

EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS
ANNUAL REPORT 2016-2017



**STRONGER
TOGETHER**



LETTER FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“The journey of a thousand miles begins with one step.”

– Lao Tzu

Each week for the past 35 years, a bus pulls up and a new group of bright-eyed students step out, excited for the opportunity to immerse themselves in the natural world. I am continuously inspired by our students who embrace the lessons learned at Exploring New Horizons Outdoor Schools. I see counselors, students, and teachers incorporating their Exploring New Horizons experience into their day-to-day lives, embodying the

ACT: positive Attitude, Cooperation, and the courage to Take a Chance.



When I ask past participants to recall their personal experiences during Outdoor School, they rarely recall the species of birds they saw or the names of the trees that surrounded them. Instead, I see their eyes grow bright as they recall the power of community. They become animated as they talk about the skit they performed or the courage it took to go out on their first night hike. It is clear from the stories that they tell that the lasting impact of the Outdoor School experience is their newfound awareness of their connection to the natural world and their sense of responsibility as its stewards.

Researchers are beginning to study the long-term impact of environmental education. Studies have shown that time in nature fortifies our physical health and emotional well-being. Though there is currently no available peer-reviewed data, there are countless anecdotal stories about the impact and power of a week at Exploring New Horizons. I am overjoyed when I hear accounts of students taking initiative to create a new ‘green’ project for their school. I am thrilled when I hear about a teacher who is empowered to build upon lessons taught at the outdoor school and how kernels from those lessons travel home to the family unit. Our Annual Report highlights how Exploring New Horizons empowers not only the participating students but their families and communities.

Just as the largest redwood tree starts as a tiny seed, the journey of protecting our environment and building the next generation of environmental stewards starts with one small step. Exploring New Horizons and the communities we serve experience first-hand the positive changes that emanate from the students that attend our program. Together with your support, we are stronger. Together, we will create a more vibrant community. Together, we enhance the world around us.



Tracey Weiss
Executive Director

LETTER FROM OUR BOARD PRESIDENT

While the Exploring New Horizons experience lasts only four to five days, the impact can last a lifetime. During our 35 years of providing engaging, hands-on environmental education, we have frequently heard stories from former students, staff, teachers, and parents about the ways in which their lives were impacted by the Exploring New Horizons experience.

I encourage every Exploring New Horizons Board member to attend the closing ceremony at the end of the week of program. One can discover and observe so much by sitting among the students and talking with the teachers during this special time. I am continuously amazed to see first-hand how a week of unplugging from their favorite screens to connect face-to-face with their peers transforms into calmer, more reflective students at school. Teachers remark that when a student is engaged and connected to their peers, it can make the biggest impact. Furthermore, results of a recent study concluded that depth and meaning are added when students learn outdoor environmental science concepts in a hands-on, active, and experiential way. 79% of students surveyed in this study indicated that outdoor school was worthwhile.*

During my recent visit to Outdoor School, a student shared: “This week, I learned that for years we have been making the earth accommodate us, and it’s time for us to adjust and accommodate the earth.” We live for ‘aha’ moments like this! So let’s give an emphatic “YES” to continuing this vital work and making sure we empower the next generation of engaged environmental stewards.



Uli Mueller
Board President

**James, J.K., Williams, T., (2017). School-based experiential outdoor education—A neglected necessity. Journal of Experiential Education, 40(1), 58-71.*



Working as a naturalist has always been a rewarding experience. The letters I have received from students over the years bring joy to my heart. Reading them, I gain insight into the lessons they learned during their time at Outdoor School. However, I have always wondered what really made it into their day-to-day life.

Last year, I had the opportunity to be a cabin counselor for two groups of girls who lived adjacent to my hometown in the East Bay. I love working with students from the area where I grew up; it gives me a chance to visit them when I go home for the holidays. So this past December I made a plan with their teachers to visit the two groups of girls at school. It was magical to get to see their everyday life. I was greeted with smiling faces, screams of joy, and more hugs than I could handle! I spent an afternoon with the girls, watching their public speaking projects and visiting the library. What really hit home for me was what I discovered during lunch time.



by Chelsea **"Hummingbird"** Wright



At Exploring New Horizons, we compost our food scraps, recycle our paper and hard plastics, and study how much food was not eaten during a meal.

Assigned food waste collectors scrape all the leftovers on students' plates into buckets at the end of every meal. We then weigh them and make a graph charting the food waste throughout the week. By seeing and measuring this food waste, students become more mindful of how much food their bodies need, how much is unnecessary, and what resources were required to produce the food. When I walked into the school cafeteria that afternoon, I found two of the girls from my cabin walking around with a bucket collecting food scraps from their classmates' trays, just like they did at Outdoor School. One of the girls,

Hanna, explained that she was president of the Green Team and that they were

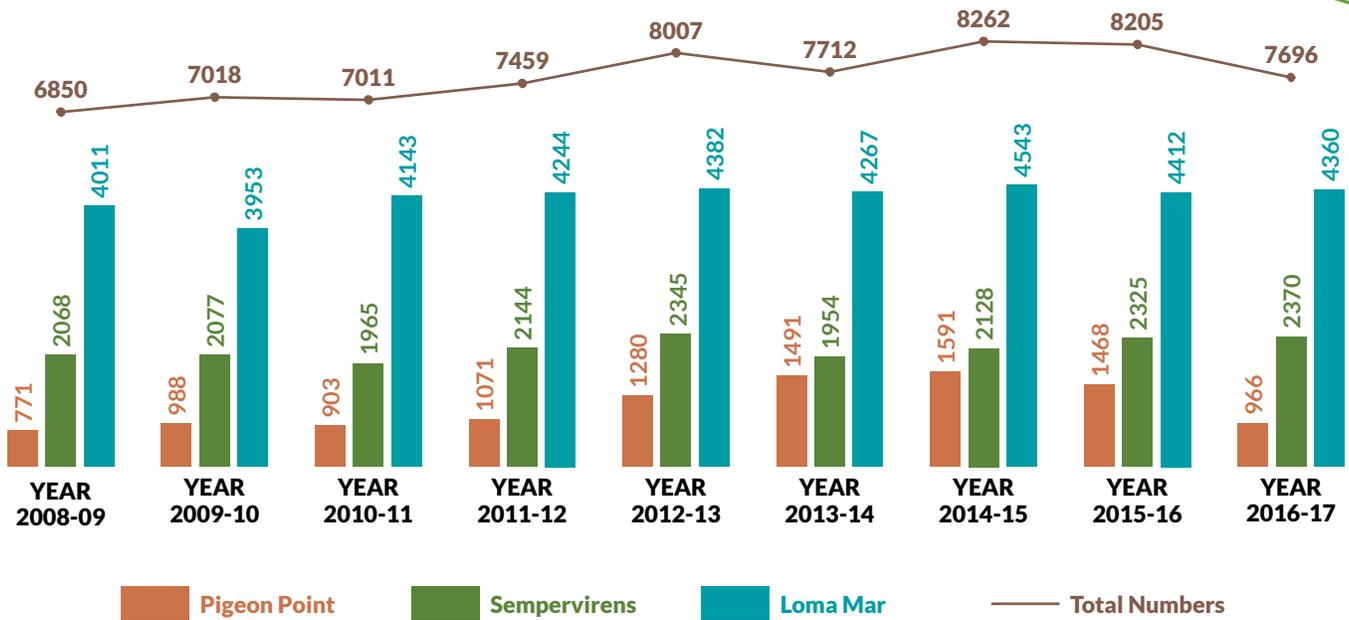
in charge of, among other things, collecting food waste and making sure whatever was thrown away was put into the appropriate receptacle (landfill, recycling and compost). This immediately brought tears to my eyes and made my heart swell with glee. The questions I had always asked myself about the lessons these students truly learned and put into practice was being answered right before my eyes. Here they were, empowered to take initiative as the Green Team to bring about a higher environmental awareness at their school.

As educators, we are responsible for planting the seeds of change. When students decide to water and nurture those seeds, they grow and flourish into something mighty and the world becomes a better place. Each of us has the power to take a small step. Lots of small steps add up to big, world-wide results.

"Here they were, empowered to take initiative as the green team to bring about a higher environmental awareness at their school."



STUDENT NUMBERS TRENDS



GENERAL MANAGEMENT
\$282,332 | 11.11%

FUND DEVELOPMENT
\$6,986 | 0.28%



PROGRAM SERVICES \$2,251,024 | 88.61%

Loma Mar.....	\$1,197,967
Pigeon Point.....	\$ 218,302
Other User Groups.....	\$ 155,888
Sempervirens.....	\$ 678,867

EXPENSE BREAKDOWN

TOTAL EXPENSE: \$2,540,342



that third morning

by Justin “Thistle” McLean

Going beyond your comfort zone in search of curiosity, knowledge, and a better understanding of your place in the world is a very special endeavor, albeit a challenging one. Exploring New Horizons provides a safe space and a nurturing community for youth and teens to take this on in the context of the natural world. The instructors and naturalists that make up the full-time staff of Exploring New Horizons are the most inspiring, intelligent, talented, and role-model-worthy individuals I have ever met, and they have taught me in incredible ways every time that I have participated: twice as a student and over eight times as a counselor.

As a student, I gleaned important information about subjects such as ecology, sociology, and biology as well as core values like community contribution, leadership, and acceptance of others. Then and now, the staff imparts wisdom and knowledge, both through the curriculum and by example, with the grace and skill that results from dedication and practice.

Now as a counselor, I have the pleasure of seeing a new generation of students completely change and awaken to nature through the program.

I always cherish that inevitable third morning when all talk of video games and home is replaced with a resolution for more hikes, camping, and the outdoors in their everyday life back home. Mentoring a group of 11-year-old boys can be overwhelming, of course, but the Exploring New Horizons staff has been there as ever to equip me with leadership skills and support, empowering me to grow and become a better mentor. I, along with the staff, learn from the children who come through this program as well. They teach us patience, parental and guidance skills, time management, and so many other skills.



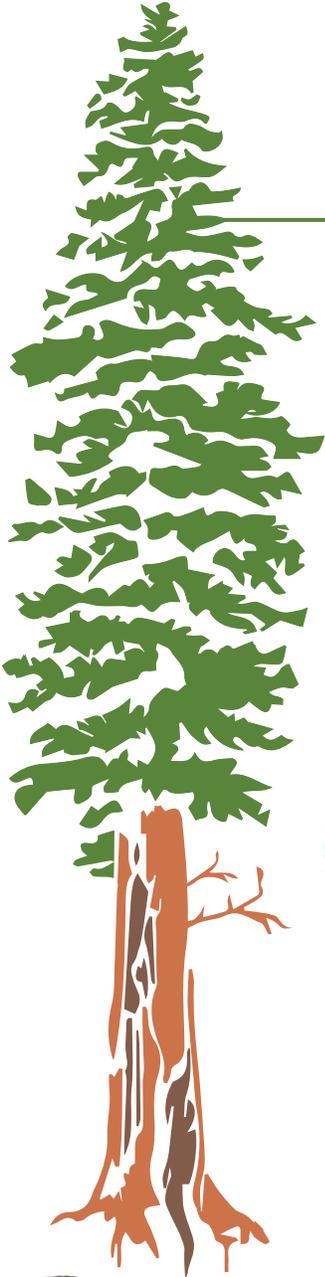
Exploring New Horizons provides an invaluable service for impressionable youngsters that you would be hard pressed to find elsewhere. I urge countless people to go every year, and I won't stop! The level of skill, love, and devotion to the students' education and safety is exemplary. I will forever be drawn back to Exploring New Horizons to continue teaching, learning, and exploring, and to a part of that transformative third morning.

“...talk of video games and home is replaced with a resolution for more hikes, camping, and the outdoors in everyday life back home.”



TOTAL INCOME: \$2,563,560.00

INCOME BREAKDOWN



PROGRAM FEES:
\$2,474,343.65 | 97%



GRANTS/CHARITABLE CONTRIBUTION: \$50,149.92 | 2%



NET SALES:
\$25,028.55 | 1%



OTHER:
\$14,037.88 | 1%



Our annual income allows us to create learning experiences that teachers rave about.

“Students spend six hours out in the redwoods. That time isn’t spent just learning about the redwoods. You can obviously utilize the surroundings to teach them the science of redwood ecology and the symbiotic relationships between all the different animals that live there. But students can also do math projects, creative writing, and conduct scientific observations in the redwoods. The agility of Exploring New Horizons to use this one place to teach so many different curriculum areas was something that I hadn’t thought of before. Now, this is an educational philosophy that I strive attain in my own classroom.”

EXPLORING NEW HORIZONS

aims to establish industry standards in environmental education.

We partnered with a graduate researcher from the UCLA Graduate School of Education to conduct research on program outcomes during the 2016-17 school year. The goal of these evaluations was to measure students' experiences and the actual impact our environmental education program had on students over time. The study was comprised of 695 students and 14 alumni who took a pre- and post- program evaluation.

OUTCOME HIGHLIGHTS:

- **Exploring New Horizons is highly successful in creating emotional connectedness with nature using direct experiences with the environment. Post evaluative scores out of 60 showed Sempervirens (SV) participants at 50.8 and Loma Mar (LM) participants at 47.6.**
- **Counselors, naturalists, and teachers felt greater self-efficacy because they learned how to foster social connectedness. Post-evaluative scores: SV 49.6; LM 46.3.**
- **Exploring New Horizons experiences influenced high school counselors' academic motivation and improved their high school experiences by fostering lasting friendships. Post-evaluative scores: SV 56.6; LM 56.**





exploringnewhorizons.org

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