



experience
LEARNING

2021 Impact Report



Camper Spotlight: Catie Mullin

“Before Experience Learning, I never imagined that I’d ride a canoe down rapids or explore deep inside a cave. The time I’ve spent at Spruce Knob has taught me about pushing boundaries and persistence—I can do these things, and I can enjoy them!”

Rising 8th grader Catie Mullin has always had a taste for adventure. Since she was little, she’s lived out this passion in the pages of books. It wasn’t until participating in her first summer camp at Experience Learning that she realized just how much was possible within only a few hours of home (Annapolis, MD).

Catie returned for her second camp this past summer, reuniting with two good friends she’d made the previous year. Besides getting to explore and give her natural curiosity free rein, she says that the people—campers and counselors both—are the best part. Catie hopes to return to Spruce Knob in future to continue building her outdoor leadership skills and connecting with others who share her love of the wilderness.

Dear Friends,

Whereas year one of the pandemic was a test of willpower and patience—hunkering down and pushing through—year two (2021) was all about re-learning, or, rather, learning anew. The world began to wake up and take on a new form, challenging us, in the process, to step out of our comfort zones. To emerge even stronger.

Here at Experience Learning, 2021 presented us with an opportunity to truly live into our values: to embody the skills, attitudes, and outcomes we strive to model for our guests and participants every day. Our staff sprang back into action (though we never fully shut down), adapting our programs as necessary to provide meaningful experiences of connection and exploration all of us were craving after an extended period in quarantine.

Not only did the great enthusiasm of our community show, but it also grew and blossomed to a degree unparalleled in years prior. In 2021, we celebrated the following fresh starts and successes:

- Cyclists from across the country joined us for three days of supported, backroad rides at the first edition of our Mountain State Gravel Adventure weekend.
- Our summer camps had the highest numbers of attendance in the organization’s history.
- Our in-person, community-based program returned and was busier than ever. In the fall alone, we had the joy of bringing beyond-the-classroom learning to 10 counties, 26 teachers, and 400 students, and we officially launched our long-awaited monarch butterfly pilot initiative at Petersburg Elementary School in Grant County.

Just like the monarch butterflies—which you’ll read more about later—we believe that it’s imperative for people, and especially children, to have access to nurturing environments where it’s safe and encouraged to experiment, wander, and grow.

We’re excited to share our 2021 Impact Report and offer you a glimpse into the many wonderful adventures we had the pleasure of facilitating in the past year. We hope that you, too, will draw from these small victories faith in our collective resilience, along with our capacity, as humans, for ongoing renewal and transformation.

Sincerely,

Vicki A. Fenwick-Judy

Vicki Fenwick-Judy
Outgoing Executive Director



Reader Tip: Unfold the pages of this report to discover a colorful and winged surprise!

Butterflies and Bright Horizons

Experience Learning launches “Monarch Edventures” pilot program

Last fall, in a patch of grass behind a small school in Grant County, a new program took flight: Experience Learning’s Monarch Edventures program at Petersburg Elementary. Though it began as an initiative to introduce the school’s fourth grade students to a variety of ecological subjects in the context of monarch butterflies, it ended up evolving into something much more meaningful.

At first, we discussed the impact that monarch butterflies and other pollinators have on our daily lives, along with topics such as the incredible phenomenon of the monarchs’ annual 2,899-mile migration, life cycles, biodiversity, and habitat needs. Students also learned about the extreme challenges these creatures are currently facing. Destruction of monarch habitats and a changing climate are just two of the many factors that have contributed to their plummeting population (fact: the monarch population has decreased by ninety percent since the 1980s).

Understanding that monarch butterflies were on the verge of endangerment, the Petersburg Elementary fourth graders started to lay plans of creating a safe haven for the butterflies right outside their school. Around the backside of the building sat a few raised flower beds that had not been used or maintained in years. This seemed the perfect canvas to create a schoolyard garden for students, butterflies, and pollinators to enjoy for years to come.

Students led the effort to repair and bring life to the existing raised beds, and the school provided supplies for the students to construct a few additional beds. With a couple nails, several buckets of soil, and a fresh coat of paint, they came together nicely. To brighten up the garden even more, students applied their creativity and decorated rocks they found nearby to include in the space. Then they planted native milkweed and wildflower species in each of the raised beds so that the habitat was equipped with everything the monarchs would need to survive and thrive.

As new life grows within the garden, so will the learning opportunities afforded by this program. In the coming months, students will be rearing and studying monarch

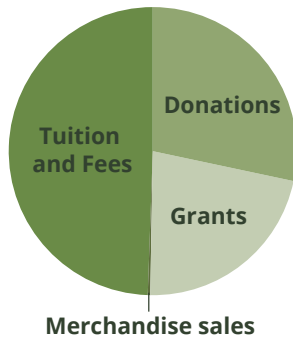


butterflies up close through data collection, parasitic monitoring, and monarch tagging. Eventually, we hope to transform the space into a fully-fledged Schoolyard Ecology Exhibit, complete with signage and other informational materials that can be used as tools to help students and visitors spread awareness of pollinators and monarch butterflies. Our vision—developed in collaboration with the Petersburg Elementary fourth graders and teachers—is for the garden to serve as an extension of the classroom, through which students can observe, participate, and educate others.

Already, we’ve witnessed the students working diligently and enthusiastically to be part of the solution. In the first year of the program, students not only learned about the importance of monarch butterflies and the obstacles we face to protect them, but they buckled down to make a real difference in their own schoolyard, and they’ve continued the conversation at home and in their community as well. Thanks to the success of year one of this program, it seems we have good cause to believe that for the students and butterflies both, the sky’s the limit.

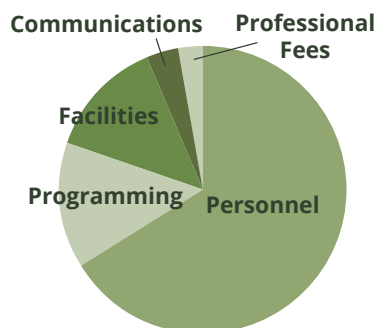
2021 Numbers

Revenues: \$520,239.08



Revenues	2020	2021
Donations	\$ 62,588	\$ 148,774.84
Grants	\$ 106,875	\$ 113,469.51
Merchandise Sales	\$ —	\$ 2,069.54
Tuition & Fees	\$ 71,336	\$ 255,925.19
Total	\$ 240,800	\$ 520,239.08

Expenditures: \$624,954.61



Expenditures	2020	2021
Personnel	\$ 231,067	\$ 413,526.67
Programming	\$ 26,095	\$ 89,505.18
Facilities	\$ 69,190	\$ 82,377.47
Communications	\$ 7,456	\$ 23,303.18
Professional Fees	\$ 6,204	\$ 16,242.11
Total	\$ 340,014	\$ 624,954.61

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Board Member Spotlight: Melody Flowers

Executive Director for Strategic Analysis and
Policy at the University of Kentucky

Melody was first a West Virginia Scholar (class of 1994), then a cook at our Spruce Knob Mountain Center, and today she's a dedicated and invaluable member of our board.

Born and raised in Barboursville, WV, Melody left the state for college knowing that, eventually, she wanted to return to Appalachia someday. She hoped to bring back experience and insights that would make her home state even better. And that's precisely what she's doing in her role on Experience Learning's board. Through her business and financial expertise, as well as her great belief in the region's potential, Melody has been expanding our vision and helping ensure the long-term sustainability of the organization.

Melody's two teenage children have spent considerable time at Spruce Knob, and they love it. It's important to her that other kids (and adults) get the same opportunity.

"There's no place else on earth like that mountain," she said. "It reconnects you to who you are, and everyone should be able to experience that. I'm grateful for the chance to help more people understand and access the beauty here!"



Give Today

Your donation today will build the next generation of leaders and community members. Your gift provides more youth an opportunity for life-changing experiences in the forests, mountains, and classrooms around the region.

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