



For immediate release

May 31, 2024

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Announcing the 2024 Richard Louv Prize recipient: Jason Stout helps children and families grieve, heal and learn in nature

MADISON, WISCONSIN – May 31: The Children & Nature Network is thrilled to announce the 2024 winner of the [Richard Louv Prize for Innovation in Nature Connection](#): Jason Stout, a longtime advocate for experiential grief support and education in nature for children.

In 2021, Children & Nature Network created the annual Richard Louv Prize to honor the visionary leadership of its co-founder and celebrated author, Richard Louv. This \$15,000 cash prize is awarded to individuals doing exemplary work to advance equitable access to nature. The prize is open to any individual, anywhere in the world, and is designed to recognize innovative strategies for creating regular access to the benefits of nature everywhere children live, learn and play.

The Children & Nature Network Founders' Council selected Stout from more than 82 nominations submitted by children in nature advocates from around the world. Throughout a 23-year career, Stout has focused on building a bridge between grieving children and the transformative benefits of a nature-based outdoor education. He has also made outdoor education financially accessible to a broader audience by working tirelessly to facilitate the acceptance of educational funding, such as 529 College Savings Plans, for outdoor educational programs. "We chose Jason Stout because the grief support programs he has designed are both innovative and inspiring," says Dr. Cheryl Charles, Founders' Council co-chair and selection committee member. "The criteria for the award says that the work also has to be sustainable, and, most impressively, Jason has opened the door to new funding sources for education in the outdoors. We believe the potential impact of that funding could be transformative in terms of creating equitable access to nature-based opportunities."

"Jason's work is helping children and families learn how to find refuge, solace and meaning in the outdoors during times of trauma and loss," said Richard Louv.

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“He speaks movingly about his own journey as a young adult healing from childhood loss and grief, which included everything from completing raft guide training to taking a 78-day, immersive Outward Bound winter educator course,” continued Louv, “Jason found that with each new adventure in the outdoors came a deeper sense of peace and an abiding sense of purpose. Jason is deeply passionate about creating opportunities for people to connect with nature, discover their own strengths and embark on their own path to healing and growth.”

Inspired by the role that outdoor adventures played in his path to healing, Stout worked with Outward Bound, a nonprofit that inspires personal growth through challenging outdoor expeditions, to create a program tailored for teens and young adults grieving the death of a loved one. Working with experts in childhood grief — including Donna Schuurman, executive director emeritus of Dougy Center, Portland, Oregon — he designed a 7-day wilderness experience aimed at providing solace and healing for participants. In order to expand the reach of this innovative program, Stout secured sponsorship from the New York Life Foundation, allowing Outward Bound to offer the program at base camps across several states. Stout also led a partnership with Judi’s House, NFL Quarterback Brian Griese’s grief support organization, to establish full-tuition Outward Bound scholarships.

While working with Outward Bound, Stout recognized the vast potential of educational funding saving plans and awards to make outdoor education financially accessible to a broader audience. He worked to develop partnerships, streamline access and build awareness of students’ ability to use the funding for outdoor education. As a result of his efforts, Outward Bound generated significant revenue from 529 College Savings Plans and the AmeriCorps Segal Award, reaching \$1.9 million in revenue in 2019. He continues to promote the use of educational funding for outdoor education programs through extensive outreach efforts, including speaking engagements at AmeriCorps campuses and national financial planning conferences.

Since 2021, Stout has served as the youth programs advisor for the Tragedy Assistance Program for Survivors (TAPS), where he designs and facilitates "Healing in Nature" workshops for hundreds of kids, military volunteers, and adults across the United States. Set in both urban and remote settings, these workshops focus on fostering healing and resilience and establishing well-being practices through meaningful connections with nature.

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“Receiving this award is very emotional for me,” Stout said. “My early journeys into nature were about seeking out the answers to my own grief, my own losses — I was so angry. But, at some point, I realized I could either burn bridges or build them. I decided to build bridges, and I have a vivid memory of being on top of a mountain, after I’d created the Outward Bound grief program, and saying, ‘Dad, this is for you.’ I felt closer to him in that moment than I’d ever felt. It feels very important to do that today — to honor the people I’ve loved.”

“After more than 20 years, I know there is nothing more powerful for healing grief than even small doses of nature — and yet my work has not been without setbacks. But it’s like they say in Outward Bound: to serve, to strive and not to yield. I just keep going because people come to me and say, ‘This is helping me, this is helping my kids,’” he added. “But to know that my life’s work is seen by my peers, by Richard Louv and by the Children & Nature Network is incredibly validating — and so energizing. It makes me want to go out and do twice as much.”

About the Children & Nature Network

The Children & Nature Network supports a global movement of leaders working to create equitable access to nature everywhere children live, learn and play – so that children and the natural world can thrive. The organization was founded by Richard Louv and a [group of colleagues](#) in 2006, following publication of his book, [*Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder*](#) — which helped launch an international movement to reconnect children, families and communities to the natural world. Visit childrenandnature.org for more information.

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