | Swansboro Elementary School |
| Fairfield Court Elementary School | NextUp - MLK STEM Academy | University of Richmond-Lora Robins |
| Franklin Military Academy | NextUp - Boushall | Gallery of Design from Nature |
| Friends of the James River Park System | NextUp - River City | The Valentine Museum |
| Frances W. McClenney Elementary School | NextUp - Lucille Brown | Venture Richmond |
| Heal with Keonna | Oak Grove-Bellemeade Elementary School | Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities |
| Henrico County Parks and Recreation | Overby-Sheppard Elementary School | Virginia Capital Trail |
| Henry L. Marsh, III Elementary School | Park 365 - SOAR 365 | Virginia State Parks |
| Housing Families First | Peak Experiences | Westover Hills Elementary School |
| J.H. Blackwell Elementary School | Richmond City Parks & Recreation | Woodville Elementary School |
| James River Park System | Richmond Grows Gardens | YMCA Camp Thunderbird |

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From outdoor 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.

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