CAMPING, CONNECTIONS
AND CONFIDENCE FOR
CHILDREN IN FOSTER CARE

2019
ANNUAL REPORT
Message from the Executive Director

The magic of Happy Trails goes well beyond canoeing, talent shows and pool time fun. The experiences, camaraderie and comforts of camp are not packed up at the end of the week. Rather, they are instilled within children in foster care and carried with them throughout the year. Campers leave Happy Trails with hope, because their counselors grew up in foster care and have shown them the potential their future holds. Campers leave Happy Trails with dreams, because their world has been opened to a host of new experiences and interests. Campers leave Happy Trails with a community, because they have developed lasting relationships with friends and counselors, which are continuously strengthened by our year-round programming.

A growing body of research supports the notion that extracurricular activities - like camp - have a long-term benefit for children impacted by foster care. This is also supported by the initial researched we have completed: our campers and their caregivers overwhelmingly report that participating in Happy Trails has been transformative.

To that end, Happy Trails is continuing to expand and make the investment in the children we serve. We opened our doors to over 400 boys and girls this year, expanded and reimagined our year-round programming and launched two new initiatives - Happy Trails Tents and Happy Trails Art Start. Finally, in order to meet the growing needs of our older campers, and in partnership with other community organizations, we facilitated 6 leadership and skills-based workshops designed to help prepare youth for life after foster care.

We know this growth would not be possible without you – our caring community of friends, supporters and partners who have joined our campfire circle. Thank you for helping us bring thousands of children in foster care the wonders of camping, the support of connections and the power of confidence.

Lindsay Elliott, JD, MSW
Executive Director Happy Trails for Kids
**HAPPY TRAILS FOR KIDS** brings camping, connections and confidence into the lives of children in foster care through winter and summer camp and year-round supportive programming designed to offer new learning adventures, cultivate an appreciation for nature and develop positive relationships with peers and role models.
“DREAM BELIEVE ACHIEVE” – Overnight Summer Camp

Overnight summer camp is at the core of our programming. We expanded summer camp sessions by an additional week this year (for a total of 3 week-long sessions). Approximately 300 campers had the opportunity to enjoy outdoor activities, swimming, horseback riding, dancing, campfire songs, talent shows and so much more. Our camp theme was Dream, Believe, Achieve and activities focused on inspiring campers to recognize their strengths, realize their potential and instill a sense of optimism about the future. Campers made “positivity posters” about themselves and peers and decorated them throughout the cabins.

Thank you to our summer partners who help make camp possible, including our volunteers, the Department of Children and Family Services and Camp Felix.

“My camp counselor encouraged me to pursue my dreams. I want to become a camp counselor to help change a life of a kid in need like my counselor did for me.”

– Junior Counselor

Holiday Winter Camp

S’mores, snowballs and sledding greeted our campers this year for a winter camp wonderland. Thank you to the Wexler Family and Pali Adventures for hosting a magical experience filled with adventure and FUN for 120 campers.

We can’t wait to return next year.
Reunion Events provide unique learning experiences as well as social and extracurricular engagements, including sailing, ocean therapy, animal farm, Dodgers game and more.

The Trails to Success Initiative offers specialized workshops and programming for older campers and Junior Counselors, including career readiness, financial literacy and leadership skills.

New Initiatives

Happy Trails Art Start: A series of art workshops hosted and conceived by acclaimed artist and youth advocate Mimi Jung. Campers build skills through intentional learning, benefit from a lunch lecture series, and are creating a portfolio that can be used to open professional and academic doors.

Happy Trails Tents: Our overnight tent camping and wilderness retreats are facilitated by our team of experienced counselors and Happy Trails Board Members Michael Leiaghat and Jason Gilliland. This experience offers campers “leave no trace” education, self-reliance, outdoor skills and overall is an immersive experience in the great outdoors.

When asked why reunion events were an important part of Happy Trails, Junior Counselor Gemma N. shared “It’s important to make kids feel like they are thought of throughout the whole year, not just during the summer.”

We couldn’t agree more – maintaining an active and consistent presence in the lives of our campers is critical to our model.
OUR EVENTS

Taste of Camp - May 16, 2019
Happy Trails supporters gathered for an evening of camp nostalgia, delicious food and fun! While featuring signature camp dishes from local restaurants and honoring actress, foster parent and advocate Jen Lilley, our wonderful community of friends raised $130,000! As a result, we were able to add an additional week of summer camp - taking 100 children in foster care off our waitlist and inviting them to be a part of our Happy Trails family!

Cantor Fitzgerald Charity Day
Sept 11, 2019
Happy Trails for Kids participated in the 2019 Cantor Fitzgerald Charity Day. Comedian and creator of Comedy Central’s critically acclaimed “Broad City,” Ilana Glazer, served as the Happy Trails for Kids celebrity ambassador. Charity Days was founded to honor the 658 Cantor Fitzgerald friends and colleagues who lost their lives on September 11, 2001. Cantor Fitzgerald and BGC Partners in conjunction with the Cantor Fitzgerald Relief Fund donates 100% of their global revenues during Charity Day to participating charities.

Hike-a-Thon & Family Fun Day
Nov 3, 2019
Nearly 500 friends and family enjoyed a beautiful afternoon at Temescal Gateway Park at our 9th Annual Hike-a-Thon and Family Fun Day. With $90,000 raised in support of our programming, we were so appreciative of the teams, sponsors and vendors who participated to make this year a success. Thank you for hiking this trail with us in support of children in foster care!
The Max “Sonny” Salter Scholarship Recipient

In recognition of the outstanding academic excellence demonstrated by our brightest stars, Happy Trails offers college bound leaders financial aid through the “Sonny Salter Fund.”

This year, our 2019 scholarship was awarded to Ashley Robinson. Ashley started her journey with us when she was 7 years old during our very first year of camp in 2009! She is now a Junior Counselor and a first-generation college student at Chapman University.

“When I was younger, I went through life thinking I was worthless because of my situation of being in foster care.” However, Ashley recounted, being at camp surrounded by “amazing kids” going through similar situations has not only given her a lasting community, but it has taught her “to be humble and appreciate what you do have in life.” Ashley shares that one of the biggest lessons she has learned at Happy Trails is “never judge a book by its cover because you never know what someone has had to endure underneath the smiles.”

Ashley describes her feelings of returning to Happy Trails as coming home to family. The feeling is mutual. Ashley is a role model for hundreds of children and a shining light for boys and girls who need it most.

INSPIRING YOUNG LEADERS!
Happy Trails for Kids
High School Volunteer Clubs

Under the leadership of Santa Monica High School student Taylor Spill and Palisades Charter High School Student Noah Wexler, a new generation of volunteers and advocates are emerging. The Clubs are comprised of dedicated students interested in becoming more informed and involved in supporting children impacted by the foster care system. Founder and Club President of the Pali High School Chapter, Noah Wexler, describes why he is a committed volunteer:

"It was a fun, but also an incredibly meaningful experience to host the scavenger hunt and camp dance for the Happy Trails campers - it reminded me and our volunteers about all the things we love about camp, and why it is important for children in foster care to have these positive experiences."
OUR IMPACT

424
NUMBER OF KIDS SERVED
47% F 53% M

63%
OF COUNSELORS IDENTIFY AS A FORMER FOSTER YOUTH

ethnicity
LATINO 52%
AFRICAN AMERICAN 36%
CAUCASIAN 6%
ASIAN PACIFIC ISLANDER 2%
AMERICAN INDIAN 1%
OTHER 3%

types of programs
RECREATIONAL 5
EDUCATIONAL 6
TRAILS TO SUCCESS 6
FULL FAMILY 3

21
REUNIONS EVENTS OR WORKSHOPS

1,452
ONGOING POINTS OF ENGAGEMENT WITH CAMPER AND CAREGIVER COMMUNITY
OUR TEAM

Our Board of Directors

CHAIRMAN
Jonathan Abrams, JD
Partner,
Abrams Brown LLP

PRESIDENT
Susan Abrams, JD
Policy Director,
Children’s Law Center

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
Lindsay Elliott, JD, MSW
Happy Trails for Kids

SECRETARY & TREASURER
Mark Hikin, JD, MBA
Real Estate Associate,
Sklar Kirsh, LLP

Our Leadership Team

Deanna Cooke, Ph.D.
Director of
Engaged Learning at
Loyola Marymount University

Erika Frank, BA
Founder,
Erika Frank Interiors

Jason Gilliland, JD
Vice President,
Endeavor Capital

Jeffrey Schwartz, BS
Founder and Managing Partner,
Corbel Structured Equity

Michael Leiaghat, MS
Vice President,
Pom Pom at Home

September Sucher, Camp Director
Vincent Stevens, Assistant Camp Director
Nadia Gonzalez, Administrative Assistant
Jasmine Steele, Camper Care Coordinator
Carolina Wolf, Trails to Success Project Coordinator
Raquel Barbas, Activities Director
### OUR FINANCIALS

**Revenue**

- **42%**
  - $275,536
  - Individual Donations and Special Events

- **20%**
  - $126,904
  - Non-Profit Organization and Government Grants, and Other Revenues

- **38%**
  - $246,236
  - Foundations and Corporate Grants

- **Total Revenue**
  - $648,676

**Expenses**

- **64%**
  - $322,440
  - Programming

- **21%**
  - $107,194
  - Development

- **15%**
  - $75,172
  - Operations

- **Total Expenses**
  - $504,806
THANK YOU TO ALL OF OUR PARTNERS, SPONSORS AND SUPPORTERS.

Every dollar contributed makes a difference in our ability to improve the lives of children in foster care.
Thank you so much for everything Happy Trails has taught me so much.

I love the years I was here. And there is more to come. Happy Trails has made me meet amazing people. Learn things, too. Thank you so much. Love you, September.

Also, my cabin members and my counselor are the best I could ever ask for. Thank you Happy Trails for every thing that you’ve done. And see you next year. And all the years after that.