

Thriving Through Challenge



2024
ANNUAL REPORT



**PHILADELPHIA
OUTWARD BOUND SCHOOL**

A MESSAGE FROM OUR EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

If we were giving out awards for the grittiest crew of 2024, it might just go to the Student Leadership Council from the Russell Byers Charter School. Accompanied by Bryony Grant, Byers' Student Affairs Program Manager, this intrepid group of middle schoolers embarked on the Appalachian Trail in late-October with temperatures dipping below freezing each night.



JUSTIN ENNIS

For most of the students, it was their first time backpacking and first time sleeping in the woods. Far from their families and the comforts of their daily lives, they looked to each other to provide the courage and motivation needed to complete their dozen-mile trek.

When they made their triumphant return to The Discovery Center after five days on the trail, they were greeted with cheers and hugs from friends and family. At the closing ceremony, the students' chaperone Bryony shared that -- with the exception of childbirth -- this expedition was perhaps the most challenging experience of her life. Then Bryony turned to the families and said *"Your children are stronger than you realize."*

At the heart of the Philadelphia Outward Bound School is the belief that every young person deserves access to spaces and experiences that will challenge, inspire, and empower them. And working alongside dedicated, compassionate educators like Bryony, the greatest impact we hope to make is changing how young people perceive their capabilities. This report is a testament to our amazing community of staff, partners, and supporters who share these beliefs and are committed to helping youth develop the skills, the self-confidence and the peer relationships they need to thrive.

Thank you for joining us on this adventure!

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Justin".

Executive Director
Philadelphia Outward Bound School



Bryony Grant, center, with students of the Russell Byers Charter School, who have just returned from their Outward Bound expedition with smiles, certificates, and a new sense of their own inner strength and capabilities.

2024

by the numbers



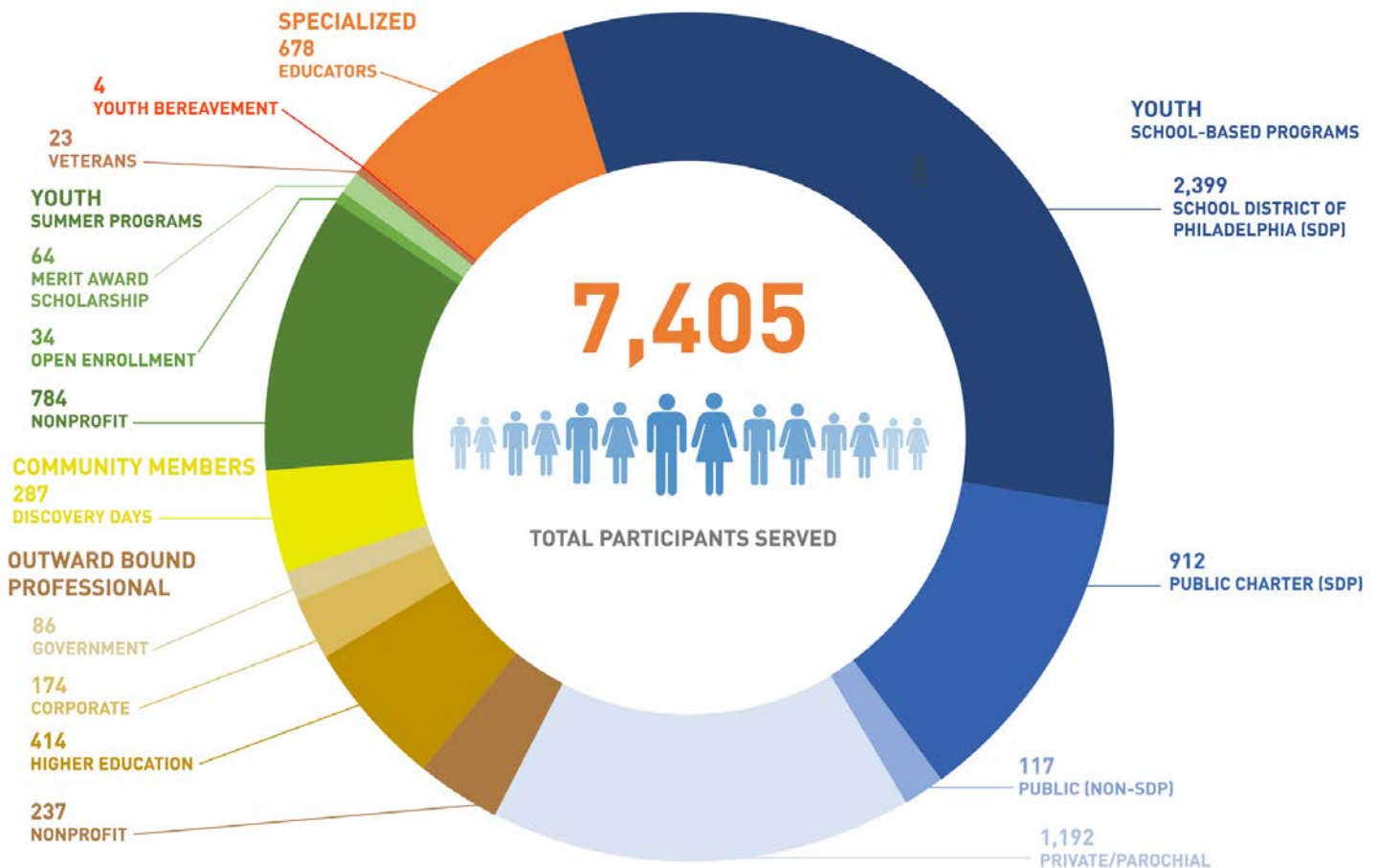
\$827,217

Scholarship & Financial Aid

123



Program Partners



Outward Bound Offers Relief for “the Anxious Generation”

by Matt Norcini

While educators and parents continue to wrestle with the impact of technology and the pandemic on student learning, Jonathan Haidt’s best-selling book, *The Anxious Generation: How the Great Rewiring of Childhood Is Causing an Epidemic of Mental Illness*, has put cell phones and social media in the crosshairs of parents, schools, and state legislatures.

Haidt’s work argues that a transition from a “play-based childhood” to a “phone-based childhood” has contributed to the rise of “The Anxious Generation.” Haidt argues that phones have transformed the way young people build relationships, resilience, and a sense of self.



SCH 9th grade students spend their first week of school on a five-day Outward Bound expedition, no cell phones allowed.

As a result, many schools are discussing new ways to limit access to devices during the school day, such as with cell phone holders by companies like Yondr. As a principal of a high school that implemented the use of these cell phone holders over a year ago, I can attest to the transformative change of getting phones out of the classroom.

The removal of devices is one piece of the puzzle. Another is finding ways to facilitate for our children the creation of deep and meaningful connection, the development of self and belonging, and a sense of value and purpose in the world.

Enter nature. The immersive, inspiring power of the natural world, argues Haidt, is one way to help children break free from phones and seek to be “awed” by its power to transform us. It can be a simple walk in the woods, or time sitting outside, free from devices, to reflect and connect. In our busy lives, we just need to make space for it.

Luckily, for teachers and parents wanting more for their students and children, there is an organization that has been “changing lives through challenge and discovery” in the outdoors since the Second World War: Outward Bound.

In the words of Outward Bound co-founder Kurt Hahn:

“There is more to us than we know. If we can be made to see it, perhaps for the rest of our lives we will be unwilling to settle for less.”

At Springside Chestnut Hill (SCH) Academy, we have partnered with the Philadelphia Outward Bound School for more than a decade to build meaningful learning experiences for our students. Each year, our ninth grade class spends its first five days of school in the woods: no showers, no toilets, no cabins, and, importantly, no phones.

Students spend their five-day expeditions in advisory groups that will be a cornerstone of their high school experience. From morning breakfast and the breakdown of camp to day-ending reflection and conversation around the fire, Outward Bound creates familiarity in unfamiliar environments by providing a knowable, repeatable structure to its participants.

This structure facilitates learning that is shared and collaborative and meets students where they are. It helps them engage authentically and directly with one another without the distraction of cell phones.

Each year, feedback gathered from students attests to the power of learning in the outdoors. In years of collected data, the top response to the question “What did you learn about yourself on expedition?” is, by far:

“I learned that I am capable of so much more than I thought I was.”



SCH students backpack 6-8 miles per day on their trip.

And while Outward Bound experiences don’t transform all students into outdoors-loving adults, they do demonstrate the power of connection, challenge, and belonging.

For many students, their Outward Bound experience is the first time they have been away from their cell phones, screens, and social media since they were toddlers. But the stories, smiles, and bonds that I see emerge from the woods demonstrates that students want play-based lives, as well. It’s our generational responsibility to help them do it.

Matt Norcini is the Head of Upper School at Springside Chestnut Hill (SCH) Academy in Philadelphia and the Chair of the Board of Trustees for the Philadelphia Outward Bound School.

OUR PARTNERS

SDP MIDDLE SCHOOL EXPERIENCE

Bethune, Mary McLeod Elementary
Blaine, James G. Elementary
Clemente, Roberto Middle School
Dick, William Elementary
Duckrey, Dr. Tanner G. Elementary
Gideon, Edward Elementary
Kelley, W.D. Elementary
Kenderton Elementary

SDP 9TH GRADE ACADEMY

Building 21 HS
Dobbins, Murrell HS
Edison, Thomas A. HS
Frankford HS
Furness, Horace HS
Kensington CAPA HS
Kensington Health Sciences Academy
Kensington HS
King, Martin Luther HS
Northeast HS
Olney HS
Penn Treaty HS
Randolph, A. Phillip Technical HS
Roxborough HS
Sayre, William L. HS
School of the Future
South Philadelphia HS
Strawberry Mansion HS
Swenson Arts and Technology HS
The LINC HS
The U School
Vaux Big Picture HS
Washington, George HS

OTHER SDP PUBLIC ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Overbrook Educational Center

SDP/OTHER PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOLS

Arts Academy at Benjamin Rush HS
Lankenau Environmental Science HS
Saul, W.B., Agricultural HS
West Chester Area School District

CHARTER - ELEMENTARY AND MIDDLE SCHOOLS

Independence Charter School
Russell Byers Charter School
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Wissahickon Charter School - Fernhill

CHARTER - HIGH SCHOOLS

Boys Latin of Philadelphia Charter
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IMHOTEP Institute Charter HS

Universal Creighton Charter School

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Cristo Rey Philadelphia HS
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LaSalle Academy
Natural Creativity School
Pennsylvania School for the Deaf
Springside Chestnut Hill Academy
Middle School
Springside Chestnut Hill Academy
High School
The Crefeld School
The Rose Tree Media School
St. Mary Interparochial School
Tiferet Bet Israel
Valley Forge Military Academy
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COMMUNITY GROUPS (YOUTH SERVING)

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Alliance for Watershed Education
Bicycle Coalition of Greater Phila.
Big Brothers Big Sisters Independence
Currently Trending
Discovery Pathways
Ed Snider Youth Hockey Foundation
Fairmount Water Works
Families and Communities on the Move (FAMCOM)
Hand2Paw
Heights Philadelphia
Inspiring Minds of Greater Philadelphia
JEVS Human Services
Natural Creativity
Netter Center for Community Partnerships
One Day at a Time (ODAAT)
Penn Presbyterian Medical Center, High School Program
Peter's Place
Police Athletic League - North Penn
PowerCorps PHL
Project HOME
SquashSmarts
Summer Search Philadelphia
Teen Trek
The Empowerment Achievement Movement (TEAM Inc.)
The Fellowship Initiative/Brothers@
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Drexel University, Lebow
College of Business
Temple University
Thomas Jefferson University
University of Pennsylvania - The Wharton School
Williamson College of the Trades

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Elkin, Lewis
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Young Scholars Charter School

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Xiente

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United States Environmental Protection Agency - Region III
William Penn Foundation

The Discovery Center Celebrates Sixth Anniversary with “Discovery Fest”

The event was in addition to community-focused “Discovery Days” held throughout the year

Throughout 2024, the Philadelphia Outward Bound School and Audubon Mid-Atlantic co-hosted several free public events at The Discovery Center. These events — called “Discovery Days” — included rock climbing, ziplining, birding, and canoeing in the reservoir.

The largest event of the year was **Discovery Fest: A celebration of the 6th Anniversary of The Discovery Center**, which attracted 400 attendees on October 5th.

Participants took part in ziplining, canoeing, and challenge course experiences on the James McLane Family Challenge Course. Cheers to Audubon staff who added a unique educational aspect by integrating bird and environmental education into the canoeing portion of the day. They provided binoculars, facilitated a popular “Create Your Own Bird Feeder” craft, led hourly tower tours, and distributed self-led Discovery Center scavenger hunts.

POBS hosted a Backpacking 101 table showcasing program area maps and gear, while other tables introduced participants to POBS programming opportunities.



Bria Wimberly of Audubon Mid-Atlantic has some customers at the “Create Your Own Bird Feeder” table.

Service in the Wild: Outward Bound Students Give Back Through Trail Maintenance While on Expedition



These POBS students geared up for trail maintenance as part of their expedition in the Delaware Water Gap.

The Philadelphia Outward Bound School has partnered with the New York-New Jersey Trail Conference to provide service opportunities to students on expedition in the Delaware Water Gap National Recreation Area. In the summer of 2024, students on course met up with Zac Cole, Long-Distance Trails Program Coordinator at the Trail Conference, to perform trail maintenance.

Cole provided instruction, safety gear and implements to cut back overgrowth, and then the students spent the morning working their way along the Coppermine Trail, an offshoot of the Appalachian Trail.

“Being on this course is an amazing opportunity that we’ve been given,” said Yashmee, a 15-year-old POBS student. “Clearing the trail is a great way to give back to other hikers.”

Cole was impressed with what he saw. “I hope this partnership continues,” said Cole. “I think it’s a natural fit – Outward Bound, the Trail Conference and the Appalachian Trail all supporting each other to do good work.”

Philadelphia Educators Take Learning to New Heights at POBS' Annual Educators Week

At the start of the 2024 school year, more than 500 teachers and support staff from nine schools and the School District of Philadelphia gathered for an unforgettable experience at the Philadelphia Outward Bound School (POBS). The annual Educators Week brings participants together for a unique mix of adventure, teamwork, and personal growth.

Led by expert POBS instructors, educators took part in a variety of activities designed to challenge them both mentally and physically. They navigated the aerial team course, participated in leadership discussions, and engaged in exercises that encouraged self-awareness and resilience. Along the way, they discovered new strengths in themselves and their colleagues while exploring strategies to support social-emotional learning in the classroom.

More than just a team-building event, Educators Week helps set the tone for the year ahead. Teachers reflect on their experiences, drawing connections between the challenges they faced and those their students will encounter. By fostering collaboration, strengthening relationships, and emphasizing personal responsibility, the program equips educators with fresh insights and tools to create dynamic, student-centered learning environments, and provides a renewed sense of purpose and inspiration to support their students as they start a new school year.

Right: Educators Week 2024 received extensive media coverage, including a large feature in the Philadelphia Inquirer by education reporter Kristen Graham.

The Philadelphia Inquirer

Teaching in Philly is tough. Some schools build community on the ropes course.

"I just want them to feel supported and welcomed and loved on," one Philadelphia principal said. "This is hard work."



Frank Bandy, a new teacher at Elkin Elementary, crosses the ropes course at the Philadelphia Outward Bound Discovery Center in Philadelphia. Photo: Philadelphia Outward Bound School

by Kristen A. Graham
Published Aug. 22, 2024, 1:33 p.m. ET

Helmet strapped onto his head, harness firmly in place, brand-new Philadelphia teacher Frank Bandy made his way carefully across a ropes course, shaking a little, but determined. Behind him, Gabriella Pacheco, also a new educator, moved with similar energy.

POBS ALUMNI TEAM WINS BIG AT 2024 INDEPENDENCE DRAGON BOAT REGATTA

The POBS Dragons were formed in 2022 to engage both POBS and other Outward Bound alumni who live in the Philadelphia area.

Spurred by POBS co-founder Nancy Goldenberg's passion for dragon boating, the team is also open to POBS staff and board



members, and is coached by Outward Bound alum Dave Kunz, who was a member of Team USA for the dragon boat world championship in China 2017.

No experience is required to join the team, whose membership age range spans some fifty years. Several practices are held on the river each year before the big race day in June when the Independence Dragon Boat Regatta (IDBR) is held.

The POBS Dragons won their first heat in 2022 but did not place in the finals. That changed the next year at the 2023 regatta when the POBS Dragons came in first place in their division to take home the gold!

In 2024, POBS won the silver in their division at the regatta and also took home the prestigious Educators Cup (see photo at left).

For more information and to join the team see pobs.org/alum.

2024 Trailblazer Gala



Outward Bound friends and family came to The Discovery Center from near and far for POBS's bi-annual Trailblazer Gala on June 5, 2024.

The event provided an opportunity to celebrate Katie Newsom and Jennifer Raymond, each of whom celebrated their 25th year at Outward Bound.

News reporter (and two-time Outward Bound alum) Sergio Cruel kicked off the festivities, reminiscing about the role that Katie and Jenn had played in his life as a teenager; the crowd also heard from POBS Executive Director Justin Ennis and Outward Bound USA CEO Ginger Naylor.

Nearly \$100,000
Raised in One Eventful Night!



Jenn and Katie received the second-ever Founders' Awards, given in recognition of individuals who have showed extraordinary leadership and vision in support of the Philadelphia Outward Bound School. Jenn's award was presented by POBS co-founder Nancy Goldenberg (left); Katie's was presented by POBS co-founder Tim Greenwood (right).



2024 OUTCOMES DATA

MEASUREABLE MOMENTS AND LASTING IMPACT

In 2024, POBS participants didn't just conquer physical challenges; they grew as individuals. Students reported improvements in **courage**, **teamwork**, and **self-awareness** — proof that the power of adventure creates lasting impact. Measurable moments include:

We served **7,405 participants** across **123 schools, community organizations, and Philly businesses**.

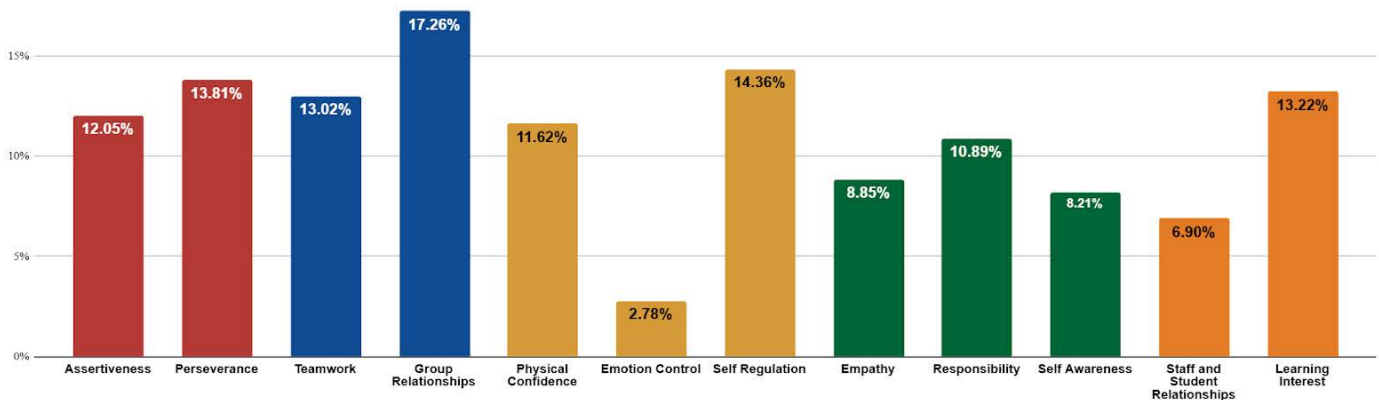
We sent out **61 expedition crews**:

- Students **paddled 696 miles of river** (equivalent to paddling the Delaware River 2.5 times).
- They **hiked 790 miles of the Appalachian Trail** (equivalent to walking from Philadelphia to Florida).

Participants combined:

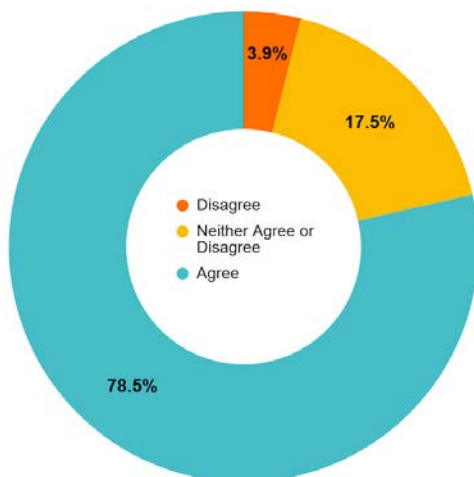
- **Climbed 68,663 vertical feet** (about 3 Mt. Everests).
- **Traversed 62 miles of cable** on our challenge courses (that's a lot!).

Total Percent Change From Start to Now



But the real impact wasn't just the physical feats — it was in the personal growth. Overall, participants showed the most improvement in **Group Relationships**, **Self-Regulation**, and **Perseverance**, particularly in our 5-day+ expedition programs.

In our day programs (averaging 4 hours), growth was strongest in **Group Relationships**, **Teamwork**, and **Physical Confidence**. These outcomes are apparent not only in the data, but also in what we hear during the course. As one participant put it, while standing on the central platform of the Aerial Teams Course, **“I’m gonna do it, I’m gaining the confidence.”** Another said, **“If you go, I’ll go. Let’s do it.”**



It's the personal takeaways that truly highlight the value of these experiences. After completing an expedition, **79% of students reported feeling they had gained the courage to face new challenges** — proof that the challenges they overcame on the river, trail, or rock wall left a lasting impact on their approach to life.

Chaperones see the change, too. Said one, **“They didn’t realize how mentally healthy they would feel, disconnecting from their cellphones for so long.** They have positive things to report to their peers about the excursion, and **most say they would do it again.”**

Left: After completing an expedition, 79% of students reported feeling they had gained the courage to face new challenges.

Thank You 2024 Donors!

Multi-Year Grants

Our work in 2024 was supported by multi-year grants, received in prior years, from the following institutions:

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3401 Reservoir Drive
Philadelphia PA 19121
Justin Ennis
Executive Director
EIN 56-2472884



NEW PARTNER SPOTLIGHT

VALLEY FORGE MILITARY ACADEMY

POBS is proud to announce an exciting new partnership with the Valley Forge Military Academy (VFMA), an international leadership institution where young men discover their potential, fortify their character, and develop into leaders.

Our Outward Bound courses deeply align with VFMA's mission of character and leadership development, allowing cadets across all grade levels to actively engage in meaningful, hands-on experiences that reveal their strengths and build confidence.



VFMA cadets prepare to tackle the POBS high ropes course in Fairmount Park.

Early results from the partnership have already showcased encouraging growth among cadets, highlighting increased confidence, enhanced teamwork, and deeper personal insights.

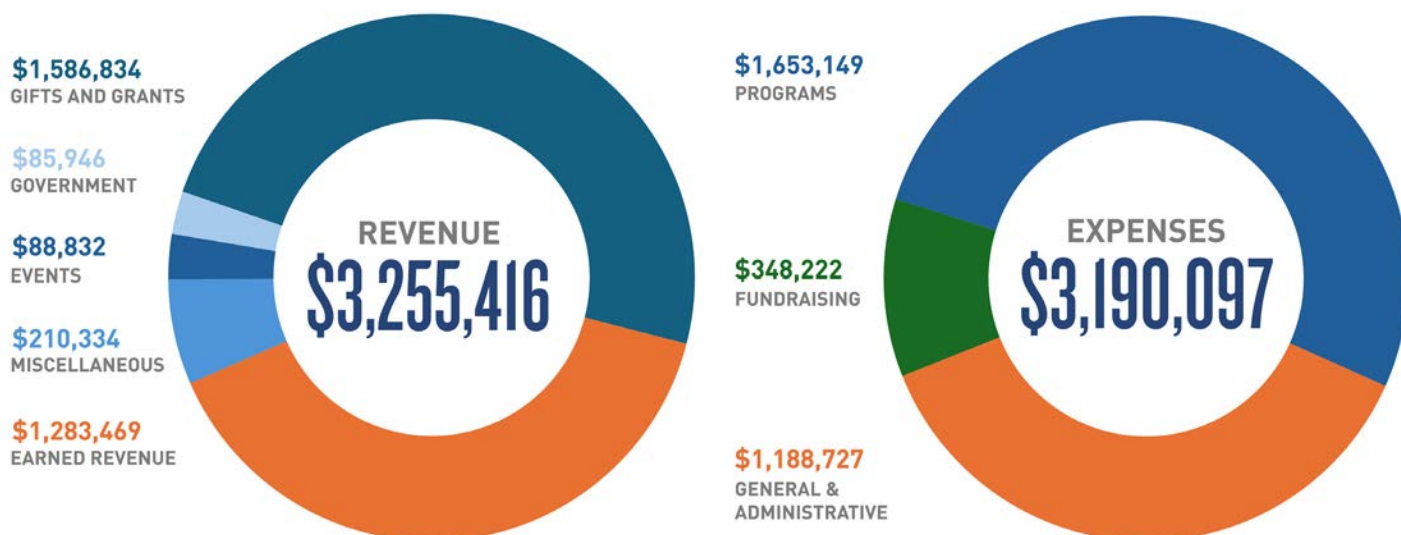
“We believe we have an important role in helping our school partners realize their most ambitious educational goals,” said Justin Ennis, Executive Director of POBS. “Every moment on an Outward Bound course is designed to foster a sense of connection, confidence, and shared purpose among students.”

Katie Newsom, Head of School at VFMA, is enthusiastic: “I strongly believe that this program partnership will be the educational catalyst we need for today’s cadets to become tomorrow’s leaders. The opportunity to discover untapped potential through Outward Bound’s time-tested experiential learning approach is a priceless investment for the Academy.”



One of three VFMA crews on a five-day expedition with POBS in Fall 2024.

2024 Financial Snapshot



Audited statements not available at time of printing. Please email info@pobs.org for a copy of our 2024 audit.

SPRING PARTNER BREAKFAST HIGHLIGHTS COLLABORATION AND IMPACT

In early May, POBS staff, partners, and supporters gathered at our scenic headquarters in The Discovery Center for our Expedition Launch Partner Breakfast.

This special event marked the official start of our program season and highlighted our commitment to fostering strong partnerships and delivering impactful social-emotional learning experiences.

We were honored to welcome esteemed panelists including Dr. Claire Robertson-Kraft, Founder and President of ImpactED; Dr. Crystal Edwards,



Principal of W.D. Kelley School; Kim Glodek, POBS Director of Education and Partnerships; and Emily Della Fera, POBS Associate Director of School District Partnerships. The panel discussed the critical role of data and partner feedback in continuously refining and enhancing our educational programs. Additionally, POBS students shared inspiring personal reflections from their transformative experiences during their courses.

Attendees also enjoyed a tour of The Discovery Center and a behind-the-scenes look at students from Swenson Arts & Tech High School, The LINC, and Kensington Health Sciences Academy preparing to embark on their 5-day backpacking and canoeing expeditions in the Delaware Water Gap.





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* As of 12/31/24