



# 2021

## ANNUAL REPORT



# A Letter From Our Founder

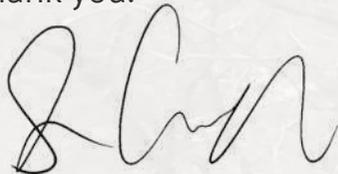
Last year we asked for your support to reach an ambitious goal of serving 300 youth. This goal would be a 50% increase in youth served. Some might have wondered why we would try to do so much in the middle of a pandemic. Surveys of our teens show that 54% of them have experienced or witnessed violence at school or in their neighborhood and 32% have experienced or witnessed gang activity. Community trauma, poverty, and the impact of decades of marginalization did not cease because of the pandemic and we couldn't either. In 2021 youth spent a record amount of time on their screens. As an organization that knows empowerment comes from being in nature, we had to serve more. We had to continue to grow. With your support we smashed through our target and reached nearly 350 teens.

We not only served more youth, but we also launched a new after-school program: Photography Club. The program teaches teens how to use a professional camera and gives them an opportunity to experience nature in an entirely unique way from our other programs. They're also able to earn money both now and in the future. The club participates in Art House Productions' JC Fridays, a quarterly city-wide arts festival. During the events our youth showcase and sell their work and retain 100% of the profit!

I am happy to introduce you to Aracelis, an amazing teen that just completed her 5th year in our programs. Aracelis has faced many challenges in life, and she shares one of them on the following pages. She is an inspiration to us all and that's exactly why starting this summer she will be our newest Junior Field Instructor!

Hopefully her story also serves as a reminder that the impact made on Aracelis - and every youth we serve - would not be possible without your support.

Thank you!



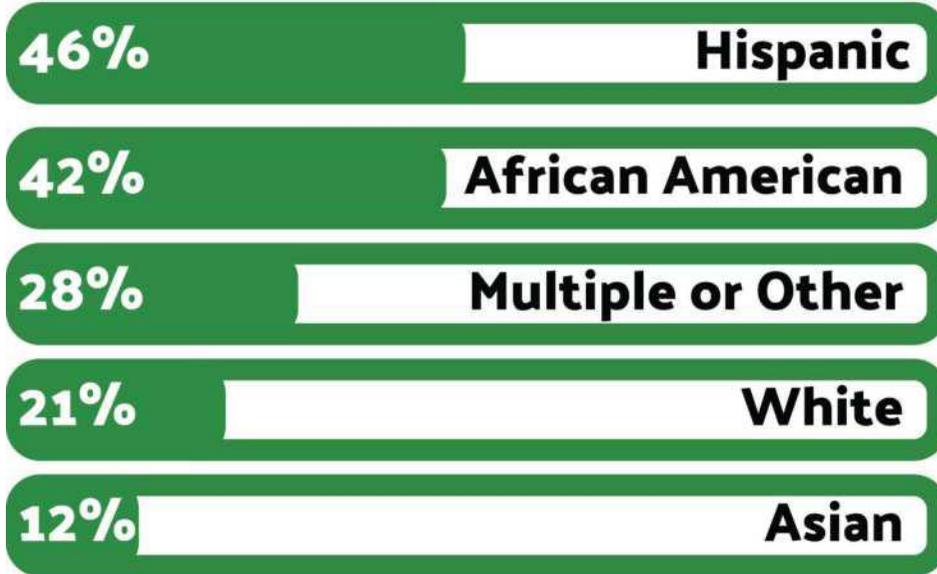
Steve Cunningham  
Executive Director





# 2021 Results

## How Participants Identified



## Free/Reduced Lunch Recipients



**95%**

reported it increased their confidence to deal with adversity in their personal & academic lives

**82%**

reported being in nature helped reduce their stress

87

2018

142

2019

**OVER**  
**3,820**   
**HOURS**  
of Outdoors Time

**208**

**2020**

**344**

**2021**

**Total Youth Served**

# Aracelis' Story

Before Team Wilderness I had some tough challenges. One of them is the bullying I had to withstand throughout middle school by classmates and from people I thought were my friends. It was so bad I decided not to attend my neighborhood's high school and chose Snyder High School instead. I felt the best way to deal with the problem was to go to a school in another part of the city and avoid them altogether.

Around the same time, my mother suggested I join one of Team Wilderness' summer programs. I tried to refuse, but she wasn't going to let me. That first year we rock scrambled through a very challenging trail. It included one mile of nothing but large boulders in 90 degree weather with no shade. It was intense and I was getting a sharp pain from my right side cramping up. I wanted to turn around or find shelter underneath a boulder until someone would carry me out. It was a mental struggle too. I had to keep encouraging myself to continue going, and when we finally got to the end I was exhausted and exhilarated. Eventually I began to embrace these challenges on the trail.

While in the Summer Treks program, we went waterfall rappelling. This is when you hike to the top of a waterfall, put yourself in a harness, and lower yourself down next to a roaring waterfall. When you're dangling from a rope above a 100' waterfall suddenly your other problems become less than what they really are.

These lessons I was learning really helped toward the end of my first year at Snyder. That year was tough. I was failing English; not just for the marking period but for the year. It was not my greatest moment, but I remembered those times on the trail when I wanted to give up and turn around but tried to persevere. It took mental strength and help from the team. So I pulled myself together, tried harder, and got help from Ms. Harris, my English teacher. It worked and I passed the class!

Since that first year, I've joined every program Team Wilderness has offered. With them I've kayaked across the Hudson, backpacked in the Great Smoky Mountains of North Carolina, and sold my pictures of nature I took in their Photography Club. I am finishing up my fifth year with Team Wilderness. It has impacted me in ways I didn't think it would. But we're not done yet! They just hired me to be one of their newest field instructors! Now I can help the next group of teens experience nature and the empowering feeling of overcoming challenges the way I did!

Team Wilderness has done a lot to make me the person that I am today and there is still much more to come. I'm much more comfortable with myself and better equipped to handle physical and mental challenges. I've learned so much about myself with these different experiences and continue to learn more as I transition into adulthood.

Both pages: Photos Aracelis took in 2021 while on a trip with Photography Club.  
Inset: Aracelis on her first backpacking trip in 2017. Photo credit: Alyssa Ki





## SUMMER TREKS

Our founding program occurs over two weeks in the summer. During week one teens hike, yoga hike, rock scramble, and even rappel down a waterfall. During week two they backpack for three days without access to electricity, running water, or even their cell phones!





## **WILDERNESS ON THE WATER**

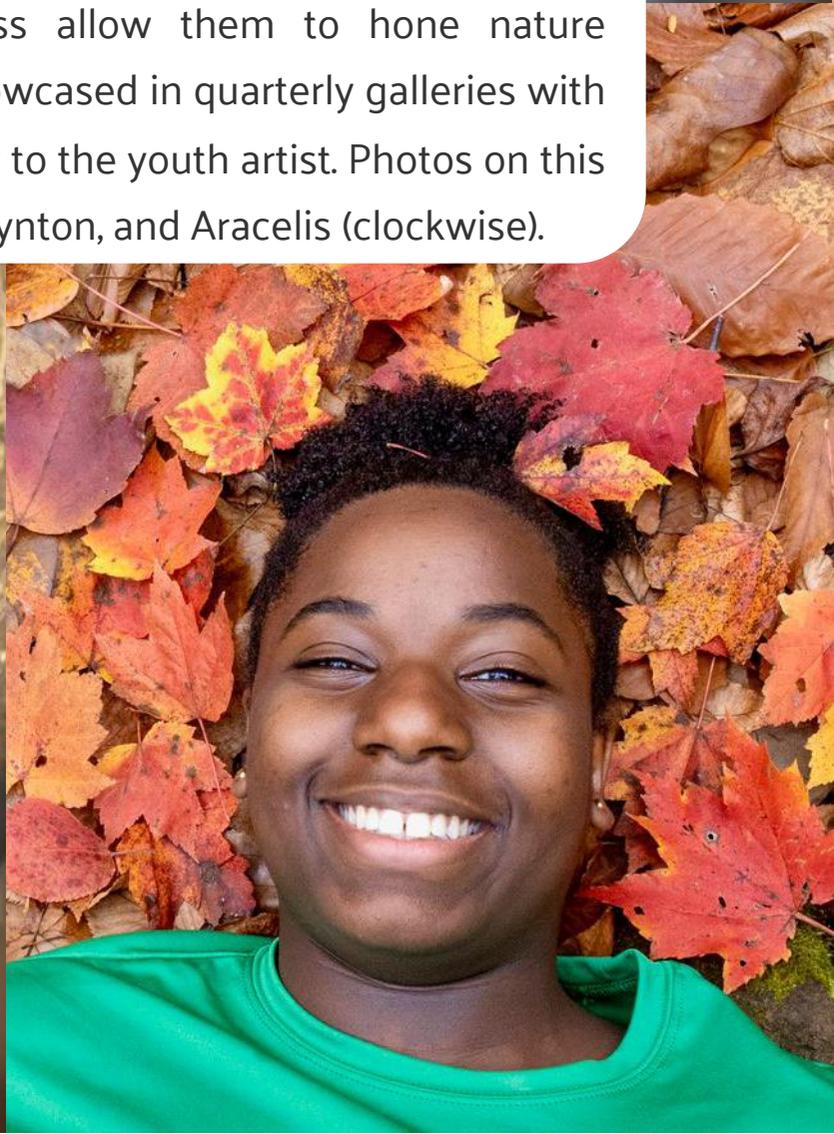
We partner with Resilience Paddle Sports for week-long water-based STEM adventures. Teens kayak and paddle board on the Hudson River while learning how to conduct water quality tests and studying the impact of climate change on the estuary.





## PHOTOGRAPHY CLUB

During the school year teens learn how to use a professional camera. Frequent trips into the wilderness allow them to hone nature photography skills. Their work is showcased in quarterly galleries with profits from sold work going directly to the youth artist. Photos on this page taken by teen artists Greta, Quyn-ton, and Aracelis (clockwise).





## WILDERNESS CLUB

This after school program is offered at Jersey City's Ezra Nolan School, MS 40. Middle school students receive tutoring and mentoring each week. Every month they venture into the wilderness on empowering outdoor adventures.



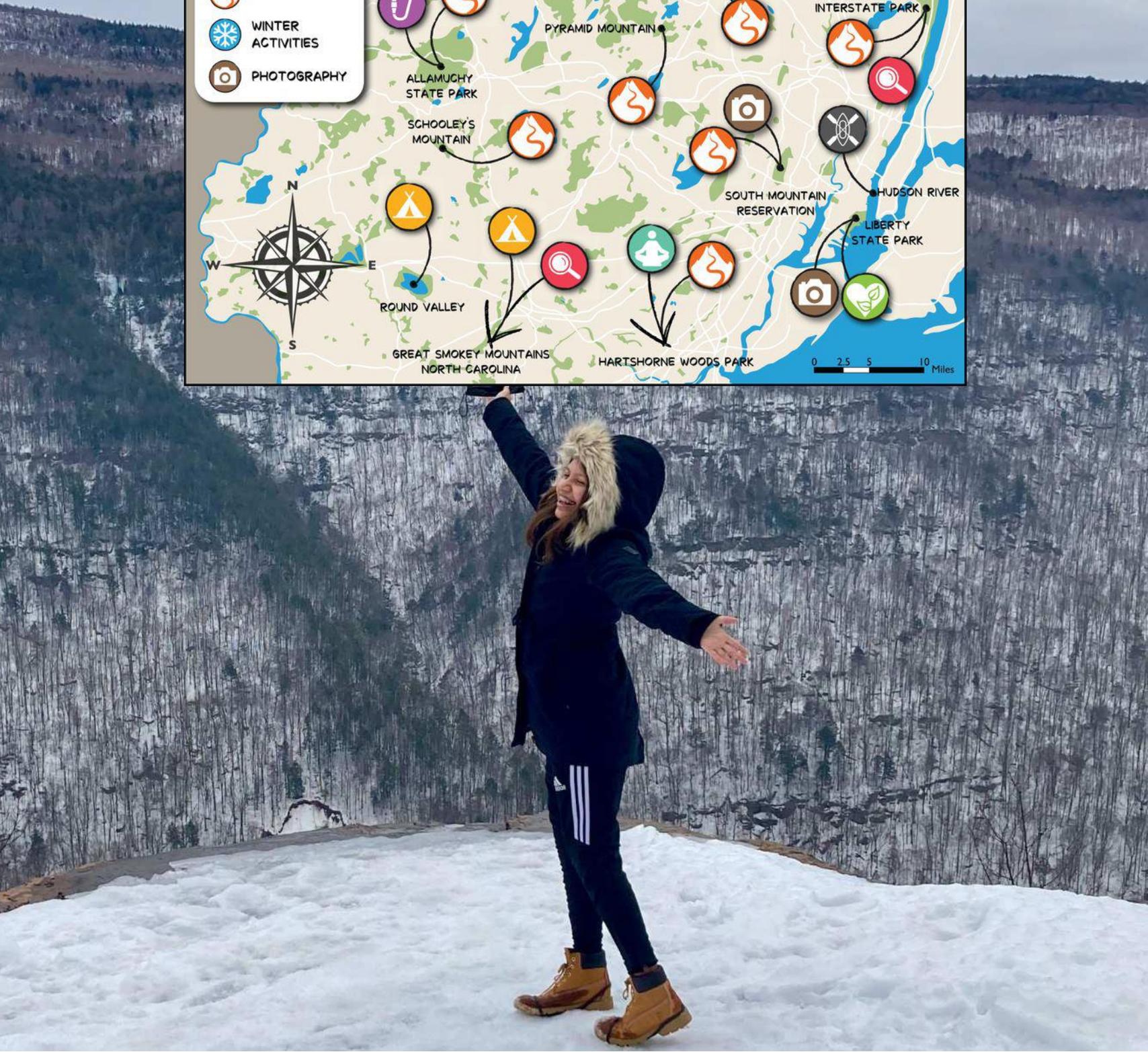


Photo Credit: Diana Richards

## PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS

We partner with Title 1 schools and non-profits to expand our reach to vulnerable youth. In 2021 partners included BelovED Charter School, The Bridges Program, the City of Jersey City, Jersey City Public Schools, Kismet of Kings, Triangle Park Community Center, Union City High School, Welcome Home, and Women Rising.



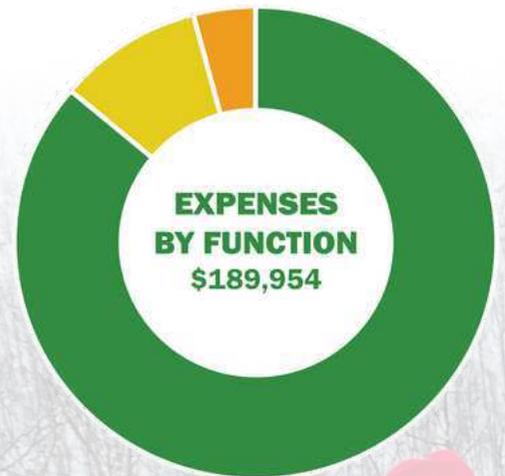


# 2021 Financials



- GRANTS \$105,606
- INDIVIDUAL SUPPORT \$60,493
- CORPORATE SUPPORT \$10,163
- PARTNERSHIP PROGRAMS \$17,500
- TUITION \$13,686
- EVENTS \$9,637

- PROGRAMMING \$163,786
- OPERATING \$18,715
- FUNDRAISING \$7,454



## FINANCIAL POSITION

**Total Assets** \$63,889

**Fixed Assets** \$23,831

**Total Liabilities** \$25,044

These figures have been verified through an independent audit.

**86% of each dollar impacts programs directly!**

## Board of Trustees

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**TEAM  
WILDERNESS**

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