

2023-2024
ANNUAL REPORT

**BLUESKY
FUND**

blueskyfund.com

A MESSAGE FROM AMANDA AND MARGO

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

Blue Sky's three core programs provided elementary, middle, and high schoolers with outdoor education and adventure programming which sparked curiosity in the outdoors by allowing participants to:

- Observe the natural world around them
- Learn new outdoor skills
- Build connections with new friends

These experiences would not be possible without our incredible community. 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 24 Board President



Amanda Godbold Payne, Executive Director

MISSION

To provide transformational experiences for Richmond area youth through outdoor education.

VISION

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



PROGRAM OVERVIEW

*A Letter from our Programs Director,
Josh Bearman*

I am grateful to be in the role of Programs Director at Blue Sky Fund. Now, in my second year I have had the opportunity to meld the skills and strategies of my years in the world of formal science education with our three successful and well-regarded programs; working to hone the edges and brighten the bright spots.

We have a fabulous and growing pool of community partners who support and enable our mission, and a clear set of goals and objectives to help guide our growth.

We have spent this past year refining all three of Blue Sky Fund's programs in their focus and goals.



As you will see in the proceeding program pages, much of the refinement has been focused on deepening the previous relationships we have formed with students, school staff, and community partners through more targeted outreach, specific lesson and activity planning, educator training, and reflecting on our practice in the pre and post experience setting.

I am super excited for what next year's continued successes will bring!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Josh Bearman', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

PROGRAM GOAL 1

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

PROGRAM GOAL 2

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





EXPLORERS

ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

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

EXPLORERS 2023-24 BY THE NUMBERS

1,840
3rd to 5th
graders

25,750+
cumulative
outdoor hours

12
unique green
spaces explored

164
total field
experiences

OUR YEAR IN REFLECTION

In this past year, our Explorers program put an even greater focus on science skills. A Blue Sky field experience is a chance for RPS students to explore aspects of the natural world that are new to many of them. We deepened this exploration by focusing on a different long-term investigation - 3rd Grade studied plant diversity, 4th grade examined weather trends, and 5th grade measured sound levels - that continued across all field experiences.

Essential to our mission of providing transformational experiences for Richmond youth is helping our students recognize that “the environment” is not something you have to travel to see, but that exists within our neighborhoods and schoolyards.

For this reason, the first field experience of the year took place on school grounds. During this session, we explored the ecosystem of the schoolyard, collected data, played team-building games, and centered ourselves for the off-site trips to come. Some of our favorite outcomes from this included:

A 3rd grader from Overby-Sheppard sharing that **“I feel like I’m a scientist”** during a data collection activity.

And an RPS Teachers sharing that the **“Activities were engaging! [My class] loved the sound activity & observations with mindfulness.”**





OUTDOOR ADVENTURE CLUBS

MIDDLE SCHOOL

Weekly after-school outdoor programming focused on developing confidence and resilience in mastering new skills by introducing students to outdoor activities.

OACs 2023-24 BY THE NUMBERS

204
5th to 9th graders

15,000+
cumulative outdoor hours

70+
unique green spaces explored

265
total outings + 8 overnight trips

OAC YEAR IN REFLECTION

In the summer of 2023 and subsequent school year, we ran Outdoor Adventure Clubs with 14 partners, visiting over 70 sites in and around Richmond. We hiked, biked, climbed, floated, geocached, camped, and cooked. Sometimes, we just simply hung hammocks and relaxed in the great outdoors.

The goals of the OAC are to increase outdoor skills and help to build personal resilience. For many years we have stressed the importance of planning and execution when it comes to the hard skills. This last year we spent time as a team planning and discussing how to intentionally integrate the habits and mindsets of the 7Cs of resilience into our weekly and bi-weekly club meetings. In the field, this looked like more time spent front-loading and debriefing the intentions of activities. But even more importantly, here is what it sounds like from our participants perspectives!

Blue Sky is a place full of friendship and love, and I feel this love should be shared with everyone!

- Roemello, 7th Grade, Albert Hill

Blue Sky has encouraged me to try fun things I have never done before!

- Arianna, 7th Grade, River City





OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

HIGH SCHOOL

A year-long program that 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 2023-24 BY THE NUMBERS

24

9th to 12th graders

3,150

cumulative outdoor hours

5

days & 4 nights in the backcountry

8

Service Saturday experiences

OLI YEAR IN REFLECTION

Every year, we are excited to welcome a new group of high school students to our Outdoor Leadership Institute. In the summer of 2023, we were especially fortunate to lead two excellent cohorts to Mount Rogers for 5 day camping expeditions. Additionally we spent 5 glorious days on the James River, canoe camping with our OLI alumni. It is always a delight to watch, through the magic of shared experience, a group of teenagers with different backgrounds and personalities come together to form a cohesive team.

During the school year, our OLI students took part in over 30 hours of community action as part of our Service Saturdays. We weeded and planted at Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens, helped maintain trails with the James River Park System, and helped remove trash from the James River as part of a state-wide cleanup.

In addition to the service component, we also added a focus on career pathways to every Saturday meeting. Students had the opportunity to speak with museum curators, outdoor educators, scientists, and organizers of events like RiverRock, among other such careers. We are excited about the opportunities that will arise as we deepen this aspect of our OLI program in the coming years.



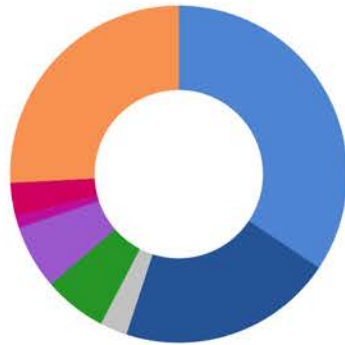
FINANCIALS

FY 2024 financials as reported on audited year end statements of revenues and expenses.

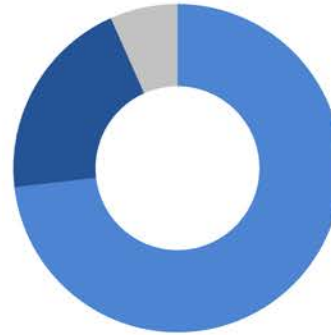
FY 2023 = July 1, 2023 to June 30, 2024

\$1,399,467
TOTAL REVENUE

\$985,422
TOTAL EXPENSES



Foundations \$485,184
Individuals \$294,005
Board \$36,289
Events \$69,711
Earned Income & Interest \$87,806
Corporations \$16,615
In-Kind \$44,880
Service Organizations \$1,358
Capital Campaign \$363,620



Program \$710,350
Fundraising \$205,063
General Management \$70,009

PEOPLE

FY 24 Board of Directors

President: Margo Webb

Vice President: Debbie Edwards

Treasurer: Darin Moore

Secretary: Sally Hunnicutt

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Molly Leraris

Maeve McGuire

Rose Milefsky

Jacob Minnick

Anna Moreau

Jay Murdoch

Sydney Murray

Noah Nottingham

Payton Palmerton

Max Peronnet

Vic Reichert

Myla Stephens

Chris Tucker

Andy VanDeusen

Cecil Whitehead

**Bold indicates full-time staff member*

GET INVOLVED!

Join Blue Sky Fund on the path ahead to connect youth in the Richmond area to the positive impact of learning in nature! From experiential 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 www.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 www.blueskyfund.org/get-involved/volunteer
get involved

