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Blue Sky Fund
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*Going Deeper
Climbing Higher*
2014 Annual Report

OUR MISSION

To provide transformational experiences for urban youth through outdoor education



Dear Blue Sky Friends,

Three years ago, Blue Sky's leadership team signed off on an exciting and ambitious strategic plan. Our goals included "going deeper blue" with the kids that we served and "climbing higher" by scaling-up our organization to provide more (*and more excellent*) programs through a strategic focus in Richmond's East End. These targets were dependent, however, on our goal to strengthen our organizational foundation and secure our financial health by diversifying funding sources. Heading into 2014, with the confidence and perspective of our progress on those goals, we decided this year's theme would be "Blue Sky 2.0."

The "version upgrade" began when some of our Outdoor Leadership Institute graduates pleaded with us to create a 2.0 version of our wilderness program so they could strengthen their skills and literally climb higher mountains. We had strategically set out to transform kids' lives in deeper ways, but the kids themselves took the organization to a new level with their commitment, desire to lead, and passion for the outdoors. I joined the 2.0 backpacking trip up Mount Mitchell (6,683 ft.), and it was the highlight of my summer. "Out here, nature is big enough to calm my anger," Chris shared with me on our last evening under the stars. I then knew, first hand, that as we climb higher, our kids gain life skills needed for their success.

Also in 2014, we laid large foundational blocks on which to build an even stronger organization for the future. As a talented and stable leadership team in their second year together, our staff developed and grew Blue Sky in remarkable ways - most notably through the expansion of our weekly outdoor adventure clubs and the full implementation of 5th grade Explorers. Recognizing we were "growing up", the Board took the organization to the next level by pursuing accreditation through Standards for Excellence and increasing their involvement with governance. Lastly, the incredible donor support we received in 2014 provided a financial foundation that will expand Blue Sky programs - enabling more improved science grades, more confident young leaders, and a more valuable impact in the community moving forward.

Going Deeper & Climbing Higher. All on a solid foundation. Thank you for making 2014 the capstone year of our three-year strategic plan. Join Blue Sky as we set exciting and ambitious strategic goals for our next round of transformational adventures.

With Gratitude,
Lawson Wijesooriya
Executive Director



OUR GOALS

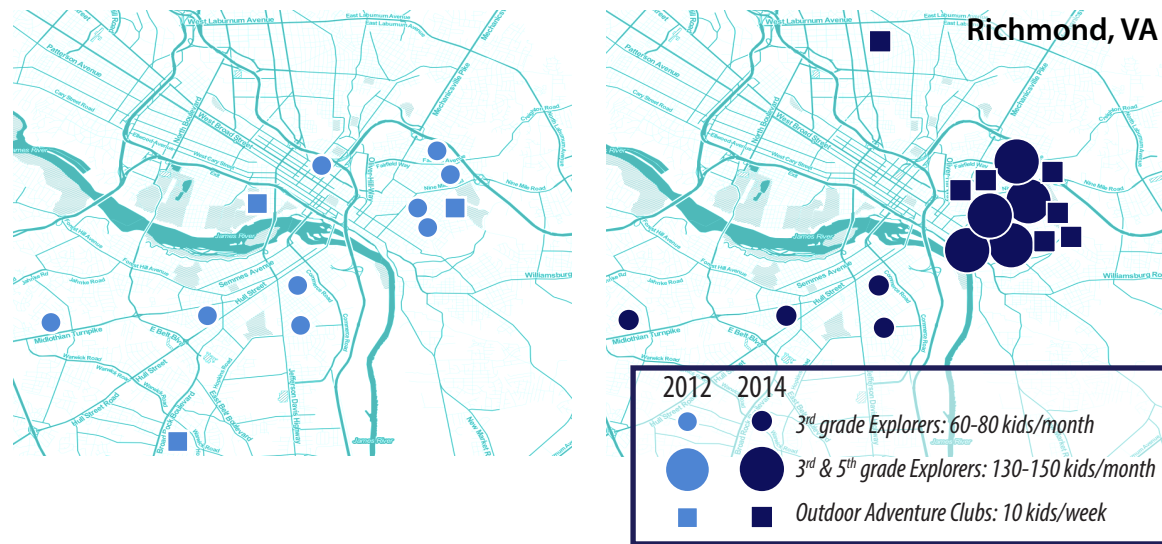
- Helping kids achieve academic success, especially in the sciences, through active outdoor education that enriches standard curriculum
- Developing character and leadership through outdoor experiences that expand horizons, increase self-efficacy, and build collaboration skills

2012 STRATEGIC PLAN:

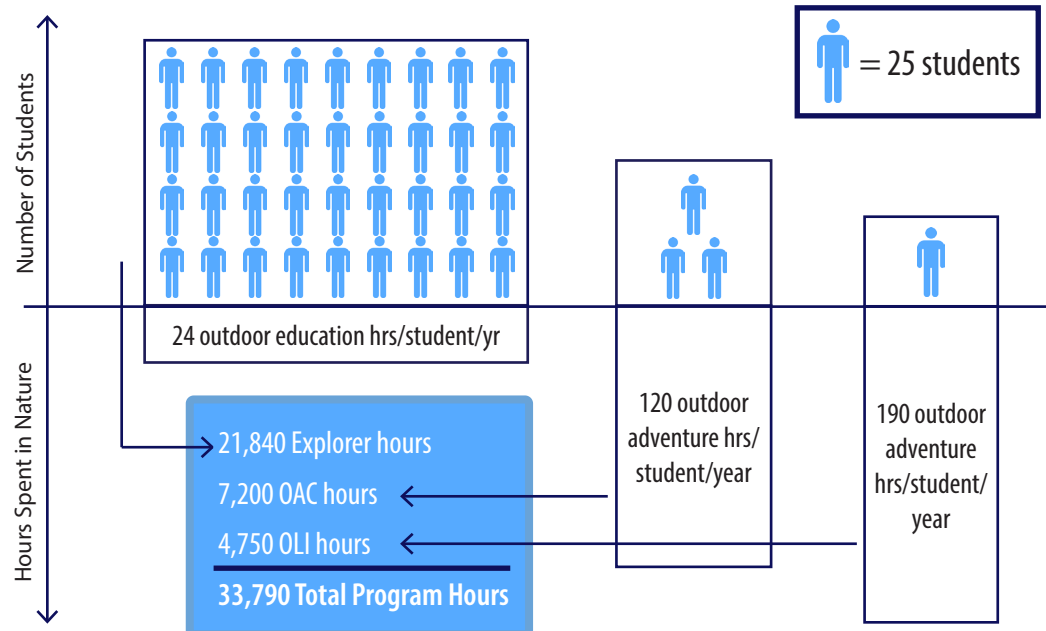
Goals and Updates

Strategic Goal: "To make the most significant impact possible, Blue Sky will focus its efforts primarily in **Richmond's East End**, with the goal of **increasing the number and depth** of Blue Sky experiences for a particular child."

Distribution of Explorers and Outdoor Adventure Clubs:

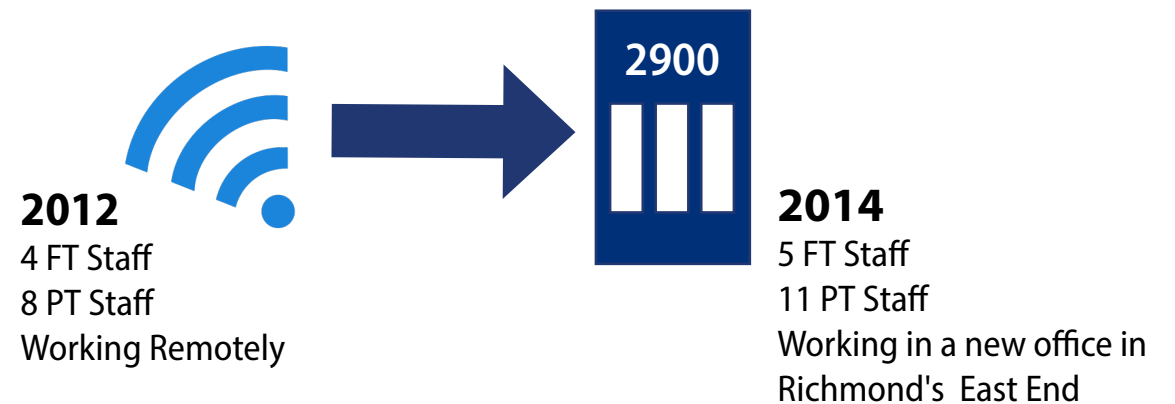


Depth and Reach of Blue Sky Core Programs:



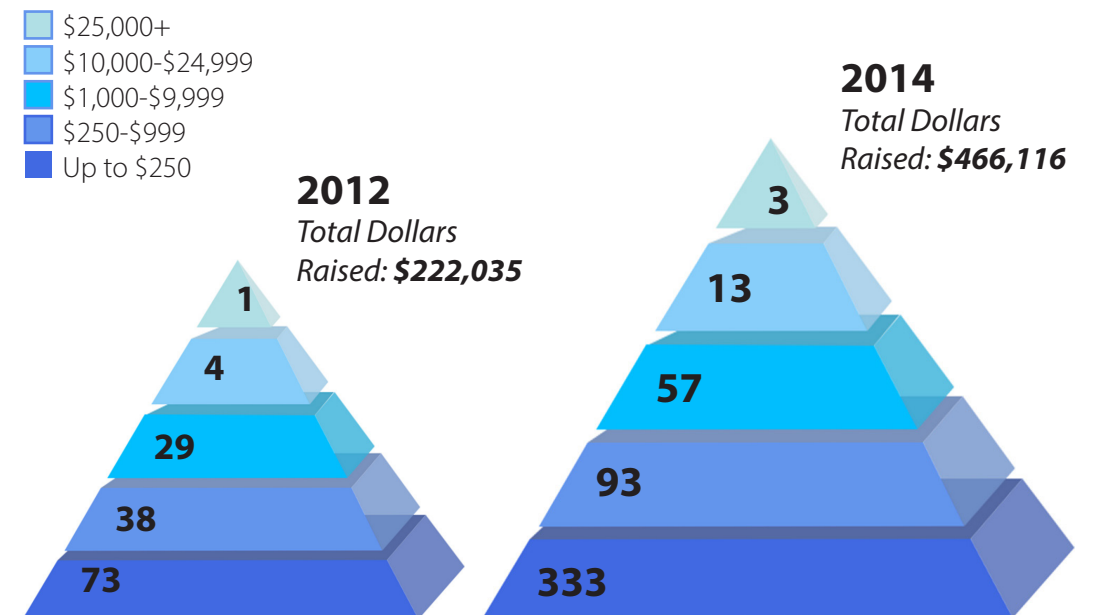
Strategic Goal: "Blue Sky has been successful at operating on a **shoestring budget** for overhead expenses – the office is virtual, there are no employee benefits, and employees provide their own technology tools. The goal for this planning period is to **establish the physical and procedural infrastructure** that serves as a stronger foundation."

Infrastructure Growth over Time:



Strategic Goal: "Increase annual fundraising to cover an estimated budget of \$500,000 by 2015. **Diversify sources of funds** to include corporate grants as well as individuals and foundations."

Number of Donations by Gift Level:



CORE PROGRAMS



OLI Outdoor Leadership Institute

We bring together high school students from a diverse cross section of Richmond for intensive leadership training opportunities each summer. Crews of 10 students prepare for and complete a 5-day wilderness expedition and become self-sufficient outdoor leaders. Crews continue to meet monthly for one year to do meaningful community service and environmental advocacy. In 2014 we hosted one boys' crew, one girls' crew, and one mixed gender alumni crew for a total of 25 participants.

Summer Programs

In the summer of 2014, Blue Sky facilitated the Mayor's Youth Academy Jr. STEM program. This program was designed to prepare students for placement in STEM - Science, Technology, Engineering & Math - careers and expose them to environmental job fields and mentors, while simultaneously nurturing their leadership potential and character development. Through this partnership, we served 22 students from the Richmond area.

Blue Sky also provided 22 day camp scholarships for our OAC participants to attend camps in Richmond and 12 sleep-away camp scholarships for Richmond youth to attend camp in Virginia.

Explorers

Explorers learn about nature by being in nature. We lead students on unique monthly field trips during 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 expand their horizons. We served over 900 Richmond Public School students in 2014.

OAC Outdoor Adventure Clubs

Our clubs use outdoor adventure activities such as rock climbing, kayaking, backpacking, and camping to teach life-skills and build confidence. OAC leaders also provide outdoor skill and spiritual mentorship for club members. Each semester culminates in an Expedition that challenges the youth to use their new skills in the great outdoors. At the close of 2014, we had seven active clubs meeting weekly, for a total of 65 participants.

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE CLUBS



Technology and Science:

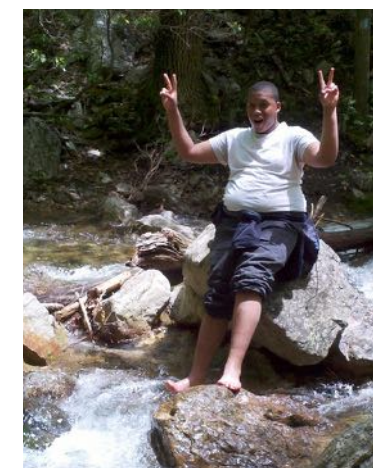
In the Fall of 2014, Blue Sky Fund introduced it's first "Math Intensive" Outdoor Adventure Club, which highlighted some of the basic math and science concepts behind outdoor adventure sports. We also introduced the use of Einstein education tablets into our clubs, allowing students hands on encounters with GPS navigation and geocaching!

Deeper

In just two years, Blue Sky retooled a struggling program model to build Outdoor Adventure Clubs that could help us go deeper with kids by having regular weekly interactions and skill building. We are proud to report that this model is working and scaling as we now have 7 active clubs. In 2014, we went deeper with our students by having returning participants in all of our 2nd year clubs, offering week-long day camp scholarships to club members, and developing student decision making within our curriculum.'

Upon exiting our 2013-14 OAC programs, **95%** of students said they would like to do another Blue Sky program

100% of educational partners that had an OAC in the 2013-14 year invited Blue Sky to return for the 2014-15 year



OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

Higher

Our developing young leaders in OLI climbed higher in 2014 both literally and figuratively. A group of ambitious alumni from the previous OLI year put their newly acquired leadership skills into practice as they designed and completed a more rigorous backpacking trip up the highest peak east of the Mississippi River, Mount Mitchell. We plan to follow them as they take Blue Sky to higher places with their student-led Teen Challenge Event, their commitment to each other, and their pursuit of Blue Sky's first paid student internships in the summer of 2015.

"I have changed the way I look at the wilderness, in that it is not just fun to be outside, but it can also bring different people together."

17 OLI Members summited Mt Rogers (5,728 ft)

8 OLI Alumni summited Mt Mitchell (6,683 ft)



As a result of my child's participation in OLI he has "more insight and empathy towards others whose lives have not been as easy as his."
- OLI Parent Survey

100% of polled participants said that OLI enhanced or reinforced their leadership abilities

100% of polled parents said that they would recommend OLI to other parents



Lindsey Shavers *a deep blue leader*

Lightning struck within 100 ft of my OLI crew during our 2013 backpacking trip:
we were forever changed.

Together, we faced our fears and achieved our goal of summiting Mt. Rogers. We realized that we are capable of achieving great things. And we were all eager to go on another trip with Blue Sky. This led to the creation of OLI 2.0.



Before embarking on my second OLI backpacking trip, I envisioned a very similar experience to my first trip. I thought the trail would look the same, my backpack would feel the same, and group dynamics would be the same. But, my experience on Mt. Mitchell was amazingly different. I credit this to the people with whom I traveled.

Taking on Mt. Mitchell as a co-ed group definitely made this trip unique. The diversity among us led to interesting conversations that proved invaluable during a few challenging situations. **How else would we have avoided a close encounter with a bear and survived a swarm of angry hornets? Withstood bee stings, tackled challenging climbs, and cared for an ankle injury?**

Lawson, Steven, and Brett kept us safe while giving us opportunities to tackle unique challenges Mother Nature put in our way. Using trust, faith, respect, ingenuity, and perseverance as our tools, we remained calm and worked as a team to summit the highest point in the United States east of the Mississippi River.

My participation in OLI led to my role in co-creating of Richmond Virginia's first ever RVA Outdoor Teen Leadership Challenge with five members of my original backpacking crew. We created the event to help other teens fall in love with leadership, volunteer service, and the outdoors. Our event was a huge success with over 50 attendees.

Since my first backpacking trip in 2013, I have grown tremendously. **I am one of those transformed kids!** All of my experiences with the Blue Sky Fund have helped me become a more effective and engaged community leader.

EXPLORERS



"The kids seemed to really enjoy Blue Sky trips. It was a great review and gave them many real life examples to remember. Great job Blue Sky!"

**3rd Grade Teacher,
Blackwell ES**



Based on a thorough evaluation of our 2013-2014 school year pilot program in 5th and 7th grades, we proceeded to fully implement the 5th grade program in all five 7th District elementary schools. This means all students in those five schools have eight field trips with Blue Sky in 3rd grade and eight more field trips in 5th grade, deepening their interaction and engagement with Blue Sky.

Deeper

81% of students improved their science grades over the course of the school year OR maintained a B or above

Teacher Feedback:

On average, our teachers rated their satisfaction with us at a **3.52 out of 4**, corresponding to **Well → Very Well.**

2014 Partnership Highlight James River Association

Through a new partnership with JRA, our 7th grade students took a boat to Presquile Island National Wildlife Refuge, where they observed wildlife, used compound and field microscopes, touched real live fish, and experienced their solar array. A big 'Thank You' to the Education Team at JRA for going "deeper blue" with their commitment and support of Blue Sky.



Bernly Bressler

expanding corporate partnerships



I am coming up on my two year anniversary as a Blue Sky board member, which makes it a great time for some reflection.

Early on, I was looking for ways to make an impact on Blue Sky beyond volunteering and board service. I work as an environmental consultant and I realized my local office could lend a hand to program enhancement for the Explorers. My team and I developed a hands-on groundwater pollution experiment and transformed that experiment into a teaching session for the third graders. This experiment is thrilling for the kids and the content meets the Standards of Learning (SOL) for Virginia Public Schools.

As a team, my office has been delivering this experiment to each of the Explorers groups year after year. Last year, one of my fondest memories came working as a volunteer and teaching this same experiment. The teaching

session happened to be on a very chilly Virginia morning, and frost was on the ground when I walked out my front door. I decided to take some of my wood from my wood pile so I could build a fire during my lesson, which happened to be at an outdoor natural park outside the City. I ended up building two large fires to help warm the kids. Upon arrival, the kids were so excited to just see a real-life fire. To quote one of the kids "Look, that's a real fire, not on TV!" And while this sounds silly, something as simple as bringing the experience of fire (something we all take for granted) was quite powerful for me.

Every time I leave a teaching session I feel invigorated and excited as I have done something personally to change a child's life. The kids are what keeps me coming back, and being part of their excitement, curiosity, and thirst for knowledge is a privilege and honor, even as a volunteer.



LEADERSHIP STAFF



Charles Johnson

Program Manager - Academic Programs

Lawson Wijesooriya

Executive Director

Steven Cottam

Program Manager - Adventure Programs

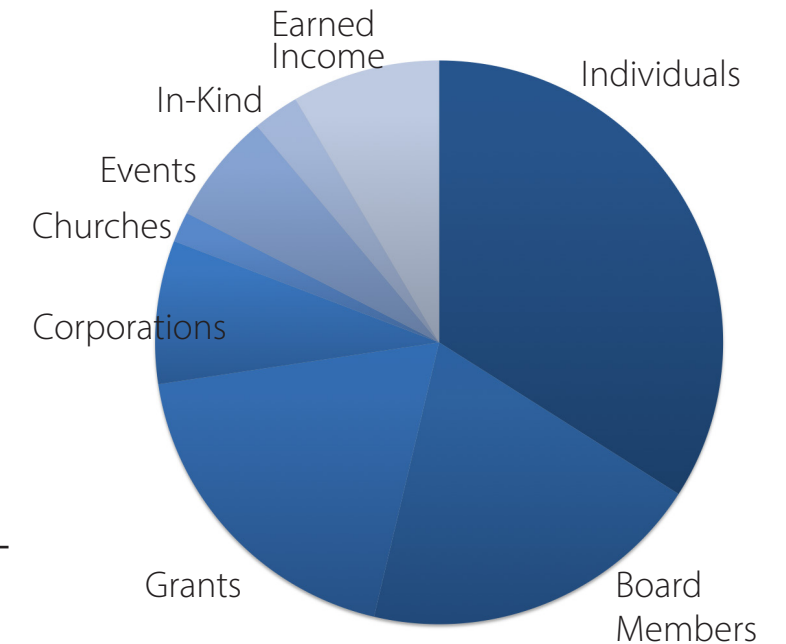
Amanda Payne

Business Manager

FINANCIAL UPDATE

2014 Revenue

Individuals	170,618
Board Members	98,468
Grants	94,930
Corporations	41,223
Churches	8,700
Events	31,759
In-Kind	13,217
Earned Income	42,319
Total	\$501,234



BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Connell Mullins, President

Shareholder, SpottsFain

Charles Valentine, Vice President

Co-Founder, Lumiary

Joni Albrecht, Secretary

Community Volunteer

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President, Benefinder

Bernly Bressler

Branch Manager/Senior Project Manager, ERM

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Community Volunteer

Emily Gottwald

Community Volunteer

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President/Co-Owner, Riverside Outfitters, Inc.

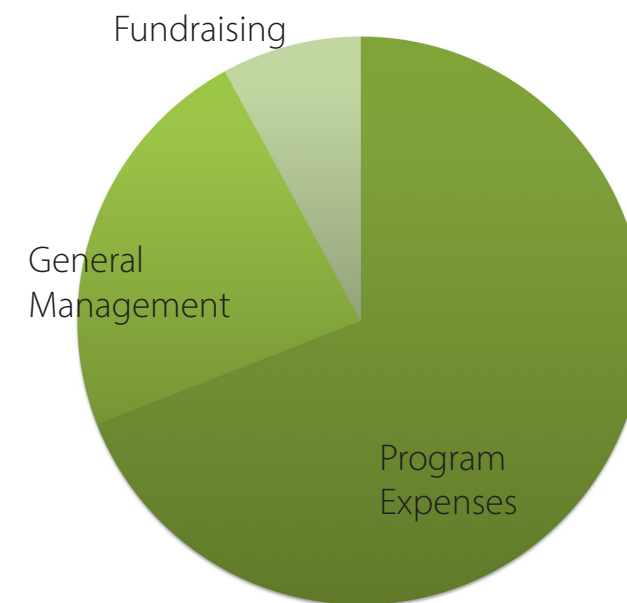
Matthew Rigby

Managing Director, Gerson Lehrman Group

Kelly Tattersall

Community Volunteer

2014 Expenses



Program Expenses

Salaries and Benefits	159,351
Direct program fees and transportation	69,647
Insurance	13,772
Occupancy	14,936
Program equipment, depreciation, and misc.	9,181

General Management

Salaries and Benefits	75,170
Occupancy	2,619
Accounting and office misc.	10,904

Fundraising

Salaries and contract work	23,922
Fundraising materials, software, and misc.	6,882

Total

\$ 386,384

Thank you for your continued support of Blue Sky!

The Summit Giving Circle (\$1,000 and above)

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 Sam and Tania McCleery
 Amelia McConnell
 Faith McCormick
 McCormick Family
 Steve and Laura McCoy
 Antoinette McCracken
 Haden McCullough
 Richmond and Rennie
 McDaniel
 Matt and Carol McGee
 McKenna Family
 Sean McKenna

Mr. and Mrs. Brock Myers
 Ross and Beth Myers
 Nemic Family
 Paul Nolte
 Rob and Janie Norfleet
 Brad and Darwin Nott
 First Community Bank
 Evan Ocheltree
 Greg Olson
 Eric Olson
 James Olson
 Osprey Packs, Inc.
 Brian and Cheryl Pacious
 Trey Packard
 Stephanie Pagan
 Matt Page
 Mr. and Mrs. Michael
 Palmore
 Jennifer Parham
 Ms Brooke W. Park
 Dustin and Lindsay Parks
 Patagonia Footwear
 Charles and Leigh Pate
 Ms Virginia W. Pate
 Anne Paul

Matthew Payes
 Will and Amanda Payne
 Bill and Nancy Payne
 Peak Experiences
 Mr. and Mrs. John Pearson
 Penn and Lynn Pendleton
 Josh Penn and Lee Taylor
 Penn
 Luke and Anne Pickett
 Mark Piehl
 Saint and Maria Pollard
 Wesley Pollard
 Bob Ponzini
 Christian and Sally Poole
 Stephen and Amy Popovich
 Viqui Potter
 Mary Potthoff
 Caitlyn Powitz
 Timothy and Karen Proctor
 Braxton and Liza Pruitt
 Thomas and Sarah Pruitt
 Michele Pugh
 Tracey Ragsdale
 Edward And Patricia Ramsey
 Jerry Ramsey
 Peter Ransone
 Roy Rathbun
 RBC Foundation
 Daniel Rearick
 Redmond Family
 Barrett Redmond
 Don and Barb Reinicker
 Reveille United Methodist
 Church
 Becky Richards
 Richmond Multisports
 Brian Rickard
 Matt and Rachel Ridenour
 Thomas W. Rigby
 Joan W. Rigby
 Richard and Elizabeth
 Rinehardt
 Danielle Ripperton
 Riverside Outfitters
 William Robins
 Mr. and Mrs. Jason Rood
 Tom and Caroline Root
 Hartwell H. Roper Fund
 Erin Rose
 Van Ruffner
 Claire Sadeghzadeh
 Salomon Shoes
 Saxon Shoes, Inc
 Amy Schaaf
 Dona and Behle Schaaf
 Jack and Martha Schilthuis
 Jill Schimmel
 Betty Schwarten
 Secretly Y'all
 Secrist Family

31st St. Baptist Church
 Anna Julia Cooper Episcopal
 School
 Boys and Girls Clubs of Metro
 Richmond
 Capitol One Sustainability Team
 Chesapeake Bay Foundation
 Church Hill Activities and
 Tutoring (CHAT)
 Communities in Schools of
 Richmond
 EarthCraft Homes Virginia

Franklin Military Academy
 Friends of Bryan Park
 Henderson Middle School
 James River Association
 James River Park System
 Lewis Ginter Botanical Gardens
 Martin Luther King Jr. Middle
 School
 Mayor's Youth Academy
 MSR 2020
 Peter Paul Development Center
 Pocahontas State Park

Project: Homes
 Richmond Public Schools
 Richmond Ropes Course
 Riverside Outfitters
 Sails Angels Richmond
 Salvation Army Boys and Girls
 Club
 Shalom Farms
 Tredegar Ironworks (National
 Park Service)
 Tricycle Gardens
 Urban Hope

VCU Outdoor Adventure
 Program
 VCU Sustainability Department
 Virginia Outside
 Virginia State University
 Watermarks Camp
 YMCA of Richmond



Blue Sky Program Partners



Let's Go For 2!

Blue Sky version 2.0 that is! We are off and running in 2015 with big plans to take Blue Sky to the next level. But first, let's look back to the outstanding achievements of 2014.

We have been very fortunate to have loyal, consistent financial support year-in and year-out, which has enabled us to always meet, and sometimes exceed, our fundraising goals. Thanks in part to incredible donor participation in the Community Foundation's Amazing Raise and to our newly acquired Neighborhood Assistance Program (NAP) state tax credits, 2014 pushed us beyond the \$500,000 mark for the first time. **THANKS TO ALL** who were part of this effort!



Not to be outdone by our grassroots development efforts, our program staff and volunteers deserve heartfelt appreciation for making 2014 an incredibly rewarding year for the 990 students that we reached through our signature programs - Explorers, Outdoor Adventure Clubs, and our Outdoor Leadership Institute. As Board President, I was most impressed by the OLI 2.0 alumni expedition, which was a trip requested, planned, and essentially led by students who are all still in high school - what a feat!

As you have read in this report, 2014 marks the end of Blue Sky's first formal strategic plan. Thanks to your partnership, our strong staff, and engaged Board, we met and exceeded the goals that we set back in 2012. Some of the primary program and fundraising goals from the first plan were as follows:

- Expand the Explorers' program beyond 3rd grade - **GOAL ACCOMPLISHED!**
- Enhance after school adventure programs - **GOAL ACCOMPLISHED!**
- Increase annual fundraising to support a budget of \$500,000 - **GOAL ACCOMPLISHED!**

Our next strategic plan is taking shape right now, and we know that we will need your continued support to transform young lives in bigger and deeper ways. Thank you to our donors, staff, and volunteers for 2014's success, and we look forward to upcoming partnerships that further support adventures for our kids. With your help, we can continue to strengthen this strong foundation that empowers these kids to climb higher than they ever dreamed.

Sincerely,
Connell Mullins
Board President



BLUE SKY FUND
2012 - 2014