

Nature Connect

Fall/Winter 2020-2021



For Special Friends & Donors of Riverbend Environmental Education Center



Nature Matters

“When teaching kids, it’s particularly important to show them that nature is something we should value because everything that we want to do and everything that you benefit from comes from access to nature. You can bring your kids to Riverbend and show them that this is what we care about, and this is what you should care about because this is what matters.”

- Sara Robinson, Riverbend Habitat Intern 2020

In this unprecedented time of uncertainty, nature has been an undeniable source of wellbeing, a balm to our anxious minds, and a place we can safely escape to. It is in these times of crisis that we wake up to the way we live, the things we want to change, and what we value most. It is an opportunity to prioritize the people and places that nourish us and our community.

Riverbend Environmental Education Center was founded as Riverbend Refuge in 1974, and we take pride in knowing that we have provided continual access to our preserve since our founding, even during the COVID pandemic, allowing us to welcome countless visitors seeking a daily dose of nature. However, it has only been in the most recent decade that we realized the true goal and impact of our organization by providing superior environmental education programs to our neighboring communities, including those that are in most need of such support.

It was recently announced that we are the recipient of the 2020 Governor’s Award for Environmental Excellence for our Nature-based STEM program serving students in Norristown, Upper Darby, Bridgeport, Conshohocken, and Philadelphia. This follows our 2017 Governor’s Award for our Building STEM Skills through Aquaponics program. We have attained these high levels of achievement while simultaneously experiencing unprecedented growth in the number of people we serve. Our school program visits alone have grown 122% in the last decade; our PCAN program has provided best in class training to 112 teachers in the region, supporting 3,705 children since its founding, and let’s not underestimate the important impact of our summer camp that has reached capacity year after year.

The coronavirus pandemic has taken away critical outdoor science and environmental education for millions of students across the country, and its impact has been felt by Riverbend and the twenty thousand people that Riverbend typically serves every year, in every part of the region. We know that nothing can truly replace getting youth outside, connecting, and learning from the natural world around them and we are anxious to provide our full slate of critical programs as soon as it is safely possible. That said, we have not allowed COVID-19 to stop us from providing unique and important programming. We are supporting our students and teachers with online learning and resources that enrich classroom learning and promoting opportunities for kids to get outside in their own neighborhoods. In spite of the unique challenges facing Riverbend, we continue to find ways to positively serve our community and meet our important mission.

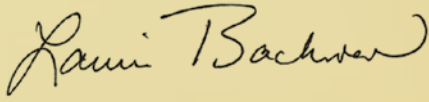
Like so many small not-for-profits, Riverbend has survived financial ups and downs in our 46-year history. We have grown from a financially vulnerable organization, which would not have survived this crisis ten years ago, to a dynamic organization that is providing services to meet the challenges of this time while maintaining the fiscal discipline necessary to balance near term and long term viability. It is the consistent and generous support of donors like you that have made this possible, and we thank YOU for that support. It is absolutely true that our successes to date are a reflection of your belief in the importance of our mission, the strength of our organization, and the effectiveness of our programs. YOU know that nature is not a nice to have; it is at the very core of our wellbeing and is vital to our future. **Nature Matters.**

We are working hard to sustain ourselves in these difficult times; however, without support, nothing is guaranteed. We already know that the impacts felt in 2020 are very likely to continue well into 2021. “Normal” is still very far off, and the financial impact on Riverbend due to such an extended crisis is profound. Your continued support is more critical than ever to Riverbend in these challenging times. It is the only way that we will be able to ensure we will continue to Rise to the challenge of this time and Thrive in the future.

Please strongly consider us in your year-end giving plans in whatever amount you feel comfortable. Every donation helps us continue to be the preserve and the educational resource that is necessary for so many. Your support means so much to Riverbend, now more than ever. Please help us Rise and Thrive in 2020 and beyond.



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Executive Director

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Operating in a Changed World

Riverbend Responds to the New Reality

Since the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, Riverbend has responded with resources and educational opportunities to support the needs of our community and the people we regularly serve. We will continue to innovate around the challenges and opportunities this time imposes and use our learning for the ongoing evolution of our high-quality programs.

Within a week of closing our doors on March 13th, we developed and shared a comprehensive guide of **Resources for Home Based Learning**. It includes outdoor learning and nature hikes, science podcasts for kids, nature-based arts and crafts, virtual field trips, and access to many subjects, including animals and birds, weather and earth science, oceanography, astronomy, and more. This was a great tool as we all began to adapt to what would become an extended period of quarantine.

With all spring programs canceled, we quickly turned our attention and expertise into weekly videos featuring our very own Erin McCool, Director of Education and Strategic Initiatives. This video series of **Nature Science Lessons** was created to support teachers and parents at the onset of this crisis. For ten weeks, we shared weekly outdoor, nature-based learning lessons for children. The lessons focused on a variety of topics, including animal habits, decomposers, and watersheds. We received wonderful, appreciative feedback from many parents and teachers.

While every day is Earth Day, this year marked the 50th Anniversary and cause for special celebration. Honoring the momentous occasion in the middle of a global health and

economic crisis was ironic, and a call for waking up more people to the impact our human activity has on the planet. In lieu of other planned activities, Riverbend hosted **Share Your Love for the Planet – Earth Week Bio Blitz** and an invitation to go outside and share the amazing nature surrounding us on our social media channels.

Summer arrived, with limited and speculative relief in sight. With tremendous regret, we canceled our vibrant and beloved **Summer Camp**. We were devastated, and so were the many families who had enrolled their children. In a regular season, we are fully subscribed and welcome 80 or more children to Riverbend every week for 11 or 12 weeks. As things began to open up, we decided we could safely offer camp for 24 children weekly. We were thrilled to offer this partial recovery for eight weeks and, once again, relish the joy that can only be found in the delight of children playing outside.

Fall arrived, and many schools opted for full or partial online learning for students. To support families, we developed a **Virtual Learning Center**. This ongoing and flexible program welcomes students to our preserve to complete virtual learning in a safe and supervised environment. We utilize every opportunity to get children outdoors, and they have the added benefit of socialization with a small group of peers.

Riverbend’s ACCESS programs for students living in urban, under-resourced communities have continued, albeit in a virtual format. Learn more about these programs in detail on the following pages.



Summer Camp looked a little different this year.



A young learner in the Snider Barn at our Virtual Learning Center.



Family enjoying a stomp in Saw Mill Run during the Spring of 2020.



Nature Science Lessons videos with Erin McCool.

Riverbend's ACCESS Programs

Nature-Based STEM

Riverbend partners with school districts in the greater Philadelphia region to build environmental literacy among learners and educators. By integrating aquaponics, outdoor learning experiences, and inquiry-based professional development, Riverbend brings science and sustainability to students and teachers, inspiring the next generation of environmental stewards.

ACCESS Programs

Elementary students living in urban communities do not enter middle school with a strong foundation in environmental science or the skills to achieve in STEM based curriculum at the secondary level. There is a need for greater intentional focus on environmental literacy, especially for urban elementary school students. Additionally, there is mounting evidence that time spent outdoors has significant impacts on an individual's mental and physical health and wellbeing. This benefit is critically important in children as they move through developmental stages in their lives and academic careers. According to the Harvard School of Public Health, by the time a student graduates from high school, they will have spent 15,000 hours in a school building, making this the unit of change for building an environmentally resilient society.

Riverbend's ACCESS program for students in under-resourced communities has traditionally addressed all of these issues by providing a student-centered, inquiry-based series program to introduce students to the natural world and concepts related to the function of natural systems. Students who participate in the program experience nature and apply critical science skills to authentic, real-world exploration. They meet a live animal in their classroom, discuss their observations, and conduct a science investigation in our natural setting, our 30-acre preserve. Finally, a Riverbend educator visits their classroom to debrief the entire experience and guide students in assimilating what they have learned into their lives.

The pandemic of 2020 has served to shine a light on many inequities, including access to nature for children in urban environments. Quarantines in the spring restricted movement, and many urban parents felt it was unsafe to even allow their children outdoors. Parks and nature preserves closed their grounds or closed their parking lots, making these places accessible only to those who lived nearby and could walk onto the property. At the same time that access has been limited, we see that a large segment of the population has found solace in spending time outdoors. Visitation to parks and outdoor recreation areas has skyrocketed, and sales of outdoor gear have resulted in widespread shortages. The divide of who can access nature and who cannot has widened. We feel strongly that access to nature and high-quality education is critical for students, and we have been working with teachers and schools to identify how we can equitably reach students.



Nature-Based Education Video Series

In lieu of in-person programming, which is not possible at this time, we have developed a nature-based education video series. These high-quality videos are designed to be student-centered, flexible, and accessible for learners and can be utilized by teachers in a variety of ways.

Each video introduces a concept. Topics include Making Science Observations, Nature Science Journals (connecting literacy to science content), What is an Ecosystem (and How Do They Work), Animal Adaptations, and Food Webs. The video follows the inquiry cycle, inviting students to become interested in exciting and relevant content. Videos take place at Riverbend but also other local parks and urban settings around the region. Students are challenged to create and carry out an investigation to explore their local settings. This can be their school, their home, or community setting. Accompanying each video is an interactive journal page that can be printed and distributed or uploaded to an online classroom. To support at-home learning, each video comes with a parent support page, which can also be printed or uploaded to a virtual classroom.

Philadelphia Children Access Nature (PCAN)

PCAN is geared towards teachers of students in the 3rd to 5th grade living in underserved communities. The students are largely children of color in environments plagued with the effects of poverty. In the day to day workings of their schools, teachers are faced with overwhelming odds. The school buildings in which they teach are run down; many of their students have experienced trauma, and teachers are managing large class sizes. In the 3rd to 5th grade, the pressure for students and teachers to perform in literacy and math is overwhelming and outweighs the critical content in science that makes math, reading, and writing relevant and authentic in student's lives. As an environmental center, we recognize the benefits of nature go well beyond health and well-being. Environmental problems are STEM problems. Issues like climate change, population growth, and environmental injustice require expertise in STEM but also critical skills like collaboration, communication, and grit to address.

Summer Science Inquiry Institute (SSII)

Every year, in the first week of August, Riverbend gathers teachers for a week of learning and science inquiry. This aptly named program is part of a larger PCAN initiative. We were thrilled to offer the SSII again in 2020, with adaptations.

The Institute is based on the premise that when students learn science through inquiry-based instruction, students learn how to investigate their own questions. We tap into students' innate motivations for learning and provide them with the tools to drive their own learning. Through the inquiry process, students learn the

critical skills of science, but they also learn to communicate with each other, to write and speak about their ideas, and to figure things out. We use nature and the outdoors as the platform for science inquiry.

The program is grounded in partnerships and collaboration. Teachers who participate are immediately supported by a strong network of education experts, scientists, and fellow teachers, all willing to support their personal and professional growth. This network is what, in turn, provides a stable platform for students, often living in unstable conditions, to develop a love of science investigation that drives their academic careers.

This year, with the COVID-19 pandemic, the program was designed to support teachers in the learning environments we predicted they would face in the upcoming school year. We planned for a hybrid week of instruction, with both in-person and virtual elements. The goal was to preserve team building while also providing teachers with the tools to incorporate inquiry-based instruction in a virtual setting. Working with our partner at the University of Pennsylvania, each in-person module was converted to a virtual format. A combination of synchronous and asynchronous learning was planned, using a virtual classroom to meet. While we planned to meet the teachers in-person for two days of the week, Hurricane Isaias derailed those plans, forcing us to adapt our plans on a daily basis.

“As a seasoned informal educator, I felt that this was making the best of a challenging situation. Working with the teachers turned into one of the most challenging and inspiring weeks of my career. I was amazed by the strength and resiliency of our teachers. Throughout the week, there was almost zero conversation about the downsides of virtual education. While these teachers recognized we are facing a crisis in education, they rose to the challenge and got down to the business of building their virtual classrooms.”

- Erin McCool, Director of Education & Strategic Initiatives

PCAN Fellowship

Ten of the SSII teachers have been accepted into the year-long Fellowship program. Teachers will continue their practice in science inquiry, taking their skills directly into their virtual and in-person classrooms. Typically, students would visit Riverbend for field trips, and our educators would visit classrooms. However, we have adapted our model to focus more on teacher professional development, with monthly meetings to discuss lessons, challenges, and successes related to inquiry-based instruction in the virtual setting. In January, teachers will be setting up aquaponics systems in their homes or classrooms to bring Riverbend's Building STEM skills through Aquaponics program to students in a virtual or hybrid setting.

A special note of thanks to our donors:

In this issue of Nature Connect we have listed all of our generous 2019 donors; it is a small way we can acknowledge your important contributions and demonstrate our gratitude. We need you, we appreciate you, and we know that it is only through your investment that Riverbend is able to exist and serve our mission.

Like many others, 2020 is a hugely challenging time financially. Our fundraising plan went out the door along with our educational programs. However, there are many special donors who have continued to support us when we couldn't deliver on our plans:

- When we canceled summer camp, we offered a full refund to our camp families. To our delight, many generous camp families donated all or partial camp fees to Riverbend.
- When Farm to Table was canceled, corporate sponsors said, keep our sponsorship; we want to help you.
- When Shiverfest turned into ShiverQuest, our sponsors and community stepped up to support a new, untested concept.
- When many ACCESS programs were canceled, corporate and foundation supporters said, use our investment in whatever serves you best this year.

We are so grateful to the many committed and generous individuals who have supported our annual fund already this year and those who will want to support our Rise to Thrive Campaign before the end of this year.

Thank you for believing in us, knowing that your investment in 2020 is an investment in Riverbend's future.

As the world is reckoning with health, economic, and social inequity crises, we see how these issues are directly related to environmental justice and sustainability issues. We truly see your investment in Riverbend this year as an investment in OUR future.



Welcome to Our New Board Directors



Sean Kennedy

As manager of the Operations Control Center (OCC), Sean Kennedy is responsible for the safe, reliable operation of PECO’s electric and gas systems with the welfare of employees, customers, and the public in mind. The OCC is the 24x7 designated authority for all PECO distribution operations. Sean joined PECO in 2009 as an associate engineer after graduating from Drexel University with a Bachelor of Science degree in Electrical Engineering. Sean also has a master’s degree in Business Administration from Penn State University.

Sean became familiar with Riverbend through our long-standing partnership with PECO, initially serving on our Property Committee. His expertise and experience gained in various roles at PECO bring much value to our operations and decision making. Sean shared, *“As an engineer, STEM education is foundational to me. I love Riverbend’s uniqueness in that it leverages fun outdoor activities to set children up for a lifetime of learning.”*

Sean, his wife Emily, and baby daughter reside in Glen Mills. We are happy to welcome an experienced STEM professional to our Board of Directors.



Keith Pryor

Keith leads a boutique management consulting practice focused on helping complex non-profit organizations and their leaders execute successfully to meet their goals. Keith is a former health system chief executive officer and has served on the faculty of Cornell University’s Sloan Program in Health Care Management; as principal with Diversified Search, Inc.; and as director, Key Executive Services for Right Management Consultants. He was also director, Leadership Advisory Services, for Health Strategies & Solutions, one of the nation’s top health care strategy firms.

Keith’s first connection to Riverbend was many years ago when his daughter had her birthday party here. A few years ago, he became reacquainted and began supporting our programs. Subsequently, Keith joined the Governance Committee and has been an invaluable resource to that work.

In his own words, Keith shared, *“Few, if any issues are more important to the quality of life than the environment. And Riverbend, with its legacy of good work, outstanding leadership, first-rate staff, and talented relationship-building, is well-positioned to be a leader in this area. I am thrilled to be part of this critically important organization.”*

Keith lives in Bryn Mawr with his wife, Mary. We are thrilled to have his leadership on our Board of Directors.



Jonathan Stump

Jon is a highly accomplished business strategist with a diverse background and 15+ years of professional experience. An executive with Independence Blue Cross since 2008, he currently serves as Vice President, Product Services.

First introduced to Riverbend through our Farm to Table fundraising event, Jon went on to serve on our Development and Marketing Committee before joining the Board of Directors. Jon’s strong analytical skills and network in the Greater Philadelphia region are tremendous benefits to his role as a Board Director.

Jon is an outdoor enthusiast, enjoying camping, backpacking, hiking, and skiing. *“Over time, these experiences have made it clear to me how important nature is to us all. It has now become important to instill this same affinity for nature in my children. First, by making them aware of their surroundings and then to ensure they understand the importance of preservation. This aligns directly with Riverbend’s mission and educating the leaders of tomorrow.”*

Jon resides in Malvern with his wife Rebecca and two school-aged children. We are excited to welcome this nature lover and business professional to our Board of Directors.

Financial Report 2019

Year Ended December 31, 2019

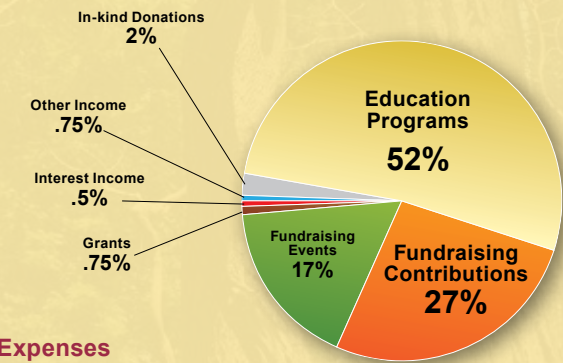
Statement of Financial Position

Property & Equipment.....	\$1,767,822
Current Assets	\$580,031
Other Assets	\$1,444
TOTAL Assets	\$2,349,297

Statement of Activities

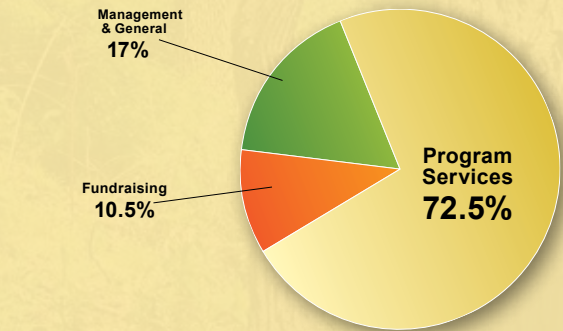
Revenues & Other Support

Education Programs.....	\$610,360
Fundraising Contributions	\$311,056
Fundraising Events.....	\$199,425
Grants.....	\$8,601
Other Income	\$7,349
Interest Income	\$5,845
In-kind Donations	\$24,172
TOTAL Revenues & Other Support.....	\$1,166,808



Expenses

Program Services	\$764,532
Fundraising.....	\$111,022
Management & General	\$178,331
TOTAL Expenses	\$1,053,885
Change in net assets	\$82,579



Donors

2019

\$10,000+

Arcadia Foundation
ASTM International 🌰
Bryn Mawr Trust 🌸
Mark and Madeleine Douglas
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Daliia Wilson-Scott
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Up to \$249

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Banny Ackerman
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Diana Ayubcha

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Sheila McNabb and Chris Baldwin
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Holly and Gerard Berry
Shyam Kamdar and Shilpa Bhansali
Karnit and Joel Biran
Amy and Jeff Bodle
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