

VIDA VERDE

EDUCATIONAL EQUITY IN THE OUTDOORS



**2015
annual
report**

Vida Verde is a nonprofit that promotes educational equity by providing free, overnight environmental learning experiences for students who wouldn't otherwise get the opportunity.

Dear Friends,

Fifteen years ago, we created Vida Verde because we recognized that most low-income, urban students did not have access to meaningful experiences in the outdoors. Through many years of learning and growing, the Vida Verde three-day program is achieving consistently powerful results: raising science test scores and helping kids make important lifelong connections to nature and the environment, while helping them develop character traits that will ultimately help them be successful in life. We couldn't be prouder. To date, we have provided free multi-day programs for over 9,500 low-income Bay Area students! YES!!!

Some highlights from 2015 include:

- The successful implementation of a weekly Instructor in-service focusing primarily on best teaching techniques and cultural relevancy. These rich workshops played a key role in Vida Verde receiving our highest-ever rankings on post-program evaluations in 2015!
- Introduction of our new post-program classroom curriculum for teachers. The Vida Verde Classroom Connections is comprised of eight lessons and designed around three primary criteria: (1) the Next Generation Science Standards, (2) relevance to students, and (3) flexibility for classroom teachers.

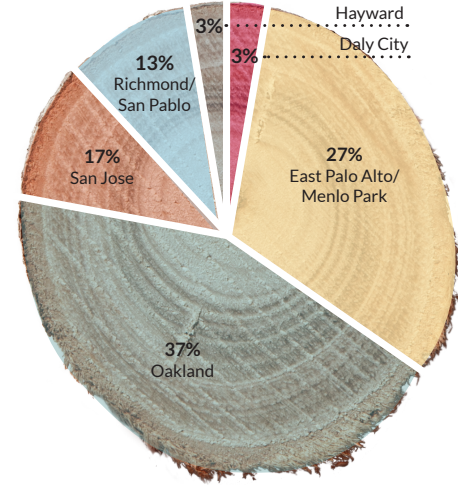
The incredible generosity of our growing donor community inspires us every day to work efficiently, effectively, and with great heart and passion towards the mission of Vida Verde: to promote Educational Equity in the Outdoors. We're excited about all that 2016 will bring! Along with serving over 750 students, we'll launch our brand new website and make significant progress on securing the purchase of our home-base site. Please join in the excitement by visiting our camp, volunteering, or attending one of our annual events!

Warmly,

Shawn and Laura Sears
Co-Founders



WHO WE SERVED



Vida Verde gave my students the opportunity to have so many experiences that otherwise they wouldn't have had. Many had never been camping, let alone hiking or even immersed in nature. Vida Verde gave them a chance to walk among giant redwoods, kiss banana slugs, and chase ocean waves, all while learning the importance of taking care of our environment and having fun. Additionally, all my students were able to experience the benefits of teamwork and supporting and loving each other during tough moments. Most importantly, I loved that every single one of my students were able to experience success. Whether it was finally getting milk out of the goat, cutting vegetables or completing a solo walk in the dark, all of them left Vida Verde with a sense that they can be successful in life.

—NELLY ALCANTAR, 5TH GRADE TEACHER

In 2015, Vida Verde served **757** students by providing our free programs to **30** classes from **16** underserved Bay Area schools.

92% of the students served were eligible for free and reduced-price meals in their schools.

99% of the students were ethnic minorities.

Due to cost, **NONE** would have otherwise had the chance to participate in a similar program.

IMPACT

In 2015, as a result of their trip to Vida Verde:

88% of teachers reported:

A Marked Improvement (highest possible rating) in students' classroom learning and science test scores.

88% of teachers reported:

A Marked Improvement in students' overall experiences when they return to school.

98% of teachers reported:

A Marked Improvement in students' teamwork, self-confidence and personal responsibility.

95% of teachers reported:

A Marked Improvement in students' awareness of and interest in environmental issues.



“Our school has come to depend on Vida Verde for building community and positive school culture. The 6th graders struggle a lot when they first come to our school, but after Vida Verde they feel a connection to their classmates and teachers. They also gain confidence by trying so many new things. The combination of confidence and connectedness has led students to feel calmer at school and take more risks, and ultimately this allows them to learn more.”

—BIANCA SONNENBERG,
6TH GRADE TEACHER

DURING 2015,

757 students participated in Vida Verde's unforgettable three-day overnight program, one class at a time. From our site alongside San Gregorio Creek and at nearby state parks and beaches, the students were provided with myriad opportunities to learn, explore, and adventure through some of the best outdoor classrooms around! *The program positively and powerfully impacts our students in the following ways:*

IMPROVED ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE

Vida Verde's lessons and activities are linked to California state education standards, and help bring to life what students have only read about in textbooks. Learning becomes more relevant. With a strong focus on teamwork, group process, and communication skills, the Vida Verde experience helps students work together and trust each other back in the classroom.

CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

While at Vida Verde, students are pushed to try dozens of new things, given challenges and jobs to do during each activity, and are held to high standards. As a result, their self-confidence, determination, and personal responsibility grow by leaps and bounds.

INCREASED ENVIRONMENTAL AWARENESS & CONNECTIONS TO NATURE

First-time, positive connections to nature occur constantly throughout the Vida Verde experience. These experiences are essential to engaging urban youth as environmental stewards: they help the students build context, and inspire them to take ownership and responsibility.



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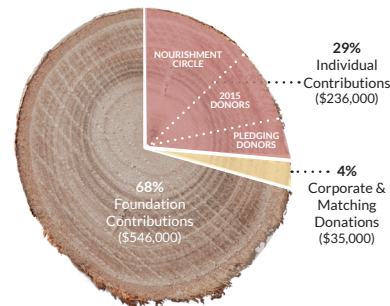
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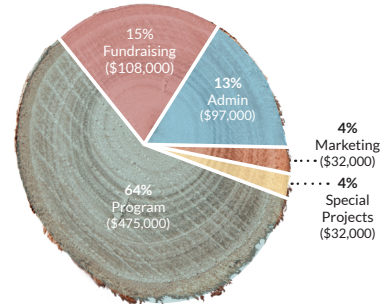
OPERATING REVENUE

\$816,000



OPERATING EXPENSES

\$744,000



In 2015, Vida Verde added \$60,000 to our Operating Cash Reserve

LETTER FROM A STUDENT

Dear Donor,

I appreciated that you gave many to us so that we could have a wonderful trip. I really like your kindness that you gave your own money just for us to go here in Vida Verde. Thank you. My best memory was when we got to try out new and cool things that we have never tried before like going to the Peble Beach. Something that changed about me when I went to Vida Verde is that when I came back home I told my friends that we should start to try out new things because nature is always, always full of surprises when you go out and explore in the nature. At Vida Verde I got to see surprises like owls because I went out and I was discovering more about how nature works. Something new that I learn is to always try new things anywhere you go and discover in your backyard too you could find animals in the ground also you could find animals in the bushes or anywhere only if you go and have fun with nature.

Sincerely,

Mia

BRENDA TUOHY, ELEMENTARY SCIENCE SPECIALIST
OAKLAND UNIFIED SCHOOL DISTRICT
1000 BROADWAY, SUITE 600
OAKLAND, CA 94607

I work as an Elementary Science Specialist in the Oakland Unified School District. In my 12-year career as a science educator in high-poverty public schools, I have worked with dozens of science museums, outdoor education programs, and science outreach organizations across the greater San Francisco Bay Area. There is no other program that compares to Vida Verde.

Vida Verde is unique in that it exclusively serves children from urban, under-resourced schools. While other programs may offer scholarships to low-income students, Vida Verde's specialization has enabled it to tailor its program to the unique social-emotional and learning needs of low-income, urban students. There are the supports that are easy to spot - a tuition-free program, a high adult-to-student ratio, the nutritious food, and extra jackets for students who may not have their own. Then there are the supports that are less obvious - the instructional strategies used to support English Language Learners, the behavior management rooted in positive reinforcement, and even the design of the 3-day program itself. The program is structured very intentionally, so that students experience success the entire time. Vida Verde does this by sequencing activities in order of increasing difficulty.

Another strength of Vida Verde's educational program is the way environmental and science learning is linked to students' life experiences. At Vida Verde, as students participate in hands-on learning in different environments - in a redwood forest, at a farm, and at the Pacific Ocean, they learn about ways that humans impact the environment - both positively and negatively.

This newfound sense of purpose doesn't end when students get on the bus and head home. The students carry the lessons they learn at Vida Verde and bring them back to their home communities. One student had her first experience with large animals when she took a goat on a hike a Vida Verde. Now, years later, as a high school student, she volunteers at the Oakland Zoo. She works as a docent and teaches a new generation of elementary students about animals and conservation. I work with families who frequent the farmer's market to buy organic produce because their fourth graders taught them how pesticides spread through a watershed and affect native plants and animals. I know families who have started hiking and camping because their fourth graders begged them to do so after returning from Vida Verde. I even know one mother whose daughter made her kiss a banana slug.

The impact of Vida Verde on students is profound. The impact is deep, lasting, and doesn't end with the students who get to attend a 3-day Vida Verde program. The impact spreads through their families and their communities.

I know of no other science or environmental program that deserves continued support more than Vida Verde.

Sincerely,



Brenda Tuohy
Elementary Science Specialist, Oakland Unified School District