



Children
& Nature
Network



2020 ANNUAL REPORT



2020 Annual Report

DEAR CHILDREN AND NATURE CHAMPIONS,

Throughout 2020 we were inspired by the creativity and resiliency of the children and nature movement. We have no doubt that this resilience comes, in part, from the healing power of nature. Despite all of the challenges we face as a global community, ours continues to be a truly hopeful movement.

In March of 2020, we began to realize the impact of COVID-19. Our staff and board created an 18-month response plan that included new virtual strategies for supporting our network—and a COVID-19 Resource Hub to help organizations, educators and parents keep children connected to nature's benefits. We continued our commitment to the right of every child to have a connection to the natural world and we intensified our dedication to addressing longstanding systems of inequity in the outdoor and environmental fields. We established a Youth Outdoor Equity Leadership Fund to provide mini-grants to young leaders working to increase equitable access to nature for all, and to advance social, racial and environmental justice.

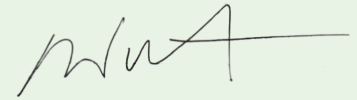
The year also saw a return to nature, with unprecedented use of parks, trails and natural areas as people sought respite from the pandemic. Many schools turned to outdoor learning as a safer way to bring children back to in-person learning. But the pandemic also brought into sharp focus deeply rooted inequities. Too often, a child's ability to spend time in nature is determined by race, income, geography and physical or cognitive ability.

Dismantling these barriers has been and must continue to be the work of the children and nature movement. Emerging from 2020, we have a unique opportunity to build on both a renewed interest in the outdoors and the emergence of leaders working to increase safe and equitable access to the natural world. Thank you for joining us in this critical work.

With gratitude,

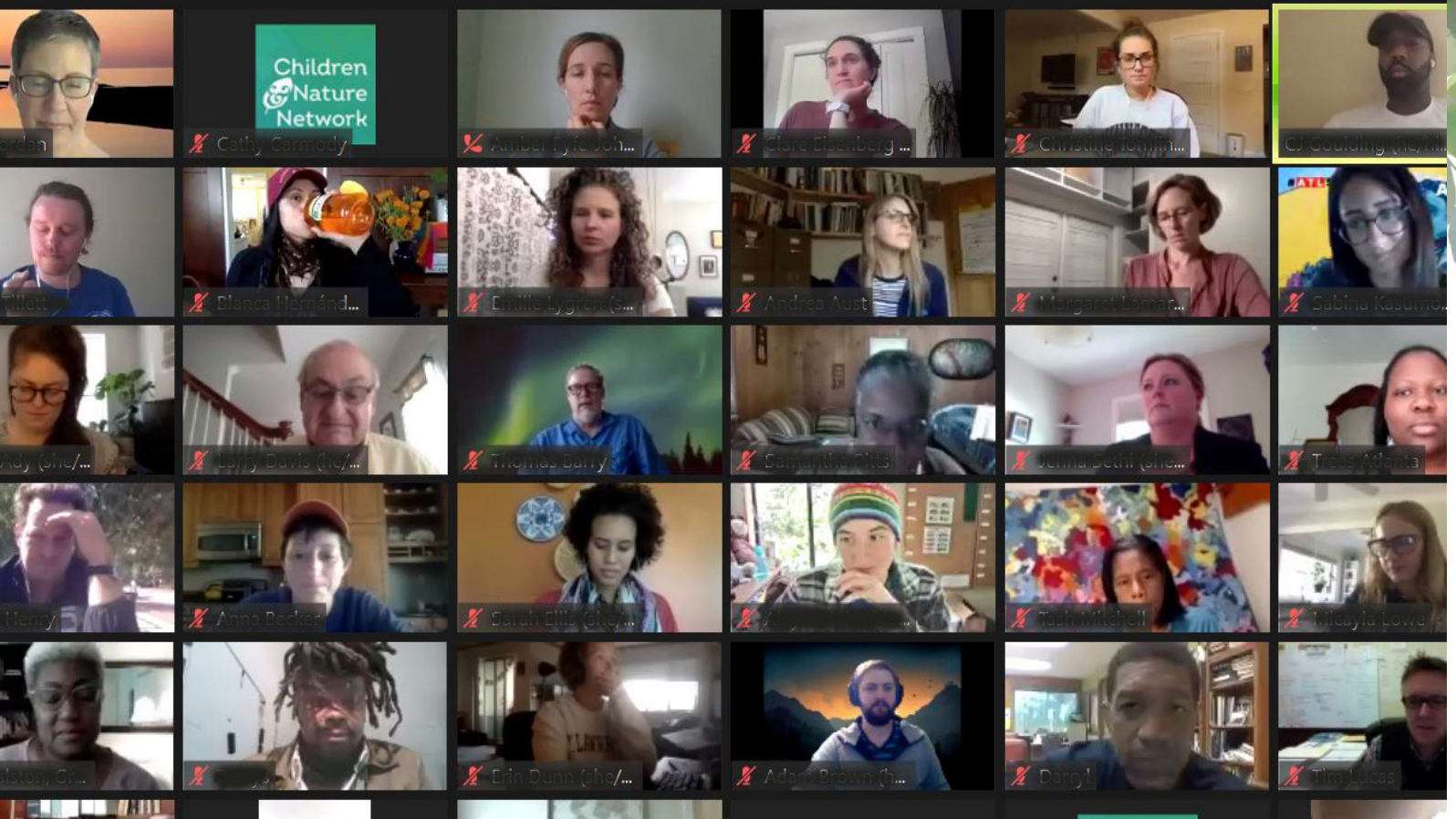


Sarah Milligan-Toffler
President & CEO
Children & Nature Network



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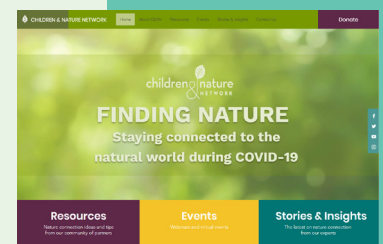
SUPPORTING AND GROWING THE MOVEMENT

COVID-19 Pandemic response

As parks and schools began closing in the spring of 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic, nature-based programs of all kinds faced an uncertain future. Many organizations in our movement generate a significant portion of their annual revenue through on-site programming.

As an organization that has always operated virtually, we knew we could play a role in helping children and nature advocates explore new ways to work, connect and collaborate. Within a week of the World Health Organization declaring a global pandemic, our team launched a rapid-response website called FindingNature.org. The site brought together COVID-19 resources, virtual peer learning and networking, skill building opportunities and guest commentary to support practitioners, parents, teachers and caregivers who were scrambling to keep children connected to nature safely during the pandemic. Thousands of people attended our online workshops, webinars and moments of inspiration, including an author chat with our co-founder Ricahrd Louv.

In late 2020, we launched an award-winning new Children & Nature Network website, migrating our COVID-19 resources to its robust new [Resource Hub](#).



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Thank you for organizing and offering great sessions. Last week was absolutely wonderful and I have so much to follow up on. That's a win for any summit or conference!

— Kris Scopinich, director of education and engagement, Massachusetts Audubon



The (virtual) Inside-Out Leadership Summit

More than 500 cross-sector leaders from 10 countries joined us in 2020 for the [Inside-Out Leadership Summit](#). Originally slated to be held in Atlanta, GA, we pivoted to produce a multi-day virtual event in April. Summit participants were selected to represent diverse perspectives, skills, disciplines and approaches to connecting children to nature. Attendees participated in six action areas, capacity-building workshops, keynote addresses and online discussion groups. With 95% of attendees saying they would recommend the summit to their peers and colleagues, we believe our first large-scale online event was a success. (But we all agree that we'd much rather meet in person!)



Conference Sponsors: Special thanks to presenting sponsors PlayCore and the Pisces Foundation. A complete list of sponsors and more information is available in our [Leadership Summit Report](#).





MAKING THE CASE FOR NATURE CONNECTION

Advancing the evidence base

The Children & Nature Network has been curating scientific evidence since 2006 to help better understand the impact of nature connection and to champion children's time in the outdoors. Throughout 2020 we added timely studies about nature's benefits during the pandemic to our [Research Library](#). We also published our monthly [Research Digest](#), covering topics such as nature's impact on physical and mental health, the benefits of second-hand exposure to nature and the power of outdoor learning. By the end of the year, our [Research Library](#) held more than 1,000 studies, making it the world's largest collection of scientific literature on nature connection.

We helped children and nature leaders strengthen their advocacy efforts by offering a workshop focused on activating research to make the case for equitable access to nature. This interactive [workshop](#) provided a primer on our research tools, tips on assessing the quality of research materials, and strategies for effective science communication and persuasion. Participants agreed that technical assistance resources and national "research-to-practice" [webinars](#) like this can help Children & Nature Network members and the movement advance equity in nature access.

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Children & Nature Network Researcher Cathy Jordan translated key ideas in the psychology of persuasive communication into one hour—a great service to us. Having time to put ideas into practice in a small team was a useful way to begin internalizing the principles she shared. This presentation deserves to be widely accessible.

— Louise Chawla, professor emerita, University of Colorado-Boulder

With major support from the Harold M. & Adeline S. Morrison Family Foundation





BRINGING THE BENEFITS OF NATURE TO SCHOOLS

A strong case for green schoolyards

As parks and playgrounds closed and schools moved to remote instruction, interest in green schoolyards and [outdoor learning](#) skyrocketed. The Children & Nature Network's vision that all U.S. communities offer access to nature-filled schoolyards by 2050 aligned with an urgent need to address inequities in nature access and education brought to light by the pandemic.

Pre-pandemic, we worked with strategic partners to advance and inform the green schoolyards and outdoor learning fields, including the [Land Trust Alliance's](#) Community of Practice, to support green schoolyards for K-12 education. We also produced a [Performance Series on Green Schoolyards](#) with the [Landscape Architecture Foundation](#) and co-hosted a series of [webinars](#) with the [International School Grounds Alliance](#).

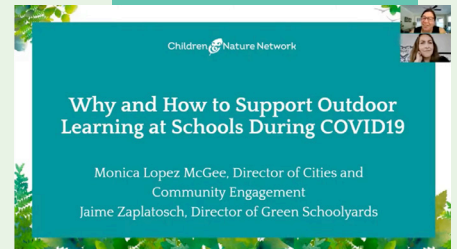
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This moment offers an opportunity for us to move learning outside into natural settings, which are restorative and calming. This will reduce cortisol [fight-or-flight] hormones in children, which science shows improves students' overall cognition and health.

— Dr. Gail Christopher, director of the Natural Collaborative for Health Equity, former vice-president of the W.K. Kellogg Foundation, and Children & Nature Network board member



When the pandemic hit, we used virtual engagement tools to connect communities and educators to [creative strategies for outdoor learning](#). We hosted webinars and presented at partner events such as the [American Institute of Architects' K-12 Subcommittee](#) on green schoolyards during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. We contributed to national collaboratives such as the [National COVID-19 Outdoor Learning Initiative](#), supporting U.S. school districts interested in using their grounds or nearby open spaces as outdoor classrooms. And, we provided technical assistance through our Cities Connecting Children to Nature initiative in St. Louis, Missouri; Seattle, Washington; Baltimore, Maryland; Austin, Texas; and Providence, Rhode Island as outdoor learning and [green schoolyards](#) became vital components of their district-wide education models.



Cities Connecting Children to Nature Green Schoolyard initiatives were made possible through our partnership with the National League of Cities and with support from The JPB Foundation.



Cities Connecting Children to Nature

NLC NATIONAL LEAGUE OF CITIES
CITIES STRONG TOGETHER

Children & Nature Network



CONNECTING CHILDREN TO NATURE IN CITIES

Cities Connecting Children to Nature

People flocked to parks and natural areas during the pandemic searching for respite and making the need for nearby green spaces more critical than ever. As participants in [Cities Connecting Children to Nature](#) (CCCN), a joint initiative with the [National League of Cities](#), many city leaders found [creative ways to keep kids connected to the outdoors](#) through cross-departmental collaboration and community partnerships. Throughout the pandemic, CCCN regularly engaged more than 20 cities to provide technical assistance, resources and virtual training.

Results can be seen across the United States. Cities such as Austin and San Antonio, Texas and Baltimore, Maryland provided direct [support to schools for outdoor learning](#). CCCN grant funding assisted four cities in starting [equity-based, district-wide green schoolyards programs](#). Cities such as Seattle, Washington and Rochester, New York enacted [Children's Outdoor Bills of Rights](#) to spur policies and programs designed to ensure equitable access to nature, and Grand Rapids, Michigan continues to be a [national leader](#) in connecting



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There's a way that you can articulate how important [nature connection] work is to all priorities in the city. I personally don't see them as mutually exclusive. My philosophy is that you need all these pieces together to have a great community.

— [Rosalynn Bliss](#), mayor of Grand Rapids, Michigan

children to the natural world. But perhaps the biggest sign of progress is the fact that 10 cities in the CCCN cohort allocated funding for full- or part-time nature connection staff in their operating budgets.

The CCCN team also created tools and resources designed to help cities drive change at the [systems level](#), with a focus on dismantling longstanding [systems of inequity](#). Renewed funding for the next three years will allow the team to use [measurement tools](#) developed in 2020 to better understand the impact of the CCCN initiative through a systems change lens.

Wintermission

To help combat social isolation during winter, we continued our partnership with [8 80 Cities' Wintermission initiative](#). This two-year community-based program engaged three pilot cities, Leadville, Colorado; Eau Claire, Wisconsin; and Buffalo, New York, in identifying barriers to outdoor activity during winter and in finding ways to help residents enjoy and take pride in active outdoor winter lifestyles. The effort culminated in the development of a [Winter Cities Toolkit](#) to guide the creation of welcoming and inclusive winter-friendly public spaces.

Cities Connecting Children to Nature is made possible through our partnership with the National League of Cities and with support from The JPB Foundation.





Photo courtesy of Tesicca Truong

DEVELOPING YOUNG LEADERS

Reaching youth's full potential through nature

At the intersection of youth development and nature-based programs is the sweet spot where youth reach their full potential and find inspiration to become lifelong nature champions. These findings, among others, are the result of a partnership between the Children & Nature Network, the Outdoor Foundation and Search Institute in which we convened 13 community-based organizations in Atlanta, Georgia and Grand Rapids, Michigan to explore best practices for incorporating social-emotional learning into nature-based programs, and to understand the benefits of incorporating nature into youth development work. The result is a free [Toolkit](#) with webinars, report summaries, presentations, research findings and assessment tools for organizations working with youth.



“

The issues that I care about always come back to my environmental roots. That's where I first felt connected to a movement and felt empowered by the ripple effect of our work.

— Tesicca Truong, Natural Leaders Network member and community activist in British Columbia, Canada



Empowering young leaders

Throughout the year, the Children & Nature Network transitioned its youth leadership trainings to virtual platforms. The Natural Leaders in-person Legacy Camp training was presented as [four online learning workshops](#), developed and facilitated by and for young leaders of color. This allowed youth from across the country to access and benefit from discussions on creating personal narratives, leadership, community organizing, civic engagement and using nature as a means of enhancing health and well-being in communities.

Our collaboration with Colorado Natural Leaders and [Colorado Parks & Wildlife](#) empowered young leaders to plan and facilitate virtual workshops. Weekly calls and online trainings helped young leaders in Colorado map local and state assets to support community health and well-being through nature connection.

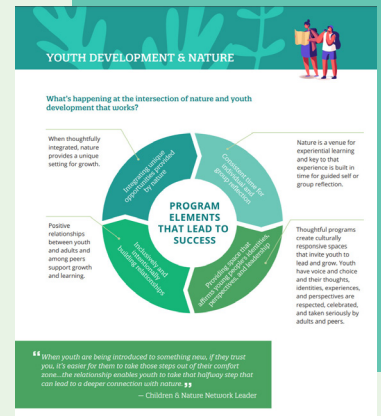
For [Fresh Tracks](#), a collaboration with [The Aspen Institute's Forum for Community Solutions](#), [Native Americans in Philanthropy](#), [My Brother's Keeper Alliance](#) and the [Opportunity Youth Forum](#), we led a [webinar](#) and [published a Research Digest](#) on Indigenous ways of understanding the healing power of nature.

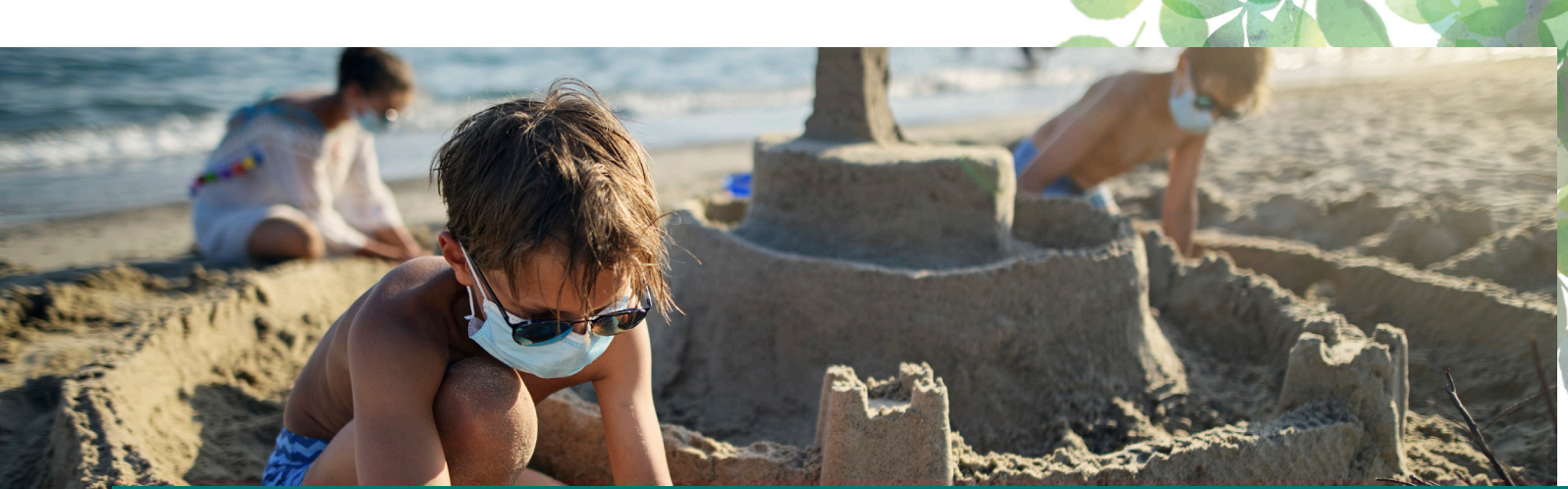
Finally, in a year marked by renewed calls for racial justice, we extended our ongoing commitment to young leaders of color by establishing the [Youth Outdoor Equity Leadership Fund](#). This Fund ensures that we will have resources on hand when young leaders need support to advance equity-based projects to connect children and youth to nature in their communities. We awarded 25 mini-grants to young leaders in 11 states through our Natural Leaders Network. Grants supported efforts to increase equitable access to nature and to advance environmental and social justice, with a focus on hyper-local projects that were led by or served Black, Indigenous, People of Color, LGBTQ+ and other underrepresented communities.

The Children & Nature Network's youth leadership development work and the Natural Leaders Network was supported by the S.D. Bechtel Jr. Foundation, Colorado Parks & Wildlife, Colorado Health Foundation, and in partnership with the National League of Cities with major funding from The JPB Foundation.

The Youth Outdoor Equity Leadership Fund is made possible with support from Vasque Footwear and Prima.

Fresh Tracks is a program of The Aspen Forum For Community Solutions at The Aspen Institute and is made possible with support from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, The JPB Foundation, The Andrus Family Fund, REI Co-Op, and the National Recreation Foundation.





KEEPING FAMILIES CONNECTED TO NATURE

Tools, resources and moral support

Parents and caregivers are critical influencers in the lives of children, and within the children and nature movement. In 2020, with schools and daycares around the world closed due to COVID-19, parents often became the main coordinators and curators of their children's learning and play while trying to manage working from home and the myriad other challenges brought on by a global pandemic.

In the early days of the pandemic, we launched a rapid-response website, [FindingNature.org](https://www.findingnature.org), which featured a dedicated [section for families](#) with resources from experts in the children and nature movement as well as practical tips from parents as they found ways to support children's learning, health and well-being through nature connection. All of these resources, including [a conversation with Richard Louv](#) on ways to access nearby nature and a [webinar on family nature play](#), were migrated to the [Families section](#) of our new website, launched in late 2020.

We updated our [Family Nature Club Toolkit](#), which offers everything families need to organize and lead a Family Nature Club in a safe and thoughtful way, including planning guides, tips, ideas, checklists and ready-to-use forms. And, after convening and learning from a group of Washington D.C.-based community organizations, we developed [Family Engagement posters](#) to support their efforts to connect families to nature.



“

What if parents, grandparents and kids around the country were to band together to create nature clubs for families? What if this form of social/nature networking were to spread as quickly as book clubs did in recent decades? We would be well on our way to true cultural change.

— Richard Louv, author and chairman emeritus, Children & Nature Network



FINANCIAL SUMMARY

Statements of Financial Position

ASSETS

Current Assets:	2020
Cash and Cash Equivalents	\$ 8,954,989
Accounts Receivable	3,700
Grants Receivable	760,000
Prepaid Expenses	7,194
Property and Equipment	73,950

TOTAL ASSETS **\$ 9,799,833**

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Liabilities

Accounts payable	\$ 44,000
Payroll taxes	37,909
Deferred Revenue	522,749

TOTAL LIABILITIES **604,659**

Net assets

Unrestricted	672,973
Temporarily Restricted	8,522,359

TOTAL NET ASSETS **9,195,333**

TOTAL LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS **\$ 9,799,992**

STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES

Support and Revenue

Grants and Contributions	\$ 9,617,696
Government Grants	106,200
Program Income	631,026
Other Income	631
Special Events	

TOTAL SUPPORT AND REVENUE **\$ 10,355,553**

Expense

Program Services	1,106,484
Support Services	
Management and	308,631
General Fundraising	77,837
Total Support Services	386,468

TOTAL EXPENSE **\$ 1,492,952**

Change in Net Assets	8,862,601
Net Assets BOY	332,699

NET ASSETS EOY **\$ 9,195,300**

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, we adapted operations to virtual strategies, renewed our commitment to equity and invested in core functions. The continued support of funders and donors allowed us to proactively respond to a challenging year. A generous contribution received in late 2020, designed to provide four years of operating support, has positioned the Children & Nature Network to emerge a stronger organization with a renewed vision for the future.

2020 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.



SUPPORTERS

The work of the Children & Nature Network is made possible by the hundreds of individuals and organizations who support our mission through memberships, grants and charitable gifts. Your belief in our mission buoys our spirits and inspires our team as we work to ensure equitable access to nature. We are pleased to recognize support in amounts of \$5,000 or more:

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Special thanks to team members who transitioned to new adventures in 2020:

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& Advancement*

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Director, External Relations

Cathy Carmody

Director, Operations

Jenette Restivo

Director, Content Strategy



OUR VISION:

A world in which all children play, learn and grow with nature in their everyday lives.

OUR MISSION:

We are leading a global movement to increase equitable access to nature so that children—and natural places—can thrive. We do this by investing in leadership and communities through sharing evidence-based resources, scaling innovative solutions and driving policy change.