



# 2023 Annual Report



## Getting Back to Our Roots

Project U.S.E. has had an incredible year full of milestones and program highlights. Among a full year of great moments, our key accomplishments include two successful extended expedition trips to New Hampshire and Baltimore, the construction of a new community garden site at Grace West Manor in Newark, and busy Spring and Fall seasons hosting school and community partners for courses at our beautiful, scenic Wildcat Mountain Wilderness Center.

We're excited and thrilled with our impact, and excited to do more in the coming year to help expand equitable access to these kinds of transformative experiences to even more students. We are incredibly grateful to all of our funders, donors, volunteers, and staff alumni for their support of our work, and we hope you enjoy seeing the beautiful photos and programming updates included below.



**WE'VE GOT YOUR BACK!**  
PROJECT U.S.E. BOARD MEMBERS AND  
DONORS CAME OUT TO SUPPORT AND  
ENCOURAGE STUDENTS ON THEIR  
EXPEDITION PROGRAM IN NEW HAMPSHIRE



## Why Outdoor Education Matters

Project U.S.E. has a long and rich history of more than 50 years providing outdoor and experiential education programs; and we know from first-hand experience the tremendous positive impact they have on participants. While some things have changed, students still need the same support and unique benefits that these programs provide now more than ever.

We remain dedicated to running high-quality programs that give students access to a crucially important set of benefits: **meaningful in-person connection and development of positive relationships in a supportive community; a safe but challenging environment to build leadership skills and learn about decision-making and risk; and the physical and mental health benefits that come from spending time in nature and engaging in regular physical activity.**



"MY PEDAL FARMER EXPERIENCE HELPED ME CREATE A NEW CAREER AND BUSINESS GOAL FOR MYSELF BECAUSE I LOVE WORKING WITH PLANTS."



## Making a Positive Impact

Below are a couple of key highlights and numbers that capture the impact that our programs and partnerships have had on the participants and communities we serve.

Worked with

**2,300**

Program Participants

Provided over

**15,000**

Program Hours

Provided

**27**

Students with Paid  
Summer Employment

Raised

**\$50,000+**

In Program Scholarship Funds  
through our Annual Hike





**87%**

of program surveys from participants indicated that “I have more appreciation for the skills and talents of other members of my group after this program.”

**78%**

of program surveys from participants indicated that “This program helped me develop a growth mindset and realize I can be successful in challenging situations.”

**76%**

of program surveys from participants indicated that “During this program, I learned to work in a group with other people with different ideas and opinions, even when there is conflict or disagreement.”

**88%**

of program surveys from participants indicated that “During this program, I built positive relationships with my peers and group members.”



## Wildcat Programming

Our outdoor programming at Wildcat Mountain Wilderness Center was back in a big way in 2023! Schools and community partners were eager to have students engaged in outdoor and experiential education programs to build community culture and provide them with a unique hands-on learning experience outside the traditional classroom environment.

Our programs at Wildcat tackled numerous goals for our school and community partners, from incorporating identification of native plants and trees for science classes to providing team building experiences for college athletic teams to help them form stronger bonds and trust before their season started.

With the completion of upgrades and repairs to our high ropes course and Ferber Lodge at Wildcat, we look forward to hosting even more courses, volunteer days, and community gatherings there in the coming year!



CLICK HERE TO VIEW OUR PROGRAM  
UPDATE VIDEO WITH 2023 HIGHLIGHTS



## TEAMWORK IN ACTION

STUDENTS FROM LINK COMMUNITY CHARTER  
SCHOOL PARTICIPATE IN A RACCOON CIRCLE  
OPENING EXERCISE TO KICK OFF A PROGRAM AT  
WILDCAT MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS CENTER



## Pedal Farmers Program

Our Pedal Farmers program had another successful year of programming with several highlights, including expanding the program to include paid employment experience for students beyond the six-week summer program and building out a new garden space at Grace West Manor in Newark.

For some of the Pedal Farmers, the experience was their first paid employment experience and helped them earn money while learning about career opportunities and professional expectations. They also had the opportunity to participate in a series of workshops on managing money focused on financial literacy, investing, and setting savings goals. Many of the students have goals of being business owners and entrepreneurs and our future programming will include more workshops and partnerships to help them reach those goals.

### CARING FOR COMMUNITY SPACE

PEDAL FARMERS MAKING SURE PLANTS GET PLENTY OF WATER AT THE WEST KINNEY COMMUNITY GARDEN SITE.



# Creating Green Space at Grace West Manor in Newark



Thanks to generous support from the **City of Newark's Nourishing Newark** grant program and a strong partnership with **Jonathan Rose Companies**, Project U.S.E. was able to build out a new community garden space for residents of all ages at Grace West Manor in Newark.



The project allowed us to hire additional students for the Pedal Farmers program who had the amazing experience of being able to build a new garden space in the community where they live. The design of the garden was based in part on input from surveys and ideas from senior citizens and families sharing what they would like to see included in the new garden space.



In the Spring of 2024, community residents will be able to begin growing fresh, healthy food in their own plots - stay tuned for more amazing updates as the garden comes to life and we introduce new programming designed to get more residents involved in gardening, access to local fresh food, and healthy cooking.







## Professional Development

This year, we continued our tradition of working with nonprofits, businesses, schools, and other organizations to run high-quality trainings to help their team members work together more effectively. Participants worked with us in a number of beautiful outdoor locations, including New Hampshire, on site at schools and college campuses, local parks, and at our Wildcat Mountain Wilderness Center in West Milford, New Jersey.

We plan to continue working with many of our long-term partners in 2024, along with developing new program offerings to introduce new business and community partners to the benefits that experiential and outdoor education can bring to building a positive organizational culture and developing staff leadership.

### WORKING IN HARMONY

AMAZING LEADERS FROM ACROSS THE STATE  
WORKING THROUGH A TEAMBUILDING ACTIVITY  
DURING A PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAM WITH LEAD NEW JERSEY.



# Help Support Our Mission



PROJECT U.S.E. SEEKS  
TO ADVANCE EQUITABLE  
ACCESS TO  
TRANSFORMATIVE  
OUTDOOR EXPERIENCES

## Sponsor Our Annual Hike

Our 2024 Annual Hike will take place on Saturday, May 4th.

Companies and businesses can support the hike as well - for a full range of sponsorship, in-kind donation opportunities, and more information on signing up a team of employees to participate, [review our sponsorship deck at this link.](#)



## Become a Donor

You can support our mission by choosing to make a donation to help us provide high-quality outdoor education programs to more students.

[Visit our donation page](#) to learn more about how your gift can make a real difference and help give one or more students an amazing outdoor education experience.



## Become a Program Partner

We're always interested in connecting with new school, business, and nonprofit partners who may be a good fit for our programs.

If your own company, community organization, or local school could benefit from our interactive, hands-on approach to programming and learning, feel free to have them contact us or [complete this program inquiry form](#) to let us know what they are looking for.



## Follow Us on Social Media

A great way to keep updated on our programs, fundraising events, and other highlights is to follow us on social media. We always appreciate our supporters helping to spread the word about the work we are doing by liking and resharing our updates.



# Thank You To Our Supporters:

Community Foundation of New Jersey

City of Newark: Nourishing Newark Grant

Lackland Family Foundation

Kate Svitek Memorial Foundation

Victoria Foundation

Impact 100 Essex

The Hyde & Watson Foundation

The Hausler Family Fund

The Goldman Family Fund

Arborjet

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Julie Costello & Dan Loftus

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