



OUTWARD BOUND  
**CALIFORNIA**

**IMPACT REPORT**

**2022**

*If I have learned anything in 47 years on the planet, it's this: the power of nature creates deeper connections to ourselves and others.*

Today's young people are desperate for connection, and not the sort of half truth connection from social media. No, they want the deeper kind where they smile broadly from a shared moment, or cry unabashedly in front of someone, knowing they see you and will stay. It's the kind of connection you feel after a crewmate helps you carry your pack the last mile when you are tired and hungry or you just need someone to sit with you and watch the stars twinkle.

My heart aches for the challenges youth are experiencing today. I long for them to have a sense of belonging and connection. I see what they are losing now in the age of technology, global health and climate crisis and the fast paced world. What does it mean to slow down, pause and connect with another human in nature?

Lately, I find myself thinking about something a student said on the closing circle of his Outward Bound course. He said he could use his brain again after his week of phone-less backpacking in the desert. We are all glued to technology and we need to be reminded, and even taught, how to look up, look around and see our surroundings.

At Outward Bound, we provide that. It's a glimpse into life without the internet all the time, where at the end of your day, you sit shoulder to shoulder with your newest friend, while cupping your hands around hot chocolate, and laugh over the silly song

you all made up while setting up camp. And then you share what was hard about your day. Your friend looks at you, and says, I felt that too.

It's the embodiment of this quote by Desmond Tutu, "I am human because you are human. My humanity is caught up in yours."

How I love that quote! We have a role in the mental wellness of our youth. We can show them how to connect in nature, and through that, they can see the humanity in one another.

As I approach the end of my time at Outward Bound California, I see this letter as my own closing circle of sorts. So like the students who share their takeaways, this is mine: I know that the inspiration I had on my own courses, and seeing our students breakthrough and connect on theirs, has settled into my DNA and will forever be a part of me. I'm so grateful that for 25 years I have been a witness to young people's lives forever changed for the better from their time in nature with Outward Bound and each other.

In community,

*Nettie Pardue*



NETTIE PARDUE

LAST YEAR IN REVIEW

150

COURSES

2,000

STUDENTS

8,200

DAYS OF PROGRAMMING

94

DIFFERENT GROUPS ATTENDED OUR CHALLENGE ROPES COURSE AT JOHN MCLAREN PARK

28

VETERANS



Through our 80 year history, Outward Bound connects people to one another, nature, to one's self, helping students develop the skills needed to thrive. In the midst of the challenges our youth face today, our role remains clear: provide a space for students to grow, serve, lead and heal.



*Social-emotional learning (SEL) is the learning process of developing the self-awareness, self-control, and interpersonal skills that are vital for school, work and life success.*

These key social-emotional skills are a protective effect for students at-risk of developing problems related to substance abuse, mental health, and violence, and can have impacts on long-term outcomes such as college graduation and employment.

Outward Bound programming is a protective factor, the opposite of a risk factor, in youth mental health and wellness. We are not the solution to this crisis but our programs provide some of the skills needed to overcome it. An investment in Outward Bound has a social impact that reverberates to students' communities, schools and homes.

*Here are four ways:*

STUDENTS ON AN OUTWARD BOUND COURSE SELF-REPORT INCREASED

- ↑ PHYSICAL CONFIDENCE
- ↑ SELF-REGULATION
- ↑ A SENSE OF BELONGING
- ↑ PERSEVERANCE



### Definitions

**Protective factors** are conditions or attributes that promote health and well-being and reduce the impacts of a **risk factor**

Risk factors are characteristics associated with a higher likelihood of negative outcomes



2 IN 3

STUDENTS RECEIVE SCHOLARSHIP AID



## MAKE IT ACCESSIBLE

Outward Bound established operations in California for two main reasons: to address the lack of quality social-emotional outdoor programming in schools and the even deeper deficit in access for communities of color and low-income schools. Access is key to our mission and we do this by providing scholarships to individuals and schools, free gear, courses close to home, and culturally relevant programming.

Nearly 8 out of 10 school district leaders reported their students had fallen behind in social-emotional learning and low-income students are least likely to have formalized SEL and service-learning programs available to them. (1)

With a ropes course located amidst towering cypress trees in San Francisco, Bay Area students from our partner, Burton High, can walk less than 20 minutes to feel the breeze and step outside their comfort zones on the high elements.

In 2022, we also offered 40 full scholarships for our two week summer programs which included gear, free boots and a travel stipend so students could swim in the chilly alpine lakes or climb bouldered desert canyons. In addition to those scholarships, 28 veterans went to Joshua Tree National Park for an all expenses covered 6-day desert expedition and tapped into the healing benefits of teamwork and challenge in nature.

### RESOURCES

- 1 [Ready to Engage: Perspectives of Teachers and Parents on Social and Emotional Learning and Service-Learning in America's Public Schools](#)
- 2 [Estimating Whether Replacing Time in Active Outdoor Play and Sedentary Video Games With Active Video Games Influences Youth's Mental Health.](#)

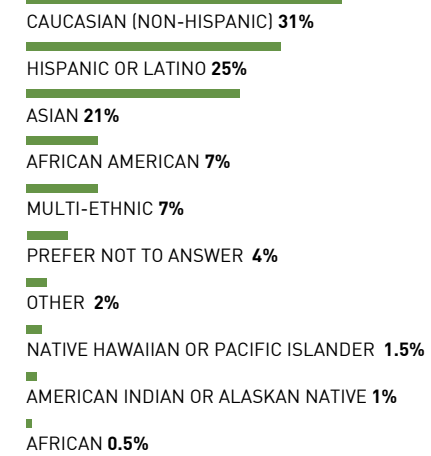
## GO TOUCH GRASS!

Spending time outside makes people feel better, and 100% of our time with students is spent outside! From the cypress trees in John McLaren Park in San Francisco to the twinkling starry nights under the Joshua Tree sky to the crystalline alpine lakes of the High Sierra, our students are embracing their surroundings and connecting with the natural world.

As little as 10-20 minutes in nature daily may serve as a preventative measure for stress and mental health strain. (2) In a review of nearly 300 studies, the benefits of nature were more pronounced in children from historically marginalized communities, which tend to have limited access to green spaces. (3) A day on the Ropes Challenge Course is a full 270+ minutes spent in nature and it's easily accessible by public transit or for many, by foot. Many of our students return to the ropes course multiple times over the school year which allows us to build a progressive experience that cements the learning and connection.

*"I dropped my guard on this trip and let my fellow brothers and sisters into my safe space. This was the perfect timing to start working on trust. It allowed me to get a fresh positive start to the new journey I need for healing."* - 2022 VETERAN COURSE ALUMNI

### STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS





## ALL THE FEELS

The real job of an Outward Bound Instructor is to put themselves out of a job by the end of the course. As time goes on, they do less training and managing of students and pass more and more of the responsibility to the youth themselves. This is why we see such high impact around self-regulation and emotional control - both incredibly important elements of mental health and well being. “There is a substantial and rigorous body of evidence showing that students learn more and classrooms are more effective when children and adolescents

### Self-regulation

An ability to counter distraction and strong emotions by calming, refocusing, and turn-taking.

have the skills and competencies to manage emotions, focus their attention, successfully navigate relationships with peers and adults.” (1)

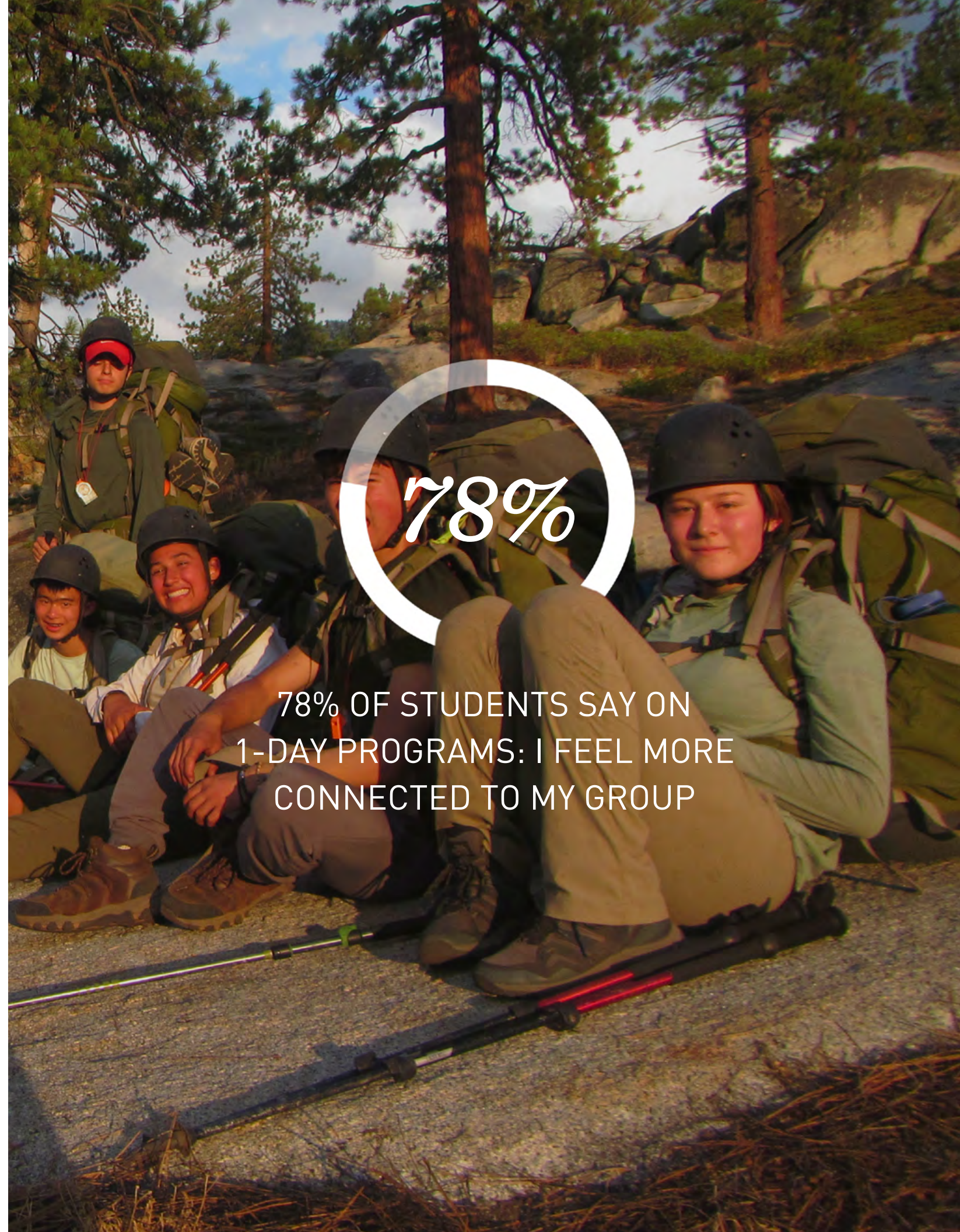
Alongside how to set up a tent or cook dehydrated potatoes, Instructors teach critical interpersonal skills like how to identify emotions, work through them, seek feedback from peers, and make changes next time they arise. The more time spent on course in this tight knit peer group, the more opportunities they have to practice and master these lessons.

## CIRCLE UP

There is something about doing hard things together that solidifies connection. Students have been through the ringer as they emerge from Covid isolation, grapple with climate change and rally around social change. Outdoor experiential learning courses are inherently a social experience where groups of students work as a crew to overcome challenges and build trusting relationships.

**With loneliness on the rise (2), Outward Bound courses can be a balm of connection, which improves physical, mental, and emotional well-being. We hear it time and time again, our participants make lifelong friendships after 7, 14, or 22 days in the wilderness. Students who feel a sense of belonging have lower prevalence of poor mental health and tend to do better in school.**

We hear it time and time again, our participants make lifelong friendships after 7, 14, or 22 days in the wilderness. Students who feel a sense of belonging have lower prevalence of poor mental health and tend to do better in school. (3) Time away from the triggers of screen time, social media and a divisive culture forces young people to build relationships IRL (in real life), social skills that they will take home with them to support self-esteem and engagement long term.



78% OF STUDENTS SAY ON 1-DAY PROGRAMS: I FEEL MORE CONNECTED TO MY GROUP

### RESOURCES

- 1 [The Evidence Base for How We Learn: Supporting Students' Social, Emotional, and Academic Development](#)
- 2 [The Center for Compassion and Altruism Research and Education at Stanford University. Connectedness & Health: The Science of Social Connection](#)
- 3 [CDC Mental Health, Suicidality, and Connectedness Among High School Students During the Covid-19 Pandemic](#)

*The Outward Bound Outcomes Survey (OBOS), designed and validated by the Partnerships for Education and Resilience (PEAR), measures student change in 12 areas.*

Students take the survey at the end of their course, and report on each area. In 2022, 744 OBCA students aged 12- 24 completed the OBOS. Our students showed statistically significant positive change across all measured outcomes, regardless of course length. Outward Bound is teaching key social and emotional skills, and through this our students are building confidence, deepening friendships, and increasing emotional awareness.

**12 OUTCOMES MEASURED**

Assertiveness, emotion control, empathy, group relationships, learning interest, perseverance, physical confidence, responsibility, self-awareness, self-regulation, staff and student relationships, and teamwork

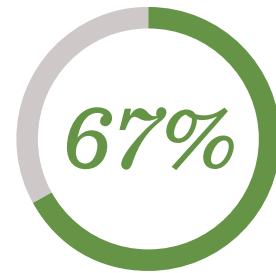
The Outward Bound Domains of Thriving (DoT) highlights the four areas of human development that are impacted on an Outward Bound course: Courage, Belonging, Reflection, and Physical Engagement.

We measure student change via the OBOS and analyze the results to improve programming, staff training and provide equitable outcomes for all students across race and gender.



**EMPOWERING YOUTH**

On average, students in 2022 reported the most growth in Group Relationships, Perseverance, and Self-Regulation.



67% of students on overnight expeditions reported positive change in Self-Regulation



81% of the 248 students surveyed on 1-day ropes course programs reported "I am more aware of how to support those around me"

SELF-REGULATION EXAMPLE

*"I know how to stay positive if I feel unmotivated."*

**SHARING LIVED EXPERIENCES**

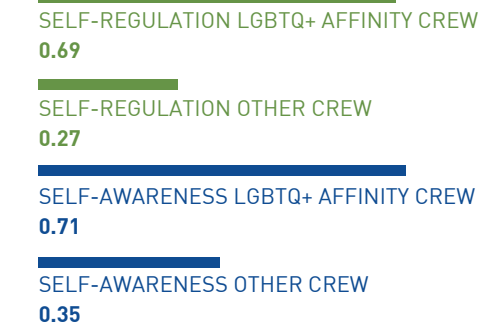
Since the 60s, Outward Bound has created identity based courses beginning with an all-female expedition. We find that crews that have shared lived experiences connect and build trust quicker than in more diverse groups.

The recent release of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention's (CDC) [Youth Risk Behavior Survey Report](#) reports that close to 70% of LGBTQ+ youth experienced persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness during 2022. On our LGBTQ+ courses, Instructors who share their identity or have demonstrated allyship, create the space to explore identity, self confidence, compassion and perseverance together.

For non-binary students on LGBTQ+ designated crews, students reported even more growth in self-awareness and self-regulation compared to non-binary students on non-affinity courses.

In addition, non-binary students in LGBTQ+ crews reported greater positive outcomes in every measured outcome than non-binary students in all other crews. As this is the first year of measuring this data, and it was a small sample, we need more data to have more conclusive statements. We'll continue to measure this in the coming years.

**LGBTQ+ POSITIVE GROWTH**

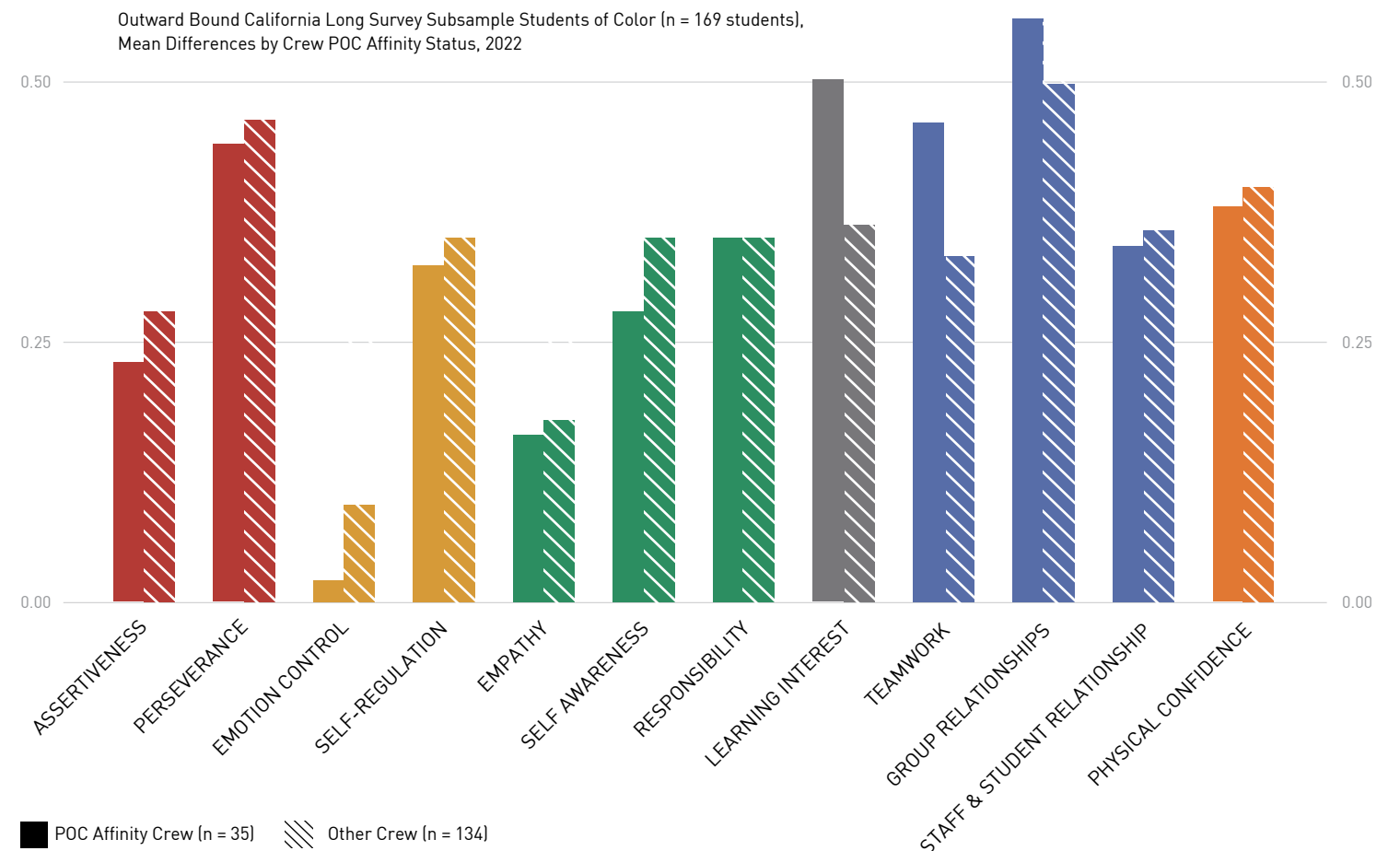


**INCREASING INCLUSION**

*When we compared results base on race, students of color showed similarly positive growth across outcomes regardless of the racial makeup of their crew.*

**CREATING SPACE TOGETHER**

*Students on same gender crews reported positive change on all 12 scales on the long OBOS survey!*



## IT WAS A REALLY GOOD DAY

Harnessed in and clipped into the rope via carabiners, Kria climbed up the ladder to the log element. Getting to the top of the tall ladder was the easy part. Once up the pole, the next move was to step out onto the horizontal log which is suspended 35 feet in the air.

Whew, this is high, she thought. But she had been assured there was no rush and to take her time. An Instructor called up to her. “This is the hardest part, once you let go, it will be easier.” In order to make her way across the log, she had to release her grip on the staples and figure out how to place her feet.

A teacher called to Kria that she was already an inspiration since she got to the top. And then she did it, she released her hands and grabbed the rope above the log.

She made her way naturally across the log. Her Instructor was right, letting go was the hardest part. Once at the end, she wasn't ready to get down. The Instructor called up again, “Do a little trick if you want!” Balancing on one foot, she kicked out her other foot for a few seconds.

Kria came to the Ropes Challenge Course September 2022 with her high school, Civic Center Secondary School. Kria was excited to try it, but also feeling apprehensive since it was all so new and she hadn't done anything like this in the outdoors.

“After the course, I felt like I could do anything. My adrenaline was pumping. I wanted to do more elements. It was a really good day and it boosted my energy,” Kria said.

During the debrief circle, the Site Manager shared about an apprenticeship program available to learn to teach on the course. Before he finished speaking, Kria's hand was already up. She applied that winter and was accepted.



## DEMYSTIFYING THE HOW

Students participate through ‘challenge by choice’ meaning that they can opt into their challenge; they won't be forced into doing anything they are uncomfortable with, though they may be encouraged to take the next step. For example, if a student climbs halfway up an element and wants to stop, an Instructor may ask them if they can do one more step, and the student can decide. If not, they can come down. And the Instructors celebrate every win, because even climbing partway can expand one's comfort zone, then maybe the next time that student will take one more step.

Before the student even steps foot onto the elements though, the Instructors have set the tone. “We break things down into manageable steps and explain how things work,” Julie, a Challenge Course Instructor said. “We assure them that the harness and the rope can easily hold their weight, and we move at a pace that's comfortable for them. Sometimes that means taking just a few steps up the ladder and then being lowered so they can get the feel of it.”

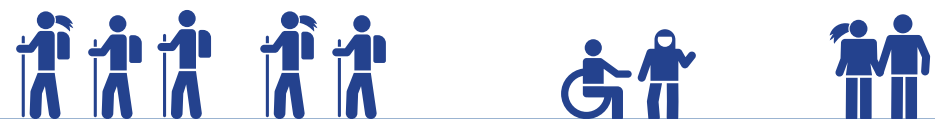
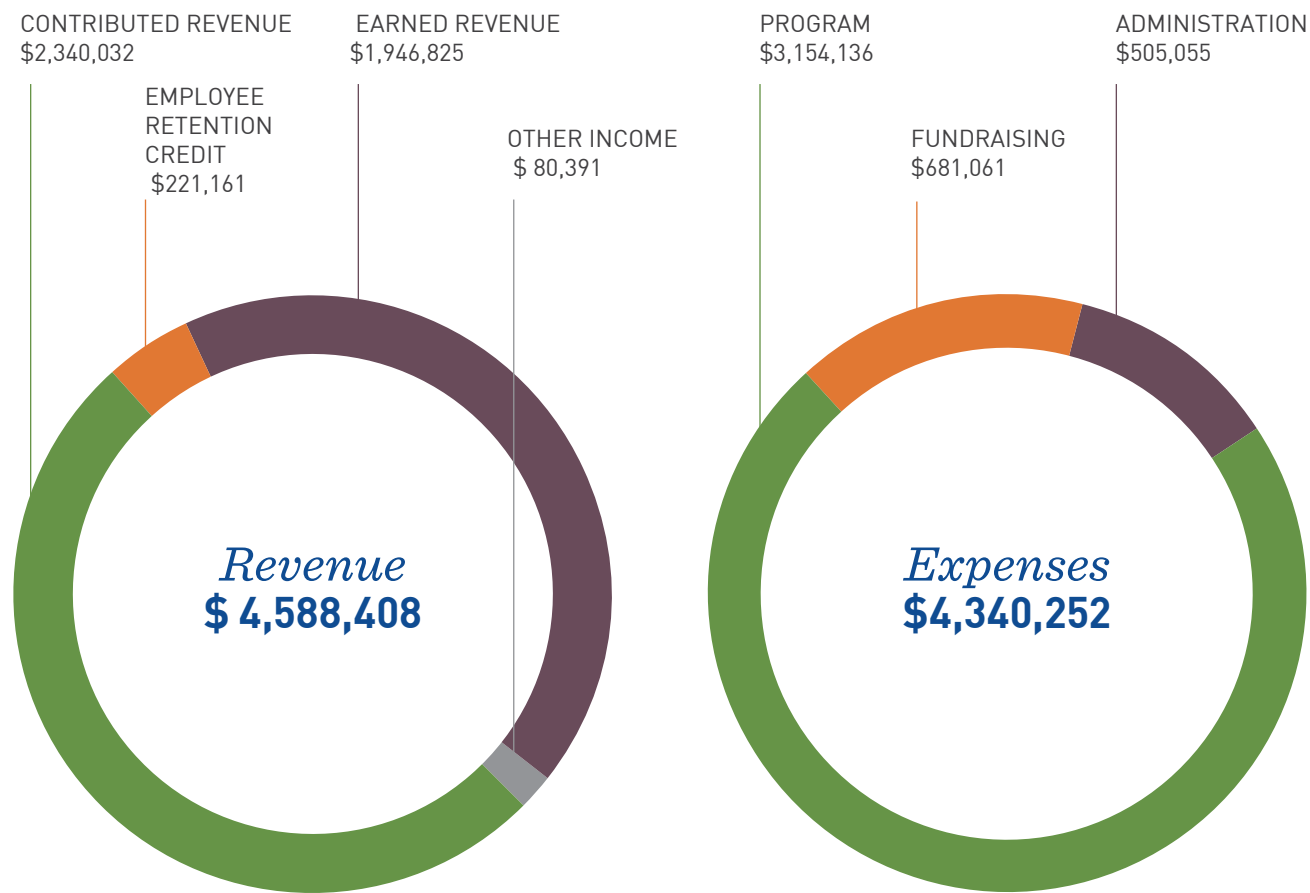


A game often played before students go up on the course shows three zones marked by three circles: the inner circle is the comfort zone, outside is the challenge zone and then outside that is the panic zone. The Instructors ask a series of questions and the students move through the circle. For example, what zone are you in when you're watching Netflix at home? All students move to the comfort zone. What about giving a presentation in front of your class? And then the students disperse into different zones. Introducing comfort zones gives participants the language to be able to articulate and understand their physical and mental response to challenges. The Instructors create a safe environment for individuals to push themselves.

# FINANCIALS

2022 was a year of growth, challenge and change in many ways. Staffing shortages and impacts of climate change on weather continued to pose challenges to running programs. We still served nearly as many students as we were pre-pandemic and grew both our Ropes Course programs and overnights in Joshua Tree. It was a remarkable year for our advancement efforts, raising over \$2.18 million. Thanks to an amazing

circle of alumni, family, and community members, we are able to offer more scholarship support than ever before. This success coupled with high enrollment on our fee-based programs and continued Covid-related government tax refunding - we ended the year with a surplus and five months of unrestricted cash on hand. This set us up for a solid start to 2023.



# I GOT TO BE MYSELF

*“I am a very shy person who doesn’t take risks because I think it is scary. Coming here changed that. I got to be myself with new people. I felt very safe and welcomed here by the amazing Instructors. I feel like I have new friends and a new family. We did struggle because of the harsh weather, but together we were able to overcome it. I would do it all over again.”*

DARLENE FROM ALLIANCE GERTZ-RESSLER HIGH SCHOOL IN LOS ANGELES

## PARTNERS

Abraham Lincoln High School (ALHS)  
 Anahuacalmecac International University Preparatory  
 Aptos Middle School  
 Bayview Hunters Point YMCA  
 Berkeley Hall School  
 Blue Oak School  
 Boys and Girls Club Visitacion Valley Clubhouse  
 Burton High School  
 Civic Center Secondary School  
 Claire Lilienthal  
 Community Boards  
 Community Grows  
 Community Ropes Course Day  
 Democracy Prep  
 Dr. Martin Luther King Jr Academic Middle School  
 Francisco Middle School  
 Friends of the Urban Forest (FUF)  
 Get Out And Learn/Downtown High School  
 Harpeth Hall School  
 Hiltonators  
 Hope SF  
 Horizons at San Francisco Friends School  
 Ithaca College  
 Jewish Big Brothers Big Sisters of Los Angeles  
 John O'Connell High School  
 June Jordan School for Equity  
 KIPP King Collegiate High School  
 Larkspur-Corte Madera School District  
 Life Academy of Health and Bioscience  
 Life Sciences and Digital Biology  
 Los Angeles Audubon Society  
 Medrio  
 Melrose Leadership Academy  
 Mentoring for Success  
 Mission High School  
 Oakland Military Institute College Preparatory Academy  
 Outdoor Educators Institute (Justice Outside)  
 Pacific Bay Christian  
 Presidio Knolls School  
 Public Service Pathway  
 Real Options for City Kids  
 Redwood Academy of Ukiah  
 Richmond High School  
 Rosie the Riveter Trust  
 Rudsdale Newcomer High School  
 San Francisco State University  
 Seen52  
 St. Raymond Catholic School  
 Stevenson School  
 Sunrise Middle School  
 Tennyson High School  
 The Bayshore School  
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 Westborough Middle School  
 YES Nature to Neighborhoods  
 Youth Leadership Summer Instructors

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## CITY SKYLINE CHALLENGE SPONSORS



# BUILDING OUR BASE: AN INVESTMENT IN CULTURE AND COMMUNITY

Wellness and connection don't stop with our students. Our field Instructors need this too. Outward Bound California, like so many other industries, is facing a massive staff shortage. Without Instructors, we can't serve more students or achieve our mission. They are truly the magic makers - deeply empathetic teachers, highly skilled risk managers, passionate environmentalists and trained professionals. It takes two years to train an entry-level Instructor into a lead Instructor through days and weeks on the trail under the mentorship of more experienced staff. We have a long term goal to increase our pool of Instructors and ensure they are as racially diverse and gender expansive as the youth we serve. It's a tall order!

Full-time positions, higher pay, benefits, paid training, professional development funds, access to mental health services, and year round work are some of the investments we have already made in our field Instructors. They also receive room and board when they are working at one of our two basecamp locations. The community built on these live/work basecamps is vital in retaining Instructors and creating a sense of belonging.

Stephanie Sherman, field Instructor of five years said, "People come back and keep doing this work because of the built-in community." This community is home. It's a place to refresh, prepare and reflect.

It's time that our basecamps in Joshua Tree and Midpines draw staff in for more than community, but also serve the physical needs of staff. Both locations need investment in housing, infrastructure, warehouse space, kitchens, bathrooms and climate controlled spaces so staff can weather the temperature extremes. To this end, we launched a capital campaign, Build our Base, and have raised nearly \$1,000,000 of the \$4,000,000 needed to complete the purchase and upgrades of both properties.



Learn more about our Build our Base Campaign, email [development@obca.org](mailto:development@obca.org)





### OUTWARD BOUND CALIFORNIA

Dear OBCA,

Today is my last day of course and I'm surprised to say I'm very sad to go. one of my goals at the very beginning of course was to learn something about myself. today I can confidently say that I completed my goal and learned much more than that. I discovered the impact of my mindset on my experience. While rock climbing I noticed that my positive self talk and the encouragement of my peers motivated me to reach the top. After suffering & recovering from a hospitalization due to a severe case of COVID-19, I could never have imagined myself hiking and scrambling over 7 miles in the desert. I learned my mind and body are capable of far more than I could have ever imagined. From my instructor Mackenzie, I learned compassion, how to be there for my peers, deal with conflict, and combat my own emotions. The course taught me resilience and confidence and created a space for me to form closer bonds with my peers and friendships I will maintain beyond course. Although it was short-lived, my 12 day course left behind memories and lessons that I will take with me for the rest of my life. I have never been an "outdoorsy" person and did not expect to gain as much out of the course as I have. The "appreciations" at evening meeting taught me to focus on the positives throughout my day and to be grateful for my experiences. "ownerships" taught me integrity and understanding for myself and others. I am extremely grateful for my Outward Bound experience and hope to come back and learn more in the future.

Sincerely  
Katalin

Thank you Mackenzie and Collier AND everyone else who made this trip possible!

Here's a picture of my group sleeping together the last night:

