

#KidsNeedNature



Dunes Learning Center 2015 #AnnualReport

“Our students lead busy city lives. It is important that we all emphasize quiet time where students can zone out, read, draw, contemplate, or just sit under a tree. I think we are exhausted and forget the value of quiet time in nature!”

#KidsNeedNature



It might seem odd to choose hashtags as a theme for an environmental learning center's annual report when multiple studies document the negative impacts of an increasing dependence on electronic devices.

Children, even those in rural areas, spend less time outdoors than ever before—according to one study, less than 7 minutes a day on average. Disconnected from the natural world, they lack the tools and empathy needed to address the substantial challenges posed by a changing climate and increasingly stressed natural resources.

But there are more immediate and direct impacts of a life spent indoors that can't, and shouldn't, be ignored. Our children's health is declining as obesity and attention deficit disorders are rising. Increases in anxiety, diabetes and vitamin D deficiency have all been attributed to a more sedentary lifestyle. Fortunately, a proven solution lies just outside the door.

Studies show that 40 minutes a day outdoors reduces the chances of becoming shortsighted by nearly a quarter. Schools with environmental education programs score higher on tests in math, reading, writing and listening, while programs like those at Dunes Learning Center have been proven to significantly increase critical thinking skills.

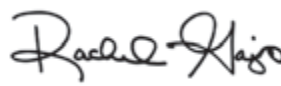
We love to see kids' eyes light up as classroom lessons come to life in nature. Freed from the screens that compel and limit their thinking, students are eager to explore, discover and challenge themselves. It's literally life changing.

And yet... social media is the new public commons. It's where we share ideas, create trends and crowd source solutions. These connections strengthen our organization and bring more opportunities to kids. United, our voice and passion can help create a renaissance of learning in the dunes. **#KidsNeedNature** but they won't get there without you.



Geoff Benson

Executive Director



Rachel Gajos

2015 Board President



duneslearning



duneslearning Campers spent 7 hours on the Cowles Bog Trail at [Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore](#) learning about fungi and looking for Monarch caterpillars on their way to the lake and back! #LearnYourPark #DunesCamp

#LearnYourPark

Dunes Learning Center's partnership with Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore is a truly unique and valuable resource, bringing global opportunities to local classrooms. Our Naturalist Intern program is one example. In 2015, emerging conservation and education leaders from as far away as Spain and Cameroon came to Dunes Learning Center for unparalleled on-the-job training, providing local students with new perspectives. In September, our national lakeshore campus played host to the annual Environmental Education Association of Indiana conference, convening 90 of the state's top environmental educators. A record number of visitors attended our National Get Outdoors Day and Winter Open House events last year, while highly-rated residential programs including summer camps, Frog In the Bog, Winter Ecology and newly updated middle and high-school programs operated near capacity. All told, more than 5,000 individuals answered the invitation to "find their park" at our national lakeshore campus in FY2015.

The #LearnYourPark campaign celebrates 100 years of learning in our national parks and the programs that bring lessons to life through immersive and adventurous experiences in nature. Dunes Learning Center is proud to be one of less than 25 residential environmental learning centers working in partnership with the National Park Service to inspire the next generation of leaders committed to the environment, our history and our parks.



duneslearning



duneslearning Meet Simone and Miranda, two of the many campers who slept out for the first time last night, and loved it!
#DunesCamp #KidsNeedNature #EveryKidInAPark

#EveryKidInAPark

Since 1998, Dunes Learning Center's national lakeshore campus has provided tens of thousands with their first national park experience. New partnerships, funding, events and initiatives helped us reach beyond park borders in FY2015, connecting 11,000 individuals with nature. \$185,000 in tuition assistance was awarded for residential school year and summer programs, \$10,000 from the second annual Lightning Bug Music Festival. Outreach programs including Mighty Acorns, Earth Force and Calumet Is My Backyard provided hands-on environmental and service learning experiences to 3,700 students—at no cost to schools. Teens from Boys & Girls Clubs in Gary and Lake Station received paid on-the-job training and a chance to attend summer camp thanks to an innovative Junior Environmentalist program, Military Kids camp provided a week of fun and respite to 68 children, and in its second year, our autism enrichment program launched a “*Sensational*” summer camp of its own, welcoming students of differing abilities to their national park.

Dunes Learning Center is proud to partner with the National Park Service to reach out to the next generation of park visitors—connecting our future leaders with the natural world via our public lands. Starting in 2015, students participating in Dunes Learning Center programs will receive a pass good for free admission to national parks and federal lands for 12 months beginning in September of the year they enter 4th grade.



duneslearning



duneslearning #MightyAcorns hiked to the Little Calumet river to learn about #WaterQuality by searching for macroinvertebrates. #stewardship #outdoordiscovery

#MightyAcorns

Committed partnerships, clear focus and measurable impacts were behind the phenomenal growth of Mighty Acorns in 2015, benefiting an incredible 3,549 students along with natural areas in 7 northwest Indiana communities. The STEM-based curriculum supports classroom goals through hands-on learning and service activities that promote academic achievement, self-discovery and leadership skills while exposing kids to a wider world of opportunities. Mighty Acorns visited natural areas at ArcelorMittal in East Chicago and Burns Harbor, where they worked side-by-side with scientists to conserve native ecosystems. In FY2015, 1,600 students paddled a canoe for the first time and 140 Mighty Acorns from across Chicago and Northwest Indiana attended one of two Dunes Learning Center summer camps. Over 5 days, campers learned to work together, accept differences, meet challenges and become good stewards of the planet. For many, it was a week of unforgettable firsts—boosting self-esteem and laying a foundation for success in school and life.

2015 marked the first full year of the Northwest Indiana Mighty Acorns Partnership, a collaboration that includes The Field Museum, Shirley Heinze Land Trust and Dunes Learning Center, with major funding provided by ArcelorMittal. As lead organization in the Partnership, Dunes Learning Center managed a budget of \$224,000, training for more than 86 teachers and scheduling of nearly 200 study field trips during FY2015.



Audited Statement of Activities

For the fiscal year ended September 30, 2015

Revenues, Gains and Other Support

Program revenue	\$370,488
National Park Service funding	542,755
Grant revenue	246,992
Individual contributions	48,623
Sponsorships & event revenue	41,048
Other	12,168
<i>Total Revenues, Gains and Other Support</i>	<i>\$1,262,074</i>

Expenses

Program Expenses

Program staff	\$438,012
Supplies	543,675
Overhead	62,530
<i>Total Program Expenses</i>	<i>\$1,044,217</i>

Administrative Expenses

Administrative staff	\$92,752
Supplies	21,491
Overhead	29,680
<i>Total Administrative Expenses</i>	<i>\$143,923</i>

Fundraising Expenses

Fundraising staff	\$35,944
Supplies	42,046
Overhead	7,143
<i>Total Fundraising Expenses</i>	<i>\$85,133</i>

<i>Total Expenses</i>	<i>\$1,273,273</i>
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<i>Net Revenues, Gains and Other Support</i>	<i>\$(11,199)</i>
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Audited Statement of Financial Position

September 30, 2015

Assets

Cash	\$304,556
Accounts receivable	14,472
Unconditional promises to give	135,000
Beneficial interests in assets held at community foundations	203,644
Other	4,331
Total Assets	\$662,003

Liabilities

Accounts payable	\$29,608
Accrued liabilities	26,481
Total Liabilities	\$56,089

Net Assets

Unrestricted	\$202,481
Temporarily restricted	199,789
Permanently restricted	203,644
Total Net Assets	\$605,914

Total Liabilities and Net Assets **\$662,003**

#Geography



75%

Indiana

24%

Metro Chicago

1%

Other

#Reach

Onsite program participants: 6,034
Outreach program participants: 5,322
Total program participants: 11,356



#Assistance

\$185,348

In tuition assistance awarded

2,746

Individuals benefited

More than half of all students attending school year and summer programs at our Indiana Dunes National Lakeshore campus benefit from tuition assistance funds.



#Expenses

Program: 82%

Supplies & Administrative: 11%

Fundraising: 7%

11%

7%

82%

#Revenues

Grants: 25%

Individual Contributions: 4%

Events & Sponsorships: 7%

Investment Income: 1%

National Park Service Funding: 23%

Program Fees: 40%



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