



# Annual Report 2014-2015







## Joyful Learning ■ Inspired Thinking ■ Empowered Futures

We **believe** that every child **deserves** to experience the **magic** of discovery and the **joy** of learning in the **natural** world.



# Blink. 35 Years.

A Message from Tracey Weiss EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2014 Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools celebrated 35 years of providing youth with education, inspiration and hands-on access to the natural world.

Our work first started back in 1979 with the visionary leadership of Laura Tucker and Gary Knightengale who led youth backpacking through the Sierras every summer. While our programs are now based on California's central coast, we are still very much the same organization at heart. What started as a small summer camp has grown into a thriving nonprofit that serves over 8,000 students annually with the transformative experience of exploring the magic of the natural world.

The environment and our day-to-day lives have changed dramatically over our 35-year history. Today students face great pressure inside and outside of the classroom. A week spent with Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools allows them to engage meaningfully with their peers, providing much needed emotional and social connection that our technology-driven society so often does not.

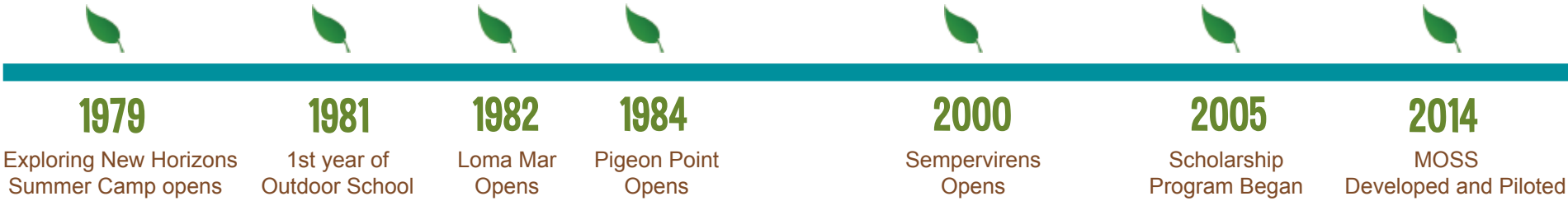
Then and now, we are committed to nurturing the whole student with a safe experience outdoors. Our passion is unparalleled, our naturalists trusted and our resolve steadfast to providing the best we can to every student each week.

Here at Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools we are strong in the convictions and guiding principles that have remained constant since our founding:

- Connect students to the beauty and magic of natural world with hands-on experiences
- Empower them with new skills, exploration and the critical time to reflect on their observations
- Incorporate music, art and science to provide a multi-modal, transformative experience
- Hire exceptional educators to inspire them to become stewards of the natural world

Looking toward the future, we recognize that the need for environmental education is becoming essential for our collective well-being. In the midst of great change we are committed to another 35 years of allowing youth to feel the sand beneath their feet, hear the wind rush through the redwoods, and smell the coastal sage warming in the sun. We couldn't be more proud to offer them what we believe is the life-changing chance to experience calm in their hearts and the knowledge that they are connected to the earth.

# Then and Now: Where We've Been . . . . And How We've Grown!



## that was THEN...

- 2 Founders, Laura Tucker & Gary Knightengale  
Two young friends from the East Bay
- 3 Number of school districts served
- 4 Number of weeks operated during the first year
- 7 Days spent in inaugural Sierra summer program  
back packing programs for youth
- 8 Naturalists on staff during the first year
- \$20 Dollars a Day / Naturalists' pay during initial years
- \$500 Seed money used to open Pigeon Point campus

## this is NOW...

- 3 Campuses
- 33 Weeks of program operated annually
- 42 School Districts served annually
- 100+ School served annually
- 90,308 Meals served annually
- 175,000 Students served to date
- \$1,229,939 Grant funds raised between 2005 and 2016  
to support student scholarships.

35 Years of Inspiring, Educating and Transforming Children's Lives

Priceless!!!







## Reflections from a Long-Time Supporter



### OUR WORK THEN, NOW, AND IN THE FUTURE

Joanne Greenbaum

I have seen Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools grow and change in so many ways. Back in the 80's, when I was teaching at Lydiksen School in Pleasanton, I would take my 5th grade classes to our school in the mountains. When I transferred to Valley View School we started going to the ocean.

From my very first 5th grade class to the last I saw huge changes in the students after their week outdoors. The organization's ACT philosophy (Attitude, Cooperation, and Take a Chance) challenged them rise to occasion with their peers. Teaching that everything in nature is connected, Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools' naturalists brought lessons to life with fun – singing, dancing, tide pooling, walking in the redwoods, and kissing banana slugs right along with the kids. My students delighted in learning about gardening, composting, and how they had the power to change things by speaking up at their "town meetings."

Without fail, I have watched young people be transformed. Exposure to new environments, stepping outside of their comfort zones, and being completely immersed in the natural world opens up their minds and makes scientific principles suddenly understandable and useful. Theoretical concepts become practical information. As great as today's traditional school classrooms and teachers can be, the experience of being outdoors observing, thinking, and reflecting brings academic lessons to life, making them an active part of the process.

Now that I am on the board, I have seen many of the faces change, but our philosophy remains constant: Inspiring, empowering, and transforming children's lives through outdoor education. And we continue to grow.

What started out as one outdoor school is now three. Every year we welcome more students to our learning sites and every session yields an even more diverse group of students than the last.

I'm proud of the exceptional and affordable outdoor education Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools provides these young people. From the naturalists to our senior leadership, we are all passionate about transforming the lives of children because we know that it is more than just a camp experience, it is our moral imperative to empower them to protect the environment.

## The Bridge from Student to Naturalist



### INSPIRING THE NEXT GENERATION

Bridget "B" Posson

I first visited Loma Mar in 1993 as a 5th grade student from Vintage Hills Elementary in Pleasanton. But it was my first time as a counselor that really drew me to the idea of becoming a naturalist. As a cabin counselor

I not only loved working with kids in an outdoor setting, but I admired the magic that the outdoor school staff created for everyone present. The storytelling, the songs, and the kindness of the naturalists and staff made me want to be a part of it one day. I signed up as a counselor several times throughout high school, each time gaining the skills and motivation to teach children about the environment in a nurturing and entertaining way.

The day came when I applied as an intern for Loma Mar. During my interview with Principal Burl, we talked for a long time by Pescadero Creek where I now hold my interviews for applicants. My experiences at Loma Mar gave me the personal understanding of why this program is so important. Outdoor education is an opportunity for so much learning, and a reminder of the simple beauties of life. It gives you the gift of being present, in the moment, to be who you are, while being supported by so many wonderful people. I was thrilled when I got the job offer and accepted without hesitation. I did it!

The four years spent as a naturalist (and summer gardener) were some of the best years of my life. I left in 2009 to pursue a teaching credential and Masters of Education at UCSC. After getting that degree, and realizing classroom teaching wasn't my true calling, I returned to Loma Mar in 2012 as the Program Coordinator—the place that always felt like home. After two years, I stepped into my current role as Program Director.

Nine years later, with a lifetime of connections, I am still passionate about this life changing program. I feel supported by my staff and peers, and I am proud to nurture students, counselors and staff in the same way that I was nurtured for so many years. The cycle of participation from our communities is stronger than ever and I am thrilled to be a part of Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools.





**Must we always teach our children with books?  
Let them look at the stars and the mountains above.  
Let them look at the waters and the trees and flowers on Earth.  
Then they will begin to think, and to think is the beginning of a real education.**

**B. David Polis – Naturalist and Outdoor Educator**





# Landmark Study Evaluation

## HOW DOES ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION EFFECT STUDENT KNOWLEDGE, ATTITUDES AND BELIEFS?

"Thank you for helping our class go to outdoor school. I had lots of fun hiking and learning new things. Outdoor School was awesome everybody was laughing, playing and being who they are. I learned that nature is fun if you don't have electronics every where you go. I think you should keep donating money so kids can experience a chance of a lifetime.

Ray  
5th Grade, Richmond CA

What is one of the most valuable lessons you see your students taking away from this experience?

"They now understand how they effect the watershed, both positive and negative."

James Ellingson  
Jose Ortega Elementary School,  
San Francisco

Every week a new group of students arrives at one of our campuses. Without fail, their teachers regale us with anecdotes about how just five days with us dramatically impacted the kids, their class dynamic and the school community.

For over 35 years we've been getting this positive feedback and knew we had to capture data to support these claims. Knowing that long-term studies related to environmental education have never been conducted within the State of California, we recognized a golden opportunity to start a much-needed data set.

With the generous support of grant funds, we hired an evaluation consultant in 2009 to develop a pre- and post-intervention survey to develop a baseline of qualitative information to highlight student changes in knowledge, attitudes, and beliefs as a result of the environmental education we provide. Randomly selecting groups of students at each of our campuses, surveys were administered for the past four years at participating schools one month prior to participation and again in the afternoon of their last full-day of program.

Reviewing our data has provided us with some invaluable insights. At Loma Mar and Sempervirens we recorded an average improvement of 11.3% in students knowledge of the natural world. For students at Pigeon Point the average change in knowledge was 13.7%. When measuring positive changes in attitude towards the natural world, including commitment to conservation, we saw an average increase of 3.2% across the three facilities.

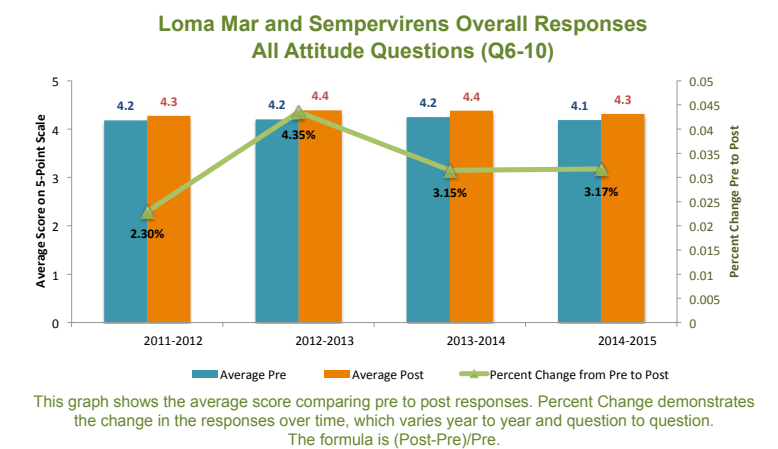
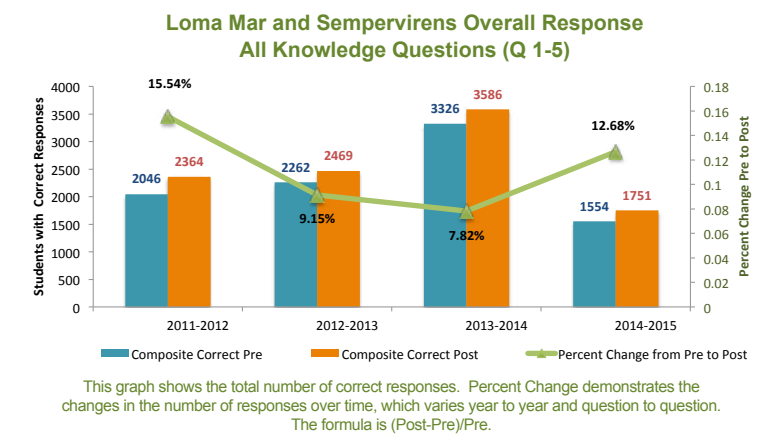
Perhaps one of the most important and unexpected findings is within the survey itself. We discovered that the pre-intervention surveys returned very high scores from students, leaving little room for improvement. We also found that one week is too small a window to measure significant student impact. As a result, we are now fine tuning our survey and developing guidelines that will help other programs implement long-term benchmark assessments to gauge student knowledge gain, shifts in attitude and changes in behavior over time.

For many of the students we serve, just one week with us provides limited exposure to the natural world. Based upon our survey results, industry analysis, and trends within the environmental education field, Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools has developed the Meaningful Outdoor Science Stewardship (MOSS) program to help address the growing need for a year-round environmental education experience.

The education landscape has evolved dramatically since Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools began—particularly in the last five years with the implementation of Common Core and Next Generation Science Standards. The data we collect today will not only improve our programs but help establish industry-wide standards.

Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools would like to thank Eleanor A. Smith and Associates for their time, development support, analysis and insight into this project. In addition, we are grateful to the teachers, staff and students who have participated in this landmark study.

If you would like a full copy of the evaluation report, please contact Tracey Weiss, Executive Director at [tracey@exploringnewhorizons.org](mailto:tracey@exploringnewhorizons.org)







# How we make it happen:

**EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS SCHOOLS** provides exceptional outdoor residential education to K-8 students at three unique locations through a **rich and relevant curriculum** tied to state and national education standards. Serving over 8,000 students from 95 schools annually from the SF Bay area and the Central Coast, Exploring New Horizons offers customized programs to both large and small groups at our three campuses: Pigeon Point, Loma Mar, and Sempervirens.

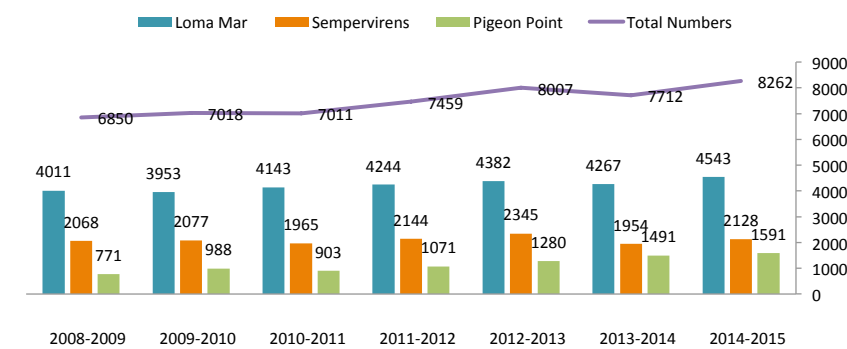
## OUR PROMISE

Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools allows children to safely explore and learn about the natural world through relevant and fun outdoor educational experiences. This **life-changing opportunity** instills a deep connection with nature and the joy of learning.

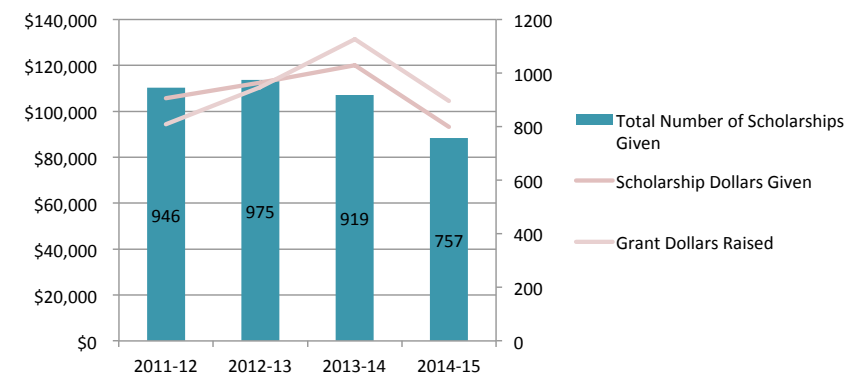
## OUR EXPERIENCE

Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools is committed to educating and empowering children to make thoughtful, conscious, and sustainable choices for themselves and the environment. By providing children **rich educational opportunities to safely explore the natural, un-plugged world**, our naturalists foster a sense of adventure and love of learning while encouraging children to creatively envision and work together towards a positive future.

## STUDENT NUMBERS



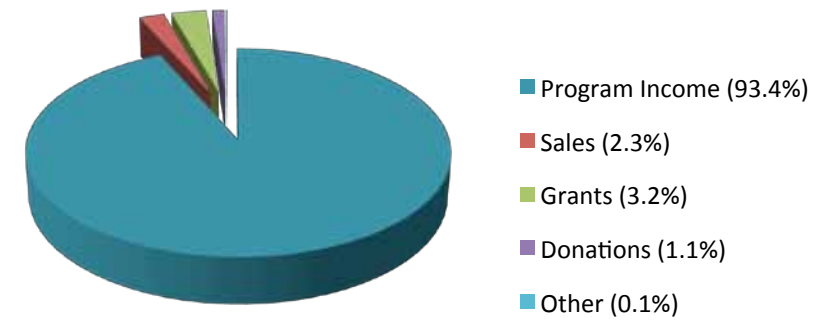
## SCHOLARSHIP TRENDS



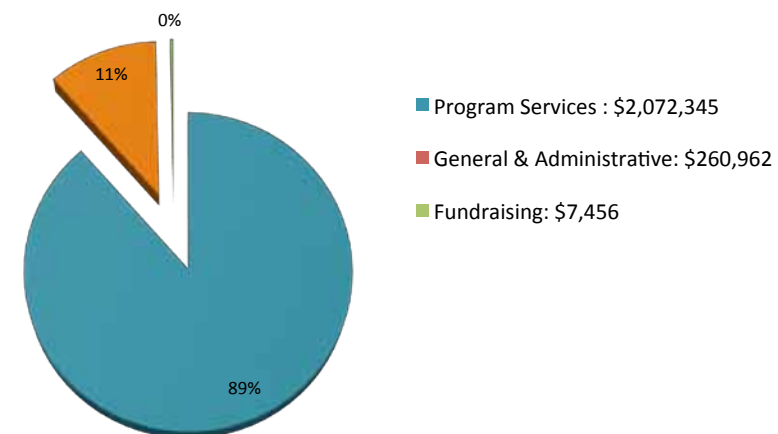
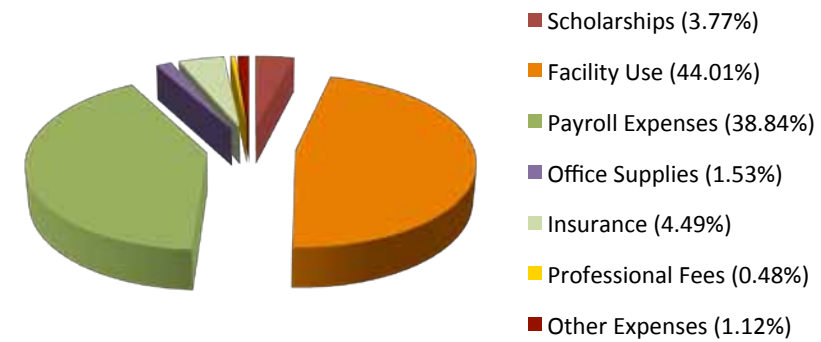
## FINANCIALS

JULY 2014 THROUGH JUNE 2015

### INCOME BREAKDOWN



### EXPENSE BREAKDOWN







# Gifting It Forward

Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools is **grateful** for the continued **generosity** of our **loyal** donors and **supporters**.

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## A Message from Andrew Cerri 2015 BOARD PRESIDENT

### LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Thank you for your generous support of Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools in 2015. We are thrilled to celebrate our 35th year of providing outstanding outdoor education to California students.

As we have grown and matured over the last three decades we have expanded to three unique locations: Loma Mar, Sempervirens, and Pigeon Point. This growth has not only provided our students with a diversified educational experience, it also helps us build strong, lasting relationships with our neighbors. This year we had a blast at the Redwood Ramble in Navarro, California and feel incredibly grateful to be the beneficiary of that community event.

While the continual improvement of our programs remains one of our top priorities, another key objective of our operational plan is student safety. In my four years of board service the effectiveness of our emergency protocols has always impressed me and bears testament to the thoughtful development and careful planning of our naturalists, program directors and executive director.

We are profoundly grateful for your generous support of our 35-year legacy. We hope you'll continue to walk by our side as we collectively bring Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools' impact to children for years to come!

Andrew Cerri  
President, Board of Directors



Inspiring, empowering, and transforming children's lives through outdoor education.

exploringnewhorizons.org

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# Creating Community and Inspired Learning for 35 Years

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