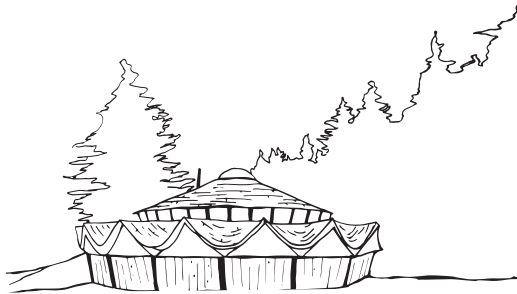


Pandemic Lessons

2020 Impact Report

The Mission

of Experience Learning is to
develop confidence,
competence,
and community
through high-quality
outdoor experiences.





The pandemic was the ultimate unifier.

When was the last time humans around the globe were so immediately affected by the same disaster? For the past year and a half, we have been isolated from each other but united in our condition.

This isolation has offered many lessons—one of the clearest being just how crucial communication is to every relationship (both human and interspecies) that exists, and how much work it can take to keep it going. When communication breaks down, community breaks down.

Research has shown repeatedly that fungi communicate with trees to warn of impending dangers—from wildfires to invading insects—and to share nutrients. Can we humans achieve this same ‘better together’ mindset within our own communities and ecosystems?

Anthony Taylor, VP of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion at the YMCA of the North said, “The ultimate measure of health is connectedness. So if we focus on building community rather than fitness, we win.”

Throughout 2020, we were pushed to find new ways to communicate and build community from a distance. We spent the year adapting and experimenting—and boy did we discover that we have a lot of learning to do.

Here at Experience Learning, 2020 was the year for us to live up to our name. This year’s impact report describes a few of the lessons we gained from our experiences on a mountain top in the Allegheny Mountains of West Virginia.

Lesson 1:

The world doesn't need us—we need the world.



May 2020

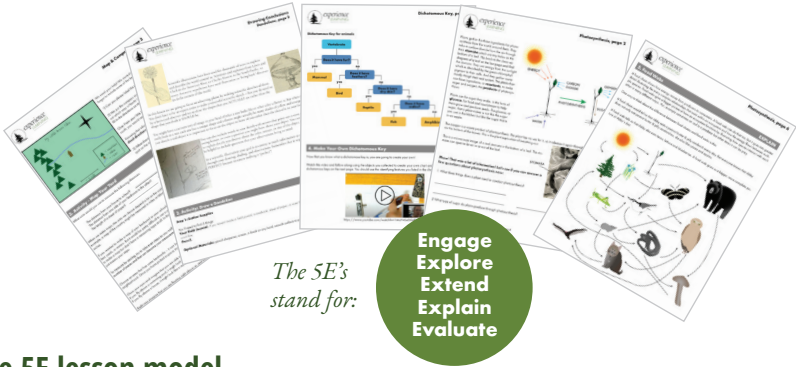
These days it's common to hear people express the hope that the world will “return to normal” soon. At the same time, though, quarantine has forced many of us to come to terms with the ordinary, normal realities of everyday life. No escaping to the office, to school, or even, for many, to the woods.

And so we're baking bread, breaking bread, and reading books. We're pausing, thinking, watching the buds swell on the tree outside our window, the sun rise earlier each day, and the dandelions bloom in the cracks of our sidewalk. We're learning to exist more harmoniously with those who share our home. What could be more normal than this: living the life that's right in front of us?

COVID hasn't stopped the birds from migrating or singing, the trees from blooming, the grasses from growing, the rivers from flowing. Our cultural norms—which we have superimposed upon the world—have been dramatically disrupted, making the normal continuation of life around us even more noticeable.

5E Lessons

The wild world is an unstoppable and ever-present force. We developed a series of lessons able to be executed by teachers and students in any climate or living situation—urban or rural—while they were out of school. These free lessons were downloaded by individuals from West Virginia, Maine, and Minnesota, as well as places as far away as Kampala, Uganda, and many locations in between.



The 5E lesson model

The 5E lessons follow the model we use for in-person programming and are based in the theory of active learning. They help students become interested in and engage with the subject matter and apply what they've learned back to their own life.

YOUR TURN:



Ants are a perfect example of how the smallest actions can move actual mountains. The human colony depends on this planet for our survival, and we'd do well to remember that the rest of the world doesn't particularly need us. What was a natural phenomenon that caught your attention this year? What was one plant or animal that you saw carrying on unconcerned with masking or vaccine development?

Lesson 2:

We all can and must become functional parts of a functional whole.



October 2020

The COVID crisis has challenged our standard education system and amplified issues that have been lurking for many years now. When systems break down, we have to start with the pieces: identify the smallest unit that is still functioning—the state, the community, the family, the self—and build from there.

Experience Learning's programs have always focused on participants realizing that they are functional parts that can contribute to a functional whole. As Nathaniel Riverhorse Nakadate said, "It's the parts of a whole that make the whole, and we need all of them."

Often, much of what we do here feels too simple to talk about. We camp, we cave, we walk, we talk, and we listen. But, as simple as these activities may seem, they're the blocks that build functional individuals and communities—and many of them can and are being carried out in everybody's house, yard, and neighborhood.

We're here to encourage and to provide resources, ideas, and hopefully inspiration, so that we can all keep building towards a better tomorrow.

Camper Turned Community Advocate: Katy Super

I came to camp for the first time as a third grader in 2006. It was my first time overnight camping and hiking; it felt foreign to me.

That faded through the week into a new sense of independence. Caring for my belongings, building campsites, learning with the group, and taking care of our environment helped solidify my love for the wild and wonderful, and instilled a desire for environmental protection early on.



In college I studied geography and focused on why place matters, how place happens, and how environmental burdens center on communities of color. Now I use geography as a lens to look at racial inequality and environmental access and I advocate for environmental justice solutions.

I first became interested in this by learning about the history and environment of West Virginia at camp. It was a privilege for me to have that adventure and grow the love in my heart for the natural world in my home state. The shared experience of camp connected me to my peers throughout West Virginia.

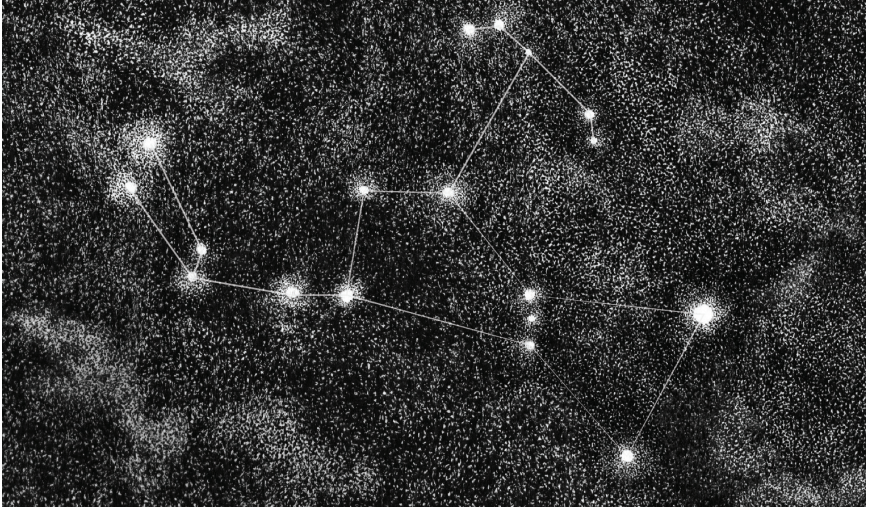
YOUR TURN:



We all experience individual struggle and growth as we continually metamorphosize into better versions of ourselves. What was something you did this past year that made the world a better place? What was something you could have done better—or wish you would have done or said?

Lesson 3:

Everything's connected.



Artwork by Felipe Delfino

November 2020

Doug Van Gundy wrote the poem on the facing page early one morning on our campus as he gazed at the sky through the bubble in Ulan Bator. Growing up in Randolph County, Doug frequently came to the Spruce Knob Mountain Center with his parents in the 1970s. He remembers getting lost in the depths of the universe looking at the stars through the bubble in Ulan Bator back when it was freshly installed and crystal clear. Years later Doug brought many of his West Virginia Wesleyan College honors students to our campus for a retreat. It was on one of these retreats that he penned “The Return of the Hunter.”

This fall, we shared Doug’s poem with a brand new friend—Felipe Delfino—a Brazilian artist living in western Pennsylvania, and he created this pointillism piece in response. Felipe discovered our campus during COVID and has fallen in love with our mountains and the wildlife they contain. You are looking at the result of this unlikely collaboration: two artists, strangers to each other, who looked up at the same stars from the same speck of land on this great planet and were inspired.

The Return of the Hunter

It's the rag-end of summer, and just before
the night vanishes into bright vapor, Orion reappears
after six months of traipsing around the other half of the sky.

He is obviously exhausted, stretched out supine
along the eastern horizon, barely able to hold himself
up on one bony elbow. Relax, old friend. Catch your breath

and polish the bright buttons on your belt –
it's been a fecund summer and the woods are full
of acorns and hickory, and the apples and hawthorn are hung

with bright fruit – deer and squirrel and bear are fat and plentiful
and slow. Soon enough your bowstring will sing, your smokehouse
will smolder and your tracks will trail others through winter's thin snows.

- Doug Van Gundy

Illustrated by Felipe Delfino

YOUR TURN:



Beavers are a keystone species in many ecosystems. Keystone species have a disproportionately large impact on their ecosystem based on their population. They create conditions that keep the system in balance. If they're removed, the ecosystem would change drastically. Who do we depend on in our human ecosystems to keep our communities in balance? What can you do to add resilience to your community?

Board Member Spotlight: Kelly Griffith

I first visited Spruce Knob Mountain Center 25 years ago. I was a 16-year-old who had never slept in a tent or gone hiking. My month-long stay at SKMC was transformational in many ways, but I think I've benefited most from the confidence that developed when I stepped out of my comfort zone and found out that I'm capable of more than I expected. I became more aware of all the possibilities, a little braver, and more trusting of myself. I was speeding toward young adulthood when I spent that summer on the mountain and it was just in time.



Since being asked to serve on the Board in 2020, I have been thrilled to help make these experiences available to even more kids and teens. I am constantly inspired by Experience Learning's leadership and staff, and I am so grateful to be a small part of an organization that is doing such important work.

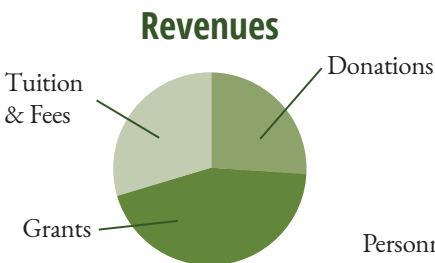
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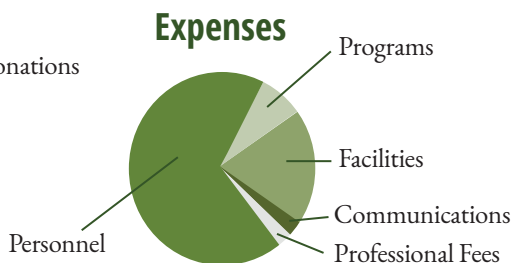
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2020 Numbers



Total: \$240,800



Total: \$340,014

Revenues	2019	2020 TOTAL
Tuition & Fees	\$ 433,498	71,336
Grants	\$ 164,427	106,875
Donations	\$ 92,156	62,588
Total	\$ 690,080	240,800

Expenditures	2019	2020 TOTAL
Personnel	\$ 420,804	231,067
Programming	\$ 122,386	26,095
Facilities	\$ 74,067	69,190
Communications	\$ 20,297	7,456
Professional Fees	\$ 1,750	6,204
Total	\$ 639,286	340,014

Of the 2020 expenses, \$79,865 of the deficit was covered by the Paycheck Protection Program loan, which was forgiven in 2021.

YOUR TURN:

*Challenge Grant
Opportunity*

As we emerged from the lockdown this spring, an anonymous donor gifted us a \$75,000 donation and challenged us to match it through a year-long fundraising campaign.

Can you help us meet this match?



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