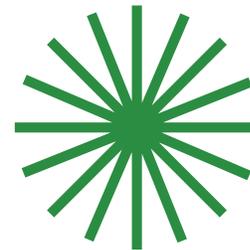




# 2024 IMPACT REPORT



# About Us

Team Wilderness is a nonprofit organization that uses an experiential educational model to teach urban teenagers teamwork, leadership, and character.

Our organization helps to promote confidence in youth, consideration for their peers, passion for the world they live in, and resilience both as an individual and a group. Facing physical and social challenges, they learn to adapt and develop real-life problem-solving skills while at the same time overcoming fears and obstacles.

Our programs are affordable for all income levels; since they cater to the youth from the community, they help positively impact the community itself.

Team Wilderness allows youth to experience hiking, backpacking, and numerous outdoor activities during single-day and overnight trips. These trips require the commitment and collaboration of the entire team. The students understand that and embrace it. The Team's adult leaders and trip experiences will cultivate reflection to unearth newfound self-confidence, undiscovered interests, and unexplored opportunities.



# Our Vision

The vision of Team Wilderness is that every urban youth have equitable access to the wilderness and be empowered by it to realize their full potential.



# 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 Theory of Change

To move Team Wilderness from empowering wilderness activities to transformative development experiences that prepare young adults for meaningful participation in society.



# Our Team

Diversity is fundamental to the success of our organization, starting with our staff, leadership, and Board of Trustees, who serve as our governing body. We are committed to ensuring that the composition of our team reflects the vibrant diversity of the youth and communities we serve.

This commitment is embodied by our Executive Team, whom have deep roots in Hudson County, NJ—a region known for its rich cultural diversity. Their deep roots in the community and lived experiences bring invaluable insights and perspectives to our work.

By prioritizing diversity across all levels, we foster representation, build trust, and create programs that resonate deeply with the communities we aim to empower.



**Steve Cunningham**

Founder/  
Executive Director



**Steph Silva**

Programming  
Director



**Hamis Guirgis**

Director of  
Development



**Vanessa Reina, LSW**

Principal Counselor



**Wendy de Armas  
Dominguez**

Programming Coordinator  
& Photo Instructor



**Kiara Jorge**

Administrative Assistant  
& Field Instructor



**Mwikali Muindi**

Academic Coach

# 2024 Impact Report



## A message from our Founder & Executive Director, Steve Cunningham

On behalf of Team Wilderness, our team is proud of our mission to bridge the nature gap for youth in Hudson County, ensuring equitable access to the outdoors regardless of background or financial resources. Our programs empower youth to connect with nature, build leadership skills, and gain confidence while fostering a deep appreciation for the environment. Initiatives like Compass Project, offering academic coaching, and North Star Project, providing mental health counseling, also support youth in overcoming challenges and building resilience.

By combining outdoor adventures with vital services, we are helping young people develop skills and experiences that will last a lifetime.



## Our 2024 Impact Snapshot

605

youth served

11,225

hours spent outside

95%

youth reported increased self confidence



## 2024 AT A GLANCE



**\$3,430.00** earned by youth artists in three **Photo Club** galleries



**15 Program Partners:** schools, corporations and other non-profits



**81%** felt their experience made them feel they could conquer more adversity in life



**Our 1st Beach Trip** Thanks Party With Purpose Jersey Shore!





# 2024 Impact Report

Did you know that **42% of our field instructors** are alumni from our programs?



*We didn't have anything else to worry about, except being in the present moment. In those moments you start noticing more things...*

*I think that being able to overcome that cliff made me feel like I could overcome anything in life.*

-Cinthya, former program participant

## 72 YOUTH

receiving weekly support services through our programs

## 24%

youth involved in more than one TW program

## 2.5 YEARS

average amount of time in our programs.

## Events that Brought us to New Heights



**Base Camp Ribbon Cutting**  
April 11th



**Annual Blazing-a-Trail Gala**  
September 26th



**First Trails & Ales: A Fundraising Hike**  
October 12th

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Jersey City, NJ 07304

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PO Box 4095  
Jersey City NJ 07304





# Summer Treks

Two weeks of empowering outdoor character building adventures.

Trips include hiking, camping, and rappelling! Breakfast and lunch is provided for all youth. Every activity and trip incorporates our E.T.H.I.C.A.L. values.

Each day includes reflection that emphasizes self-awareness, social awareness, relationship skills, responsible decision making and personal growth. The session culminates with a three day backpacking trip in the Catskill mountains. Youth unplug and bond while working together to build the campsite.

## 95%

felt their experience made them feel more connected with nature.

## 79%

felt their experience made them want to do more to care for/advocate for nature in their own community.

## 182

youth served in this program since it's inception in 2016.

# Photography Club

This after school program combining arts and nature through weekly photography lessons and monthly wilderness trips. Students learn to use professional cameras, practicing both in the classroom and the outdoors.

Dedicated youth participants showcase their work in a gallery during JC Fridays, presented by Art House Productions, where they manage budgets, set prices, and keep all profits. In the most recent gallery, students earned over \$1,600 from their art sales.

Three trimesters of Photo Club are offered each school year.



## 88%

reported feeling more creative after their experience.

## \$1,605

funds raised from our Dec 2024 gallery--all of which went back to the youth artists!

## 90%

felt their experience made them want to try new things more.

# North Star Project

This free program provides short-term 1-on-1 support sessions and monthly outdoor group trips, offering a safe and non-judgmental space for youth to discuss life, stress, happiness, and other personal challenges.

Participants meet weekly with our licensed Principal Counselor addressing issues such as depression, anxiety, self-esteem, identity exploration, and interpersonal relationships.

In addition to the sessions, youth join small, monthly outdoor trips with peers to foster connections and build resilience. The program is open to youth aged 12-18 who reside in Hudson County.



**30**

youth in the program since the inception in 2023

**75%**

youth reported that if this program didn't exist would not be able to access therapy services

**80%**

youth reported they feel they've improved both In school work and overall mental health.



# Compass Project

Our academic coaching program offers tailored support for secondary school and college students, combining 1-on-1 guidance with outdoor adventure trips. This program helps youth develop S.M.A.R.T. goals, improve time management skills, and receive assistance with college applications and the school-to-college transition.

Participants have the opportunity to address a variety of academic concerns while exploring the connection between well-being and academic performance. Monthly group hikes provide opportunities for peer interaction and personal growth.

Youth are able to stay in the program until they complete their sophomore year of college. Participants must reside or attend school in Hudson County.

**84%**

reported that being in nature helped reduce their stress levels and made them feel more calm.

**17%**

raised at least one class from a failing grade to a passing one

**3.7**

average GPA of youth involved in coaching sessions.



# Empower Youth Series

This dynamic after-school program launched in October. It provides a nurturing space for youth, emphasizing prevention, mentorship, and holistic development.

With weekly two-hour sessions held after school, it keeps kids active, engaged, and connected while promoting personal growth and resilience.

Workshop series have seasonal themes and provide a safe space as well as a place to grow social and emotional wellness.

Monthly trips and volunteer opportunities build a sense of worth, achievement, and community. The picture at the left is from their day of preparing meals during the holidays.

## 24

hours volunteering in our community

## 66%

youth reported that they feel they can apply wellness lessons to their daily life

## 10

after school wellness sessions held in 2024

# Wilderness Club

This after-school program combined weekly team-building activities, tutoring, mentoring, and nature photography lessons to middle school students at PS23 in Jersey City. Each month they embark on outdoor activities that range from climbing their first mountain to visiting a wolf preserve.

Wilderness Club is led by college students who are alumni of Summer Treks, with additional tutoring assistance provided by high school alumni of the program.



## 80%

youth felt being in nature helped positively impacted them in life

## 108

youth served in program since its inception in 2019

## 84%

youth felt the experience made them more of a team player

# Corporate Partners

## TikTok



On June 27, we hosted an incredible mentorship day at Liberty State Park with TikTok employees from Chicago and NYC! Together with 12 TikTok team members and 13 youth, we enjoyed a day of engaging activities, including a fun TikTok challenge.



The energy and connection were so strong that no one wanted the day to end. We're excited about this partnership and look forward to more collaborations with TikTok in the future!

## Goldman Sachs

On October 14, we hosted an inspiring day with 12 Goldman Sachs employees and 12 youth participants at Ramapo Valley County Conservation.

The group enjoyed engaging activities and a beautiful hike. One participant shared, "It was great to spend time with Greta and Dakota. I really enjoyed getting to know the students without them being shy or afraid to share their story. I saw myself in a few of them, and it felt amazing! Thank you!"

This was our third year in a row hosting this hike with their team members!



# Our Supporters



We are incredibly thankful to have such an amazing family of supporters. From generous individuals and families to corporations, foundations, and grant funders. Their unwavering support makes our mission possible.

Thanks to them, we can continue providing vital services and empowering outdoor adventures for youth from urban areas.

We couldn't do it without their incredible contributions—  
Thank You!



# Work with Us

You have the ability to join in our mission and make an impact on the lives of youth across Hudson County!

We're a passionate, mission-driven organization dedicated to empowering youth from urban areas through transformative outdoor adventures.

By combining nature, teamwork, and mentorship, we help young people discover their potential and develop valuable life skills.

There are so many ways to make an impact and change lives in our community.

Whether you're donating, lending your time, leading an adventure, or mentoring youth, you have the power to transform the trajectory of Hudson County kids' lives!



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