

10
YEARS



2025 ANNUAL REPORT



NATURE IS





FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR & FOUNDER

This report is not just a snapshot of Team Wilderness' impact over the past year. It reflects the work, creativity, and growth of the young people in our programs, and the community that makes it possible.

This past year tested us in unexpected ways, bringing challenges that required focus, adaptability, and trust in one another. In those moments, our community showed what is possible. Supporters, partners, and families came together, stepping forward with generosity and belief in our mission.

That collective response carried us forward. It became part of the climb.

Through the commitment of our staff and a deep focus on youth voice, we continued creating pathways for young people to express themselves, understand who they are, and experience new possibilities. Together, we are moving toward higher ground. Our commitment to young people remains unwavering, and in 2025 we deepened that commitment by expanding our programs to serve youth in Newark.

This work is only possible because of those who believe in it. Your support allows us to navigate uncertainty and continue building something lasting for young people across our community. Thank you for standing with us and for taking the time to learn more about who we are. By meeting young people where they are, Team Wilderness provides the space and support they need to grow, explore, and shape their own path forward.

With gratitude,

STEVE

FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

Team Wilderness started 2025 with a punch to the gut from the federal government. A congressionally appropriated, fully executed three-year grant — foundational to our ability to serve youth — was abruptly terminated. After years of planning, we had weeks to respond to a funding gap created overnight.

In the most challenging moment in our organization's history, you — our supporters — stepped up when we needed you most.

Because of you, we didn't flinch. With renewed purpose, we persisted in our mission of closing the Nature Gap — ensuring the youth we serve have access not just to the outdoors, but to the proven health, confidence, and life benefits that come with it.

We stayed focused on what matters most: showing up for our youth with quality programs and a consistent safe space where they can be themselves. And they showed up for us — and for themselves.

Among all the metrics we track, youth voice matters most: 95% report a sense of accomplishment, and participants remain in our programs for nearly three years on average.

Last year was about climbing this challenge together. With your continued support, 2026 will be about empowering more youth and reaching new heights.

With sincere appreciation,

Juan



OUR TEAM

At Team Wilderness, our team reflects the community we are part of. From staff and leadership to our Board of Trustees, we are intentional about building a group whose experiences and perspectives align with the young people and families around us.

Many of our team members have deep roots in Hudson County, bringing both

professional expertise and lived experience to our work. This allows us to build trust, create spaces where young people feel safe and supported, and design programs that are relevant, responsive, and grounded in everyday realities.

We believe in developing leadership from within. Many of our alums return as staff, mentors, and instructors,

strengthening our programs through shared experience and helping shape the next generation of leaders.

By prioritizing representation, consistency, and strong relationships at every level, we ensure that our work remains authentic, grounded, and connected to the young people at the heart of it.



From left to right: Steve Cunningham, Steph Silva, Joe DeFeo, Wendy De Armas Dominguez, Isabel Santos, Kiara Jorge, Mwikali Muindi, Cristal Rojas, Paula McMillan-Perez, Shane Strano, Ke Tenn, Yawa Endara, Gelmaris Rijaard, Javier Paz, Alexander Diaz, Christian Barbosa, Sara Adamu, Andrea Castro, Aracelis Hannah, Melodee Sampson



OUR BOARD OF TRUSTEES

From left to right:

Vice-President: Jennie Pu, Director, Hoboken Public Library

Trustee: Alexandrie Adebayo, Senior Global Compensation Analyst, ADP

Trustee: Thomas Pietrykoski, Director, PSEG Communications

Trustee: Helen Corona, K-12 Education Ambassador, T-Mobile

Trustee: Elvi Guzman, Founder & CEO Winning Events Group

Trustee: Cheyne Scott, Partner, Chasan Lamparello Mallon & Cappuzzo

Trustee: Stephanie Yosco-Dwyer, Director Of Strategic Partnerships, Students 2 Science

Trustee: Rasheed Chambers Sr, Founder, NJ Web Studios

Treasurer: Emily Feldman, Owner, Emily's Bookkeeping

President: Juan Melli, Partner, Mercury Public Affairs

Not pictured:

Secretary: Brenda Kessler, Program Manager, Children & Nature Network

Trustee: Julio Garcia, Executive Director, Puertorriqueños Asociados for Community Organization

Trustee: Pamela Johnson, Founder & Executive Director, Anti-Violence Coalition of Hudson County

OUR ADVISORY BOARD

Lilia Diaz, Process Lead of Payment Assistance Intake Department, PSEG

Richard Dwyer, Retired Sr. Public Affairs Manager, PSE&G

Shince Francis, Partner, PwC

Vanessa Rodriguez, Supervisor - Office of the Construction Code Official, City of Jersey City

Joel Torres, Chief Executive Officer, PRAB

April Vella, Supervisor of Mathematics, Northern Valley Regional High School District

OUR MISSION

The mission of Team Wilderness is to provide youth from urban areas with transformative outdoor experiences that cultivate a deep connection with nature while promoting personal and academic growth and overall well-being.

OUR APPROACH

We believe young people grow strongest when they are given the opportunity to challenge themselves, build meaningful relationships, and connect with the world around them. Our programs meet youth where they are, creating environments where they feel seen, heard, and valued as they navigate critical stages of development both in and out of the classroom.

We are committed to elevating youth voices and ensuring that young people play an active role in shaping their experiences.

Through consistent support and strong relationships, participants build trust, develop confidence, and step into leadership roles over time.

Through outdoor experiences, academic support, mental health services, and creative expression, we provide

Empathy

Teamwork

Health

Inclusivity

Community

Adversity

Leadership

programming that supports the whole person. Whether on a mountain trail, in a classroom, or behind a camera, participants are encouraged to explore who they are and what they are capable of. This work is guided by our E.T.H.I.C.A.L. framework.

These values are practiced through shared experiences, reflection, and real-world application. Young people learn to support one another, navigate challenges, and grow through those experiences.

Across all programs, our goal is to ensure that young people feel supported, confident, and able to use their voice. The impact builds over time through consistent relationships and experiences that help them see new possibilities for themselves.



450

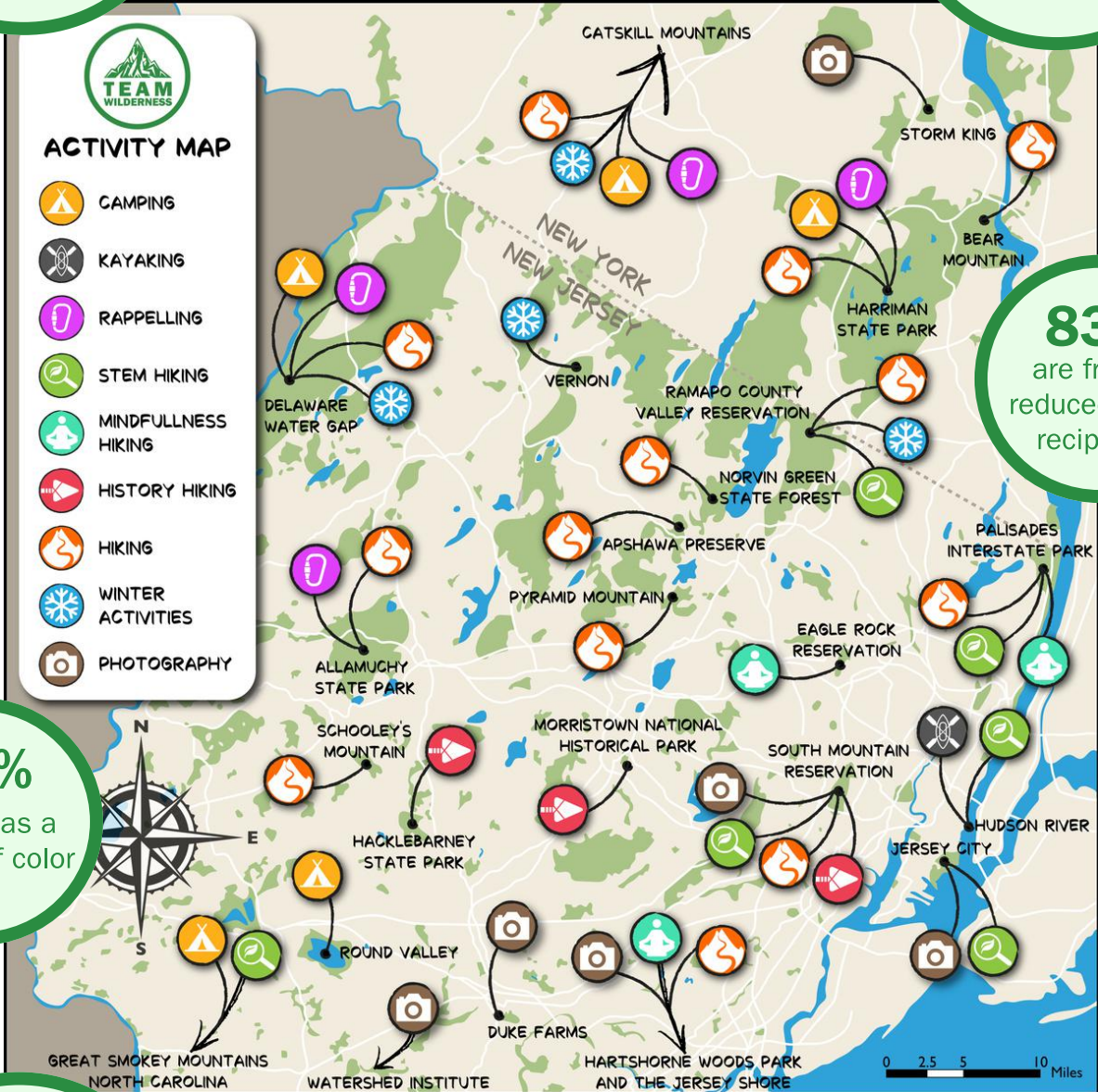
youth served in 2025

11,000

program hours delivered

70%

programming hours were outdoors



83%

are free or reduced lunch recipients

92%

identify as a person of color

72

youth received weekly support services like counseling and academic coaching

Experiences ranged from outdoor expeditions to creative expression and one-on-one guidance

For nearly all new participants their outdoor experience was a first for them.

Compass Project

Compass Project is our free academic coaching program, supporting young people with consistent, personalized guidance during key academic years. Through one-on-one coaching, college preparation, and ongoing mentorship, participants build the structure, habits, and confidence needed to navigate school and plan for what comes next.

The program is structured in two tiers to create a supportive, peer-connected experience. High school participants receive academic coaching alongside mentorship from current college students, while first-generation college students in the second tier deepen their own growth and leadership by serving as paid mentors to younger participants.

By integrating outdoor experiences with academic development, Compass Project helps young people apply resilience, problem-solving, and self-awareness from the outdoors to their academic lives and daily routines. This approach is reflected in participant outcomes, with **more than 90% reporting improvements in confidence, organization, and stress management**, and **over 30%** identifying **significant gains in their academic performance** and related markers.

“This program has really helped me put my goals more in focus. I didn't have that before. But now I have time management and organization skills. It has made a huge impact. Now we're working on study techniques.

~Jayden



North Star Project

North Star Project provides young people with free, confidential mental health support through sustained, one-on-one counseling and small group outdoor experiences. Participants meet weekly with a licensed social worker, creating a trusted space to talk openly about stress, relationships, identity, and overall well-being.

This relationship-driven approach supports consistent engagement, with 90% of participants maintaining regular counseling sessions. Over time, young people build coping strategies, strengthen self-awareness, and feel more connected to themselves and others. As a result, 95% report increased self-awareness, confidence, and a stronger sense of being heard. Ongoing wellness tracking shows sustained improvement in participant mental health throughout the year. By December, the majority of **participants reported minimal or no symptoms of depression (81%) and anxiety (62%)**, reflecting a steady decline in moderate to severe symptom levels over time.



“My time at this program has been wonderful. I have made lots of friends and improved my mental health and the way that I feel about myself overall.

~Neriah



Photography Programs

Team Wilderness' photography programs combine creative expression with outdoor exploration, giving young people the tools to tell their stories and see their surroundings with a new perspective.

Photo Camp is an immersive, week-long summer experience where youth learn the fundamentals of photography while exploring parks, neighborhoods, and natural spaces. With all equipment and meals provided, the program is designed to be accessible to families across income levels. By the end of the week, each participant produces a small portfolio of printed work that reflects both technical growth and personal perspective.

Photography Club extends this work throughout the school year with weekly after-school sessions and monthly trips. Participants learn camera techniques and composition while practicing in real-world settings. Each trimester culminates in a student-led gallery, where young artists curate, price, and sell their work. **In their three exhibitions of 2025, participants collectively earned nearly \$4,000.**

Across both programs, participants report meaningful growth, with nearly **90% noting increased confidence and creativity, 83% stronger creative expression, and 81% an improved ability to navigate personal and academic challenges.** Through this work, young people develop technical skills, a sense of ownership, and deeper connection to their sense of self and their community.



It's really unique to learn how to express yourself through your pictures. Each picture I took on the trail wasn't just a cool photo but an expression of how I felt in that moment. One of my most impactful memories was selling a photo I took in our gallery. It was exhilarating!

~ Cinthya

Seasonal Programs

Team Wilderness's Seasonal Programs provide immersive outdoor experiences that help young people build confidence, teamwork, and leadership through shared challenges.

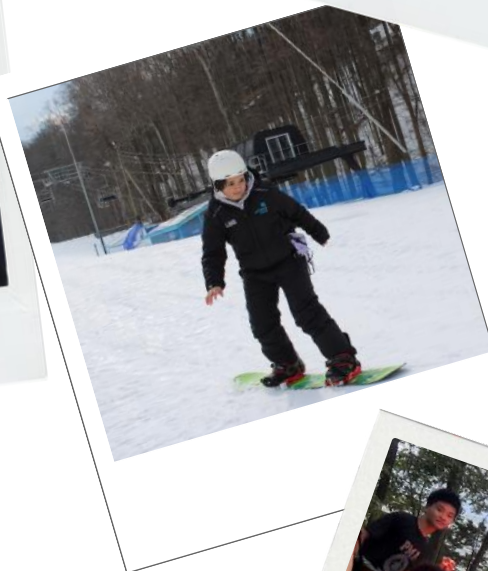
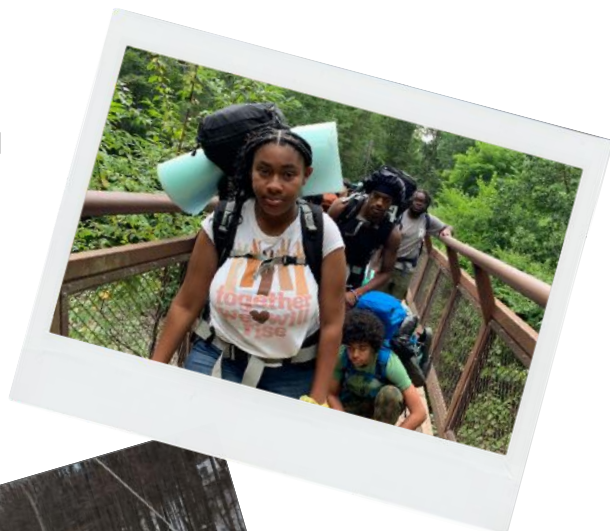
Summer Treks is a two-week program designed to be accessible to families across income levels. Participants engage in hiking, camping, and rappelling while developing problem-solving skills and working as a team. Daily reflection connects these experiences to personal growth, culminating in a three-day backpacking trip in the Appalachian Trail and Delaware Water Gap region.

Through these hands-on experiences, **75% of participants report an increased willingness to try new things**, and **80% demonstrate growth in** key life skills such as **teamwork and leadership**.

Winter Treks, launched winter 2025/2026, by expanding our work into a free, four-week program where youth learn to ski and snowboard through small-group instruction. With all equipment and winter gear provided, the program offers participants their first experience with winter sports while continuing to build confidence and resilience in new environments.

“
At first I was nervous and tired but Team Wilderness makes you feel so welcome throughout every adventure. They also put out a never give up attitude and before long we all had it too. But camping was by far my favorite. It made me feel so much more connected to nature.

~ *Diaisha*



“
It's more than just trips; it's helped me grow as a person and made me think about what I want to do in the future.

~ *Isaac*



Wilderness Club

Wilderness Club is Team Wilderness's free after-school program for youth ages 12 to 18, offering a consistent, supportive space during the week. Meeting three days a week, the program combines academic support, creative exploration, and outdoor-inspired learning.

Participants receive dedicated time for homework and academic assistance, along with activities that build teamwork, self-awareness, and life skills. Through hands-on challenges, peer collaboration, and mentorship, youth develop confidence and a sense of belonging.

Photography is a core part of the program. Through weekly Photography 101 sessions, participants learn camera skills, composition, and visual storytelling while building both technical ability and creative confidence.



Team Wilderness provides a collaborative, open-minded, equity and student-centered experience. From the outdoors to the classroom, each instructor brings a feeling that regardless of who you are, you belong and there is space for you. Students are allowed to take space. They hear it, feel it, and experience it.

*~ Tashi Diaz,
Summer Search*

Thank you to the entire organization and staff for your dedication and thoughtful programming. Your commitment to creating meaningful opportunities for the community is truly appreciated. I'm grateful for the work you do and for the chance to share.

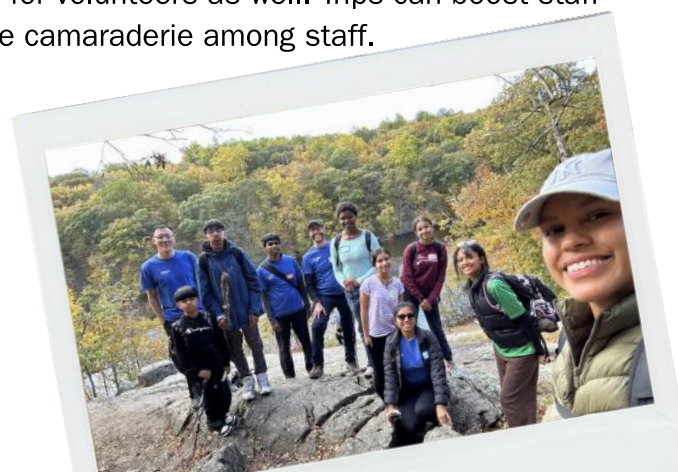
~ Marcia, parent

Partnership Programs

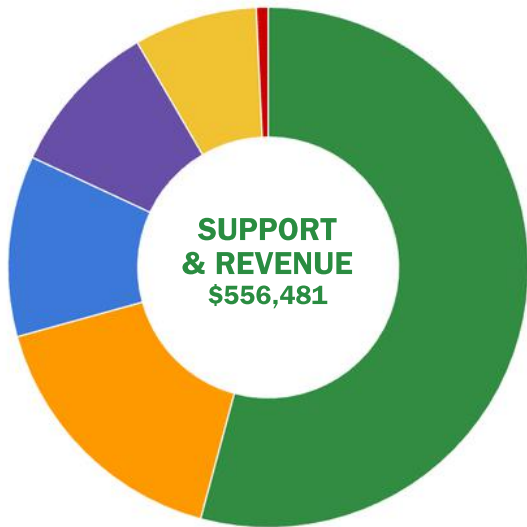
By partnering with local schools and organizations serving youth, as well as local businesses, Team Wilderness harnesses the power of local leadership and community to offer unique opportunities for mentorship, personal growth and shared experiences outdoors.

One of our longest running partnerships is with Summer Search, a national nonprofit dedicated to igniting the potential of high school students from under-resourced communities. Our partnership allows us to serve youth from throughout New York City.

Our longest running corporate partnership is with Goldman Sachs. Each year employees join Team Wilderness youth for a day-hike in a mentor-for-a-day program. These trips offer customized employee engagement experiences, connecting corporate teams with meaningful, company-sponsored volunteer opportunities. This not only serves to benefit our youth, but creates a memorable and uplifting experience for volunteers as well. Trips can boost staff morale and increase camaraderie among staff.

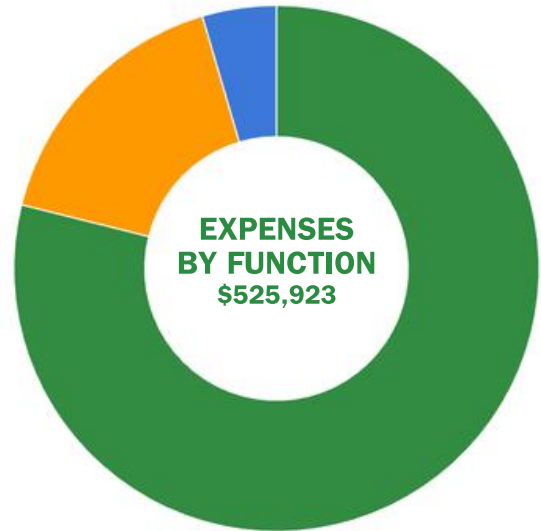


FINANCIALS



- **Grants** \$301,509
- **Individual Support** \$91,971
- **Corporate Support** \$62,528
- **Events** \$53,770
- **Partnership Programs** \$42,605
- **Tuition** \$4,098

- **Programming** \$414,929
- **Fundraising** \$87,024
- **Operating** \$23,970



These numbers have been confirmed through an independent audit. A full report of the audit's findings are available on our website.

SILVERMAN Golf Tournament

In 2025 we were the charity recipient of the annual SILVERMAN charity golf tournament. Through this generosity we were able to raise over \$36,000!



SUPPORTERS

We are grateful to all the individuals and organizations that donated to Team Wilderness in 2025. Thank you for making a difference in the lives of our youth.



10 YEARS



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