



Children  
& Nature  
Network

# 2021 ANNUAL REPORT

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## DEAR CHILDREN AND NATURE CHAMPIONS,

Throughout 2021, the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic presented challenges, but it also led to increased interest in the power of nature to restore and heal. We were honored to work with partners, longstanding and new, to build on this momentum.

We deepened our commitment to the basic human right of every child to have a connection to nature – and we refined our theory of change to better accomplish this. We found new ways to support the incredible work of children and nature advocates around the world whose creativity, resiliency and dedication inspires us as a global force for the well-being of children and the planet.

With gratitude,

Sarah Milligan-Toffler  
President & CEO,  
Children & Nature Network

Kim Moore Bailey  
Board Chair,  
Children & Nature Network  
President & CEO, Justice Outside

# HOW WE WORK

We work to increase equitable access to nature everywhere children live, learn and play by changing the systems that impact children's lives, including city, school, early childhood, youth leadership and family service policies and programs. To drive systems-level change, we:

## FOSTER BELIEF

that a connection to nature is critical for children's healthy development.

## GROW THE MOVEMENT

of diverse, cross-sector, multigenerational children and nature leaders.

## CHANGE CORE SYSTEMS

that impact nature connection in children's daily lives.

## OUTCOME:

Equitable access to nature so that children—and the natural world—can thrive.

# FOSTERING BELIEF



It all starts with belief in the power of nature to help children reach their full potential; that a regular connection to the natural world is essential for children's healthy development – and for the future of our planet.

To increase awareness of the proven benefits of nature, we curate the world's largest collection of research on human-nature connection and provide hundreds of practical resources in

our online [Resource Hub](#). We develop evidence-based tools and training for the children and nature movement and we publish [Finding Nature News](#) to share success stories from the field. We use a variety of strategies to connect children and nature leaders to the resources they need to make the case for their work.

## 2021 BY THE NUMBERS:

**500,000+**

Annual website pageviews

**300,000+**

Social media reach

**60,000+**

Research Library visits

**20,000+**

Subscribers to the monthly *Research Digests*

**25,000+**

Subscribers to the bi-weekly *Finding Nature News*

# FINDING NATURE NEWS

## A YEAR OF FINDING NATURE NEWS

2021 marked the first full year of [Finding Nature News](#), our bi-weekly online news publication that covers the people, programs and progress of the children and nature movement. Through both reporting and guest commentary, we share in-depth stories and inspiration for the field. Here are a few highlights from the year:



### *Improving diversity and representation in the outdoors, one photo at a time*

People of color, people with disabilities and the LGBTQ+ community lack representation in most forms of media. In 2021, we partnered with Nappy Studio – a photography company on a mission to improve representation – to create a collection of stock photos featuring Black and Brown people in nature. We made the collection of photos freely available to help change the visual narrative about who spends time outdoors.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)



### *Today's challenges do not need to define our children's destiny*

In this year-end review, author and Children & Nature Network co-founder Richard Louv reports on a growing mental health crisis brought on by the pandemic and the impacts of global climate change. He sees hope in the advocates “who work passionately to assure more and fairer access” to the healing power of nature, at a time when our children need it most.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)



### *Cities take the lead in transforming schoolyards with nature to help kids thrive*

After a year of remote learning, closed playgrounds and a lot of uncertainty, one of the biggest lessons learned was the role that outdoor spaces can play in supporting children's learning and well-being. A group of cities across the country are using green schoolyards to enhance children's physical and mental health and academic performance, as well as the health and well-being of the surrounding community.

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

*The physical, mental and social benefits of spending time in nature have become clear due to the accumulation of more than 1,000 studies. The data is clear and the pandemic has truly shown us how important our natural world is to our health and the health of our children.*

— RICHARD LOUV, AUTHOR AND  
CHILDREN & NATURE NETWORK CO-FOUNDER



## MAKING THE CASE

In 2021 we surpassed 1,000 articles in our [Research Library](#) - and made the world's largest collection of nature connection research easier to access, search and categorize. With more than 60,000 pageviews per year, improvements to the tagging and search functionality of our Research Library connects organizations and researchers to the information they need to make the case for nature's benefits. We share the latest additions to the Library each month in themed *Research Digests* like these:



### **March 2021: Nature and art**

Integrating nature and art in culturally relevant ways can promote children's nature connectedness and mental health.

[ACCESS THE DIGEST](#)



### **June 2021: Therapeutic use of nature**

Studies highlighted in this Digest focus on the use of nature to achieve therapeutic goals. Different approaches and different populations served are addressed.

[ACCESS THE DIGEST](#)



### **October 2021: Nature engagement during early childhood**

This Digest reviews the health, well-being and developmental benefits of nature engagement for young children, from birth through age five.

[ACCESS THE DIGEST](#)

# GROWING THE MOVEMENT



Turning today's indoor childhood – and our indoor society – back out to the benefits of nature takes a broad range of leaders, collaborating across sectors to drive meaningful change.

Throughout 2021, we supported children and nature advocates, leaders and practitioners through

convenings, professional development and networking opportunities, and by developing tools and resources to support their work. Our goal is to grow and sustain an inclusive, diverse and robust movement – a network of networks that can drive change.

## 2021 BY THE NUMBERS:

**5,000+**

Inside-Out Leadership Series attendees

**22,000+**

Resource hub pageviews

**1,800+**

Views of our downloadable resources per month

**600+**

Leaders and advocates joined The Trailhead, our new online community for the children and nature movement

**29%**

Rebound of our membership from a 2020 pandemic-related decline

## INSIDE-OUT LEADERSHIP SERIES

In 2021, we convened the children and nature movement virtually through the [Inside-Out Leadership Series](#) – a collection of capacity-building workshops, networking mixers, and focused discussions. These virtual gatherings provided ongoing opportunities for children and nature leaders to remain connected and inspired during the COVID-19 pandemic and to share strategies for keeping kids and communities connected to nature.



A highlight of our Leadership Series was a conversation with Children & Nature Network Board Member Dr. Gail Christopher and her daughter, Heather McGhee, author of “The Sum of Us: What Racism Costs Everyone and How We Can Prosper Together.” The stirring conversation dove deep into the impact of systemic racism on the distribution of parks, equitable access to greenspace, and support for outdoor learning. More than 1,000 people participated in this important discussion via live and recorded webinars.



### ***The Trailhead: The launch of a new online community for the children and nature movement***

In 2021, the Children & Nature Network launched a free, online community for the children and nature movement. Trailhead users benefit from a general news feed, focused discussion groups and cohorts, and opportunities to connect and share directly with each other and more.

[JOIN US ON THE TRAILHEAD](#)



### ***Nature Future: Kids' visions for a just and nature-filled world***

We invited children and teens from around the world to share art and creative writing that expresses their love for the natural world, along with their thoughts, dreams, questions and concerns about the future. This online exhibit included a toolkit with lesson plans and tips for [talking to kids about equitable nature access](#).

[VIEW THE GALLERY](#)



### ***Collaboration by nature***

What if we were to tap into the power of collaboration to bring groups of cities together for greater impact? That's the premise behind the new [cohort of state and regional organizations](#) that began receiving technical assistance in 2021 through [Cities Connecting Children to Nature](#) (CCCN), an initiative of the Children & Nature Network and the [National League of Cities](#).

[READ THE ARTICLE](#)

*The regular feed of useful and inspiring studies, documents and articles keeps us up-to-date, informs our own work and offers great references when we are compiling other documents.*

— BRAN HOWELL FROM THE SCHOOLS TEAM AT EDEN PROJECT, UK



# CHANGING CORE SYSTEMS



Longstanding systems of injustice have impacted how outdoor spaces are designed, distributed and programmed, calling for new policies and approaches to advancing equitable access to nature. We use a [systems change model](#) in our work to shift the

conditions that hold inequities in place wherever children live, learn and play. We work with partners, leaders and advocates to change core systems through policy advocacy, technical assistance and peer-learning.

## 2021 BY THE NUMBERS:

**32**

U.S. cities received technical assistance through our Cities Connecting Children to Nature initiative to implement equitable nature connection strategies

**11**

Communities joined our Green Schoolyards Technical Assistance Cohort to develop and implement district-wide green schoolyards programs

**5**

New regional and state collaboratives began working to leverage shared resources to connect children to nature

**18**

Community and youth serving organizations joined cohorts to better use nature to impact youth development

*We first learned about systems change during a Cities Connecting Children to Nature all-site meeting. It's so helpful to see how other cities are doing this and to have examples to show our city leadership; for them to know that Austin isn't a one-off, but part of a larger national effort.*

– MELODY ALCAZAR, CCCN COORDINATOR, CITY OF AUSTIN (TX)  
PARKS & RECREATION DEPARTMENT



### *Global Lessons on Greening School Grounds & Outdoor Learning*

What can the U.S. learn from other countries when it comes to greening schoolyards? In 2021, we launched the first phase of an 18-month project to find out. Our [Global Lessons on Greening School Grounds & Outdoor Learning](#) initiative, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation, will share case studies and data to establish a baseline of knowledge and a platform for advancing best practices for the green schoolyards movement in the U.S. and around the world.



### *Cities Connecting Children to Nature: The momentum grows*

In 2021, our Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) initiative welcomed a number of new green schoolyards cities and state/regional partners, bringing CCCN's nature connection strategies to nearly 36 sites. Despite, or perhaps because of, COVID, cities continued to prioritize nature connections and achieved significant outcomes.

[LEARN MORE](#)



### *National Youth Development & Nature Cohort launched*

In 2021, we welcomed nine organizations from across the U.S. to join our Youth Development & Nature Cohort designed to enhance local partnerships, build cultural awareness and engage youth in meaningful outdoor experiences.

[LEARN MORE](#)



### *Cities take the lead in transforming schoolyards with nature to help kids thrive*

More than 50 cities and school districts applied to be part of Cities Connecting Children to Nature's Green Schoolyards cohort. Eleven were chosen, each with a demonstrated commitment from their mayor and at least one school board official. They are bringing green schoolyards to scale with support of the Children & Nature Network and our partner, the National League of Cities.

[LEARN MORE](#)

# 2021 FINANCIALS

## Statement of Position

### ASSETS

<b>Current Assets:</b>	<b>2021</b>
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 8,547,821
Accounts Receivable	246,559
Grants Receivable	351,000
Prepaid Expenses	10,839
Property and Equipment – Net	109,175

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<b>TOTAL ASSETS</b>	<b>9,265,394</b>
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### LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

#### Liabilities

Accounts payable	82,578
Payroll taxes	49,448
Deferred Revenue	37,320

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<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES</b>	<b>169,346</b>
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#### Net assets

Unrestricted	1,972,412
Temporarily Restricted	7,123,636

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<b>TOTAL NET ASSETS</b>	<b>9,096,049</b>
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<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS</b>	<b>9,265,394</b>
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## STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

### Support and Revenue

Grants and Contributions	1,457,225
Government Grants	0
Program Income	673,721
Other Income	44,073
Special Events	

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<b>TOTAL SUPPORT AND REVENUE</b>	<b>2,175,019</b>
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### Expense

Program Services	1,579,738
Support Services	
Management and General	553,730
Fundraising	46,595
Total Support Services	600,324

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<b>TOTAL EXPENSE</b>	<b>2,180,062</b>
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Change in Net Assets	(5,043)
Unrealized Gain (Loss)	(94,207)
Net Assets BOY	9,195,299

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<b>NET ASSETS EOY</b>	<b>9,096,049</b>
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## Audit Statement

Our 2021 financial information has been derived from the Children & Nature Network's consolidated financial statements, audited by Carpenter, Evert & Associates.

This information should be read in conjunction with our audited consolidated financial statements and related notes. To obtain copies or to request a copy of our 990, please contact us at [admin@childrenandnature.org](mailto:admin@childrenandnature.org).

# 2021 SUPPORTERS

The following funders, partners and supporters made contributions of \$5,000 or more to make our work possible in 2021:

The Aspen Institute  
City of Austin, Texas  
The Marlys G. Barry Fund of the Saint Paul & Minnesota Foundation  
The Arthur M. Blank Family Foundation  
Casey Family Programs  
The Colorado Health Foundation  
Fidelity Charitable  
The JPB Foundation  
Kikkerland Design Inc.  
Meridian Institute  
National League of Cities Institute on Youth, Education and Families  
National Park Service  
National Recreation and Park Association  
National Recreation Foundation  
Open Door Foundation  
The Pierce Williams Donor Fund of Morgan Stanley Gift Fund  
Pisces Foundation  
PlayCore  
The Hannah B. Quimby Gift Fund of Goldman Sachs Philanthropy Fund  
REI Cooperative Action Fund  
Robert Wood Johnson Foundation  
Serenbe  
Smikis Foundation  
Treeline Foundation  
Turner Foundation  
Betsy and Charles Townsend  
University of Minnesota Bell Museum  
Vasque, a division of Red Wing Shoe Co.  
The Walker Family Foundation  
Wilderness River Foundation

*We also thank the 600+ Children & Nature Network members who sustain and inspire us.*

[Become a member today.](#)

# TEAM CHILDREN & NATURE

The Children & Nature Network is grateful for the leadership of our Board of Directors and our Founders' Council, who help guide and support our work to create equitable access to nature's benefits for children around the world.

[MEET OUR BOARD OF DIRECTORS](#)

[MEET OUR FOUNDERS' COUNCIL](#)

This report was developed with input from the Children & Nature Network team, an incredible group of mission-driven individuals committed to improving the health and well-being of children.

[MEET OUR STAFF](#)



**HELP US CONNECT CHILDREN TO THE  
BENEFITS OF NATURE**

[DONATE TODAY](#)

[CHILDRENANDNATURE.ORG](https://CHILDRENANDNATURE.ORG)