

BLUE SKY FUND

2015 ANNUAL REPORT

BLUE SKY
TRAILS
AHEAD



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.



A LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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.

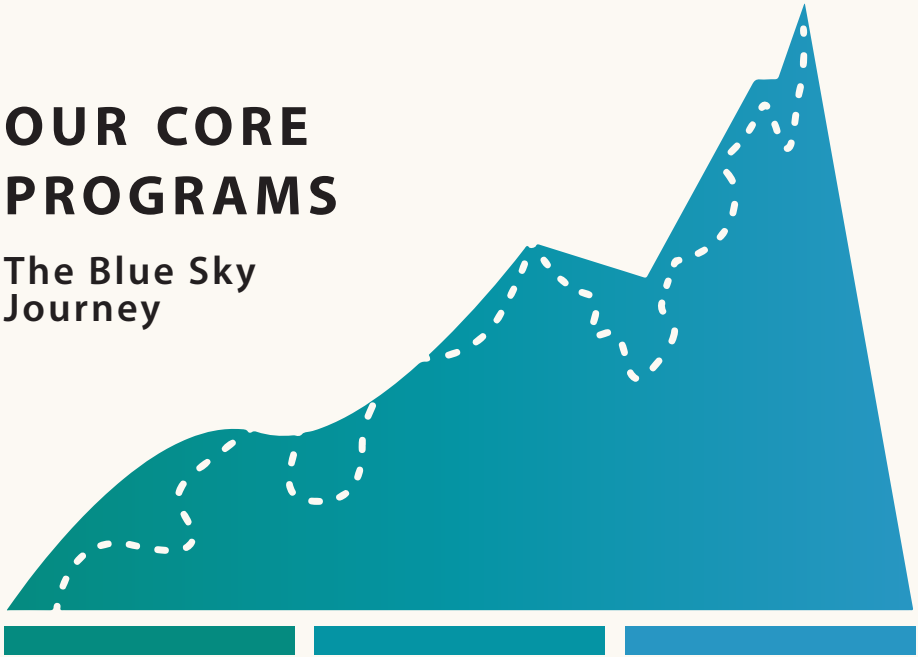
I am beginning to see the evidence of success – Blue Sky hired back four former students as summer staff in 2015! But we still have a long journey ahead. There are more needs to be met and students who deserve to feel empowered, and we hope that you will find a way to journey with us as a participant,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

OUR CORE PROGRAMS

The Blue Sky Journey



EXPLORERS

**OUTDOOR
ADVENTURE
CLUBS (OAC)**

**OUTDOOR
LEADERSHIP
INSTITUTE (OLI)**

Number of participants

917

71

25

Program frequency

Monthly

Weekly

Daily in the Summer

Age

Elementary School

Middle School

High School

Hours spent with each child a year

32

128

209

Learned Skill

Science Exploration

Resiliency

Leadership

2 0 1 5

HIGHLIGHTS



1199 youth reached

49 partnerships built or maintained

Hired back our students as
Junior Leaders



EXPLORERS

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

Quianday Worthington

13 years old

2011-2014
3rd Grade &
5th Grade
Explorer
Participant

2015-2016
OAC Participant
through the
Salvation Army
Boys & Girls Club



“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.”

OUTDOOR ADVENTURE CLUBS

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

Alyssa Brown

16 years old

2012
Rock Climbing
Expedition
Participant

2015-2016
OLI
Participant



"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."

OUTDOOR LEADERSHIP INSTITUTE

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

John Shaw

16 years old

2014-2015
OLI
Participant

2015
OLI
Alumni Trip
Participant

2015
Junior
Leader



"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

Lawson Wijesooriya
Executive Director

Charles Johnson
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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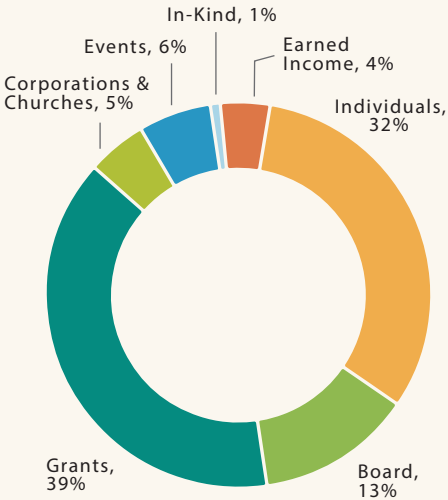
Richard Madden
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*Director of Corporate
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Matt Perry
*President/Co-Owner, Riverside
Outfitters, Inc.*

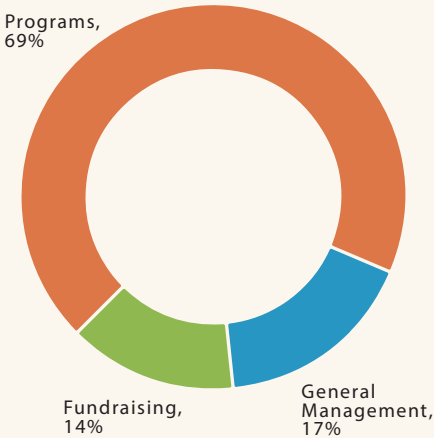
Kelly Tattersall
Community Volunteer

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

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

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.

\$25,000+

CarMax Foundation

Sam and Emily Gottwald

Pauley Family Foundation

Richard S. Reynolds
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Kirk and Kelly Tattersall

\$10,000 - \$24,999

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Tallent

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Virginia

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\$500 - \$999

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PARTNERS

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.

31st St. Baptist Church

Anna Julia Cooper
Episcopal School

Armstrong High School

Bellevue Elementary
School

Blackwell Elementary
School

Boys and Girls Clubs of
Metro Richmond

Chimborazo Elementary
School

Church Hill Activities and
Tutoring (CHAT)

Communities in Schools
of Richmond

Fairfield Court Elementary
School

Franklin Military Academy

Friends of Bryan Park

George Mason Elementary
School

Groundwork RVA

Henderson Middle School

James River Association

James River Park System

Kayak Richmond

Lewis Ginter Botanical
Garden

Luck Stone

Martin Luther King Jr.
Middle School

Miles Jones Elementary
School

New Kent Forestry Center

Next Up

Oak Grove - Bellmeade
Elementary School

Peak Experiences

Peter Paul Development
Center

Pocahontas State Park

Poor Farm Park

Randolph Macon College

Renew Richmond

Richmond Cycling Corps

Richmond Public Schools

Richmond Ropes

Richmond SPCA

Riverside Outfitters

Roslyn Center

Salvation Army Boys and
Girls Club

Shalom Farms

Tredegar Ironworks
(National Park Service)

Tricycle Gardens

U-Turn Sports

Urban Hope

VCU Outdoor Adventure
Program

Virginia Outside

Watermarks Camp

Woodville Elementary
School

YMCA of Richmond

York River State Park

A LETTER FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT



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!

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Connell Mullins". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Connell Mullins



Blue Sky Fund

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