**OUR MISSION**

To provide transformational experiences for urban youth through outdoor education

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**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

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**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 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
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:

2012
5 FT Staff
11 PT Staff
Working Remotely

2014
4 FT Staff
8 PT Staff
Working in a new office in Richmond’s East End

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:

2012
2014

3rd grade Explorers: 60-80 kids/month
3rd & 5th grade Explorers: 130-150 kids/month
Outdoor Adventure Clubs: 10 kids/week

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:

2012 Total Dollars Raised: $222,035

2014 Total Dollars Raised: $466,116

$25,000+
$10,000-$24,999
$1,000-$9,999
$250-$999
Up to $250
CORE PROGRAMS

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.

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.

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.

Technology and Science:
In the Fall of 2014, Blue Sky Fund introduced its 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!

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 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.

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.

OAC Outdoor Adventure Clubs
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.

OLI Outdoor Leadership Institute
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.

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

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.

Teacher Feedback:
On average, our teachers rated their satisfaction with us at a 3.52 out of 4, corresponding to Well — Very Well.

Deeper

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

Steven Cottam  
Program Manager - Adventure Programs

Lawson Wijesooriya  
Executive Director

Amanda Payne  
Business Manager

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Community Volunteer

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Matthew Rigby  
Managing Director, Gerson Lehrman Group

Kelly Tattersall  
Community Volunteer

2014 Revenue

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Source</th>
<th>Amount</th>
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<td>Individuals</td>
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2014 Expenses

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<td>Program Expenses</td>
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<td>Salaries and Benefits</td>
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<td>Fundraising materials, software, and misc.</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>$386,384</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Thank you for your continued support of Blue Sky!

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Holmberg Family
Travis Honeycutt
Danny and Tvia Hong
Jennifer Hoover
Wayne Hoover
Horton Family
Jon and Katy Hottinger
Annie Green Howard
Howe Family
Nyeleti Hudson
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