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# THE VENTURE FREE FOUNDATION

*An Overview of  
Outdoor Adventure!*

*2017-2019*

PREPARED BY EMILY PHELPS DELLINGER



# THE VENTURE FREE FOUNDATION

VFF seeks to empower young people of all backgrounds to foster a connection with the natural world in an environment that promotes healthy physical and mental development, leadership, respect, and a lifelong appreciation for nature.

Through our 4 main program models, our experienced Adventure guides and Counselors provide genuine outdoor experiences that allows our campers to feel 'free'; Free from stress, free from expectations, free from the inside, and free from screens.

We developed our programs to follow a loose curriculum of environmental stewardship, outdoor activities, and survival skills that has been tailored to help campers feel comfortable and gain self confidence. Whether it is a tangible skill, or intangible knowledge, every lesson and experience helps to culminate a lasting connection between our campers and the natural world

## VALUES

FUN!

Environmental Responsibility

Free Play

Communication

Collaboration

Fresh Air

Adventurous spirit

Community

Respect

Personal Connections



Venture Free (VF) was founded and began its first program in Fall, 2014, with one counselor and a total of 5 campers. In 2017, the IRS accepted our 501(c)(3) application and Venture Free became the Venture Free Foundation. By the end of 2019, our single counselor has grown into a team of 3 year-round staff and 4-6 seasonal counselors. And, the number of past and present campers we have been fortunate to adventure with has grown from 5 to over 300.

We are dedicated to growing a future generation of enthusiastic adventurers who seek new experiences, who are caring and respectful of their planet, and who are eager to learn from the world around them



### **LOCAL OUTDOOR AREAS**

Adventures take place in local outdoor areas, introducing campers to real settings they can keep coming back to.



### **ENVIRONMENTAL STEWARDSHIP**

At the core of everything we do, is care for, and show our campers how to care for our environment.



### **AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES**

We don't look at pictures of people doing things. We get the kids outside and we do it! Jumping in rivers, climbing on rocks, swimming in the ocean, hiking on the trails, exploring caves, searching for waterfalls...



### **RISK MANAGEMENT**

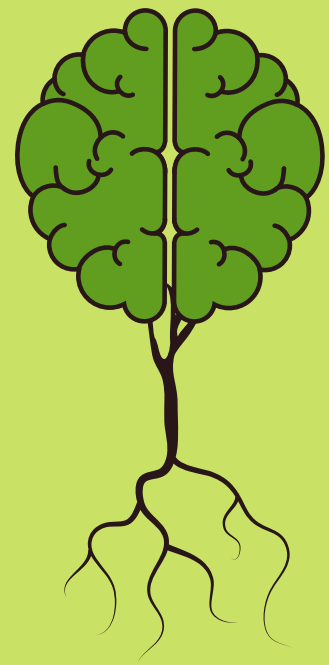
We teach our campers to assess their surroundings using sound judgement. Allowing them to build confidence by testing their limits and considering risks proactively



Venture Free was created out of two concerning realities, and one strong desire to just GO OUTSIDE!

Those two concerning realities;

1. That, by many causes, children are missing out on very important parts of development; outdoor exposure and unstructured play.
2. Our planet needs immediate help. By giving our children the opportunity to build meaningful connections to the natural world, they will be more inclined to respect it and protect it.



Nature plays an irreplaceable role in brain development.



Outdoor activity builds children's confidence as it offers unique opportunities for risk taking, problem-solving, challenging themselves, and pushing themselves to their limit.



Outdoor exposure and free play improves cooperation, flexibility, and self-awareness. Children given unstructured time outdoors learn to interact on their own terms. They can encourage each other, plan, prioritize, negotiate, multitask, and use their imagination to problem-solve and entertain themselves.



# **VENTURE FREE: BEFORE NON-PROFIT**

**August 2014 - December 2016**

Non-Profit or not, we have always been dedicated to serving our campers, their families, and making sure that we do everything in our power to give children vital opportunities to benefit from the outdoors!

**2014**

The first Venture Free program began in the fall with the start of the 2014/15 school year

Our first program started with 5 campers

Emily (VF Founder) ran After school camp on her own. She enlisted one volunteer for weekend camping trips

**2015**

VF first year of summer programs enrolled 34 campers!

Second year of After school Adventure camp expanded to an additional school and began Aug 2015 with 21 campers!

VF hired part time employees for the Summer of 2015 and obtained dedicated volunteers for summer trips and school year

**2016**

2016 Summer camps enrolled 54 campers!

Our third year of After School Adventure Camp enroled 23 campers in 3 different schools

VF was able to hire its first year round Part-time employee and continued to rely on dedicated volunteers

**72**

**Days camping**

**418**

**days outside**

# VENTURE FREE FOUNDATION

## Becoming a Non-Profit Organization

Giving outdoor experiences to all children, especially to those who otherwise would not get it, and regardless of ability to pay, was always the goal. In the first couple years of operating, we had provided more than \$2,000 of financial assistance to multiple campers. Obtaining our 501(c)(3) status was the clear path to continue working towards outreach, and the goal of giving the gift of adventure to those experiencing it the least though they may benefit from it the most. By being a 501(c)(3), our supporters are able to write off their donations, we are eligible for grant funding, and it becomes a smoother process to creating fully funded outreach programs and offering financial assistance to campers families.



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**43**

**Days camping**

**223**

**days outside  
with Campers**

**Summer  
Enrollment**

**61**

13% increase from 2016

**Adventure  
Camp Enrollment  
(school year)**

**38**

65% increase from 2016

**Financial Aid  
Provided to Campers**

**\$1,623**

## Where did we go?

- ALL OVER the Bay Area
  - Yosemite
  - Big Sur
- Eastern Sierras
  - Tahoe
- San Clemente
- Catalina Island
- Desolation Wilderness
  - Burney
  - Shasta
- Meiss County

The first half of the year, in addition to our After School adventure programs, we put a lot of energy into our 1023 application and other related tasks to obtaining our 501(c)(3) status. The second part of the year was spent learning how to find grants, learning to write grant applications, and working with Jefferson Elementary School District to get our first fully funded outreach program started. 2017 was also the year that the idea for the Terra Teen program was conceived!



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**31**

**Days camping**

**246**

**days outside  
with Campers**

**Summer  
Enrollment**

**74**

21% increase from 2017

**Adventure  
Camp Enrollment  
(school year)**

**93**

145% increase from 2017

**Financial Aid  
Provided to Campers**

**\$11,186**

## Where did we go?

- ALL OVER the Bay Area
  - Death Valley
  - Yosemite
  - Alabama Hills
  - Crater Lake
- Siskiyou, Willamette NF
- Smith Rock Oregon SP
  - Shasta
  - Burney
- San Clemente
- Desolation Wilderness

2018. This year, we were so excited to experience our efforts blossom into the start of our first fully funded Outreach program offered at Fernando Rivera Middle School in Daly City!

Our Terra Teen program that began in the Fall of 2017 was able to venture out on their first, very successful, trip to the Eastern Sierras and Death Valley in the winter of 2018.

We also took on another new, large, project; the Children's Center at our local elementary school, Kings Mountain Elementary.





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**51**

**Days camping**

**276**

**days outside  
with Campers**

**Summer  
Enrollment**

**74**

**Adventure  
Camp Enrollment  
(school year)**

**75**

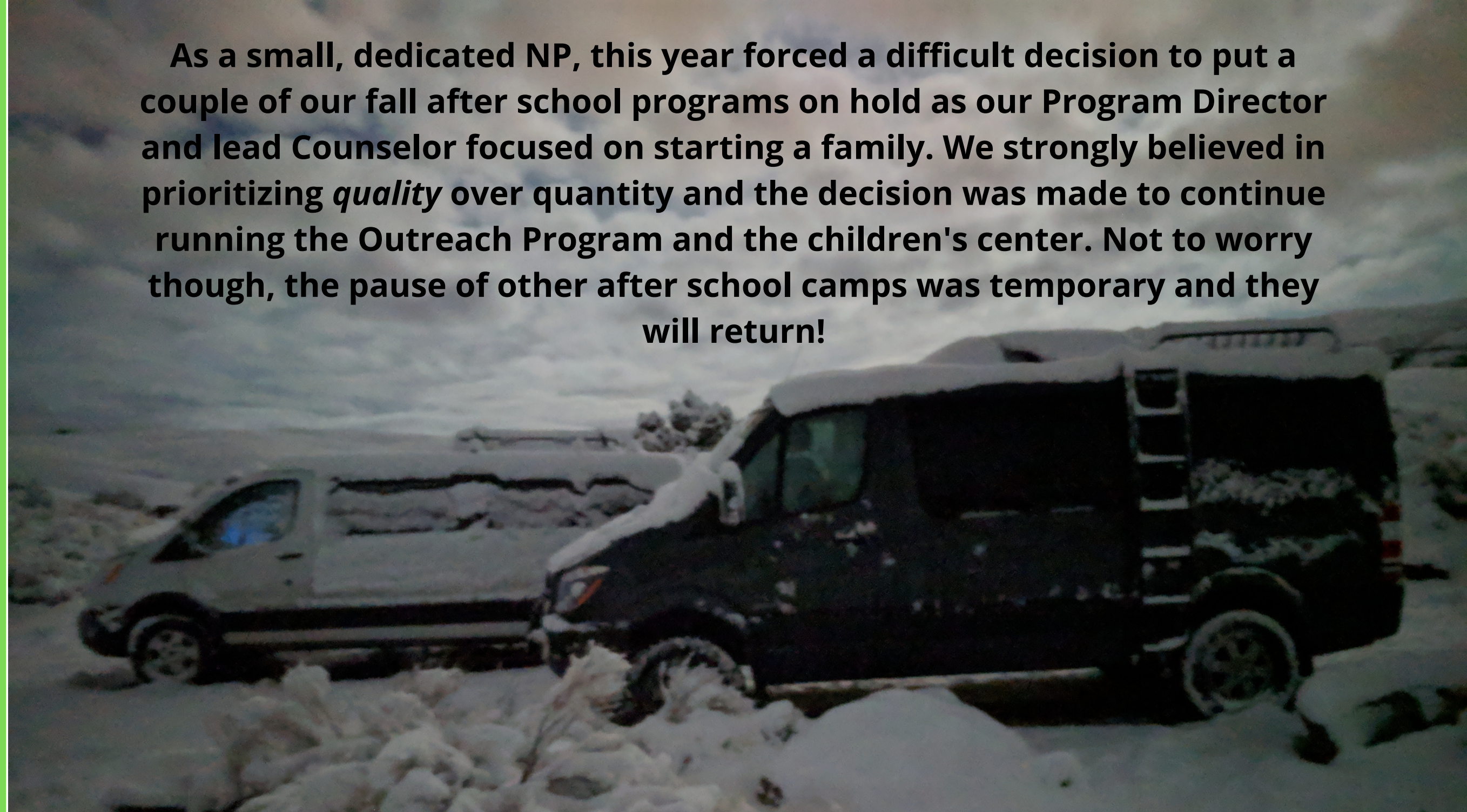
**Financial Aid  
Provided to Campers**

**\$23,431**

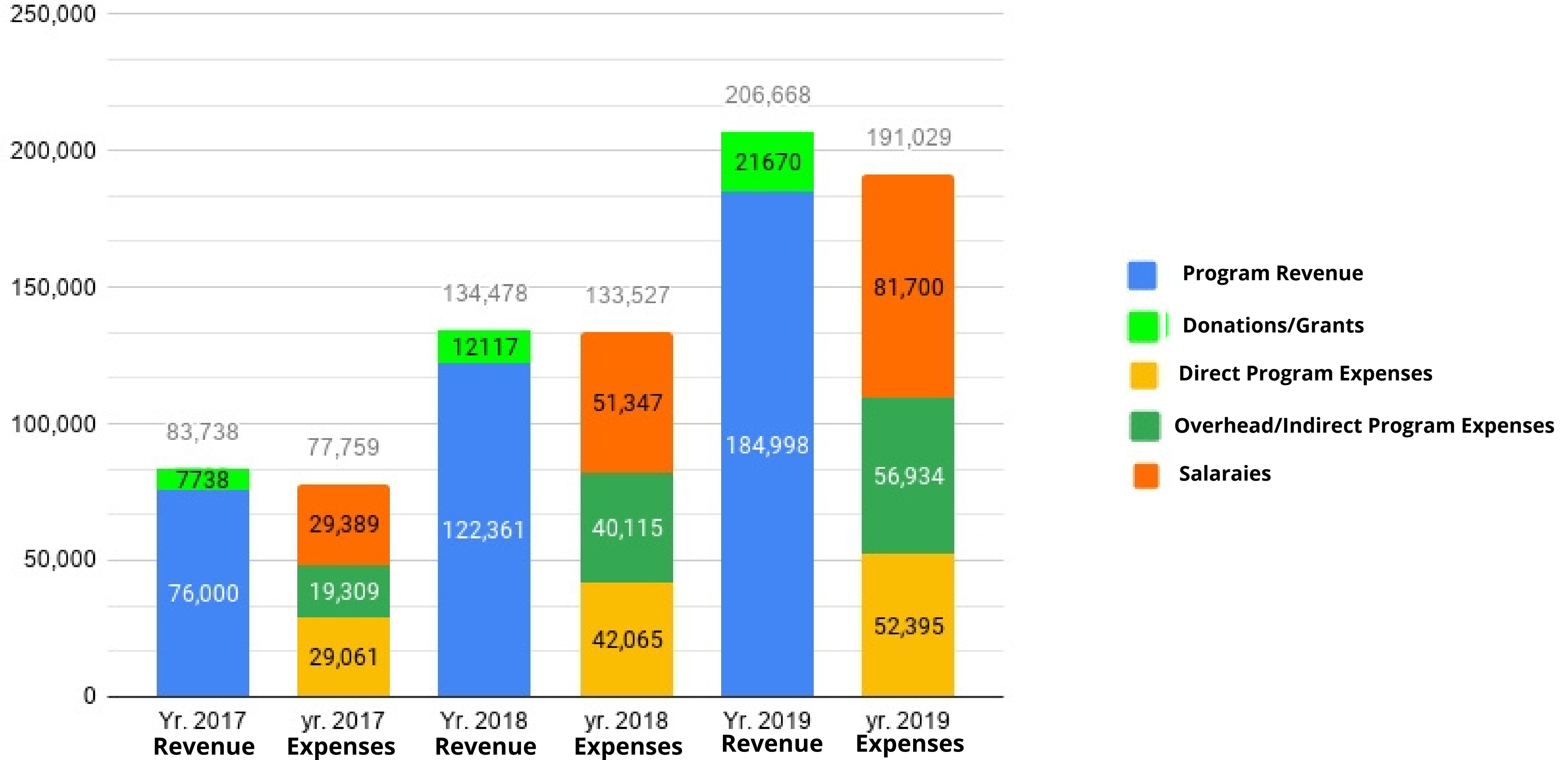
## Where did we go?

- ALL OVER the Bay Area
  - Moab, UT
  - Death Valley
  - Arroyo Seco
  - Tahoe Basin
    - Ventura
  - San Clemente
    - Mammoth
    - Bishop
    - Sierra NF

As a small, dedicated NP, this year forced a difficult decision to put a couple of our fall after school programs on hold as our Program Director and lead Counselor focused on starting a family. We strongly believed in prioritizing *quality* over quantity and the decision was made to continue running the Outreach Program and the children's center. Not to worry though, the pause of other after school camps was temporary and they will return!



# 2017-2019 REVENUE AND EXPENSES



# OUR IMPACT

Total Campers reached: **309**

Campers who keep coming back for more: **219**



**"Venture Free has changed the way I want to do things cause at home I used to just play video games. Now, I always ask my mom to take me and my sister to the beach!"**

**- Duvan; Outreach camper (FR)**

## Continuous Exposure

Our programs are structured to not only give our campers a positive experience in the outdoors, but most importantly, to give them continuous exposure to an environment that encourages problem solving, improvising, adventure, risk management, and a deeper understanding of our natural world. When children are regularly interacting with the environment for extended periods of time, campers develop a stronger connection to nature, and a "once in a lifetime" experience becomes a lifetime of experiences.

**"I feel like Venture Free has helped me feel more confident about a lot of the things I do like in school, talking to teachers, and it made me feel good enough to try out for sports for the first time"**

**- Patty; Outreach camper (FR)**

**"I like Venture Free the best because it's not just something you get to do one time, but we get to go outside and play and explore different places every Wednesday for a whole year or even longer."**

**- Ruben; Outreach camper (FR)**

# LOOKING FORWARD

**We want to provide incredible outdoor experiences for children. We want to foster strong connections with the natural world. We want to promote and teach environmental stewardship and leadership.**

**With this in mind, our focuses for the future include;**

- Expanding current adventure program offerings
- Strengthening and growing our educational programs
- Obtaining and develop a permanent Venture Free Foundation headquarters
- Increasing professional development available to our counselors
- Increasing Outdoor Adventure equity
- Strengthening our Terra Teens and Intern program

**We are also seeking philanthropic support in fundraising development**

# **GENEROUS SUPPORTERS AND DONORS**

Steve and Beverly Knight  
Marty and Cindy Phelps  
Warm Hands Foundation  
Kings Mountain Art Fair  
Village Collection Inc.  
Sandy Shapero  
Camco  
Kevin and Theresa Crispin  
Liam and Kim Hussey  
Kelly and Larry Sanderson  
Matt and Maria King  
Atherton Fine Art  
B + H Surveying  
Anonymous  
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Kay and Tony Barulich  
Miki Schmidt-Peterson  
Erika Schmidt-Peterson  
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Anonymous

Lauren Bowman  
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Tizianna Dizon  
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Krystel Finato  
Dave and Kristen  
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Ashwini Gillen  
Suzanne Greenberg  
Naomi Kepler  
Nora Naylor  
KMAP  
Tarra Knotts  
Janet Land  
Patsy Zgrabik  
Raisis Family

Indego Funk  
Christie Iribarren  
Matt Ken  
Anonymous  
Kimberly Lane  
Lisa Lessard  
Nicholas Lippa  
Robyn Loverro  
Brenda Melton  
Andrew Metkus  
Dorsey Naylor  
Jean Newhall  
Kathy Rolling  
Debbie and Ralph Schwartz  
Kate Shea  
Amber Stariha  
Sandy Stringham  
Ken Williamson  
Barbara Young  
Hank and Marlene Stern

# **INCREDIBLE VOLUNTEERS**

**Over the years, VFF has relied on our dedicated Volunteers, including our Board of Directors, to make Venture Free what it is. Thank you!**

Fiammy Dizon

Marty Phelps

Lena Lane

Kimberly Lane

Hayley Thurlwall

Sarah Phelps

Andrew Williamson

Daphne Schwartz

Madison King

Mitchell King

James Finato

Alena Stern

Rocky Raynor

Kimberly Lane

Emma Williamson

# **BOARD OF DIRECTORS:**

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Edder Diaz

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Tim Naylor

Emily Phelps