



WOODCOOKIE

a newsletter from Friends of Outdoor School



Outdoor School Grows in Southern Oregon



Photos courtesy of Bethany OK Carr

Say you'd like to start an Outdoor School program. You have experience with Outdoor School, both as a student and an educator. You have a solid background as a middle school science teacher, and you are ready to use the year's worth of grant funding you secured to plan and implement a new program from scratch. And then, everything is turned upside down by a global pandemic.

This has been life for Bethany OK Carr in Grants Pass, founder of Rogue Outdoor School. Creating a new program is challenging, but Bethany might be considered an over-achiever--she created four unique programs that served students last spring in Grants Pass, Glendale, Rogue River, and White City. Each school district had distinct needs because of the pandemic response, and Rogue Outdoor School found a way to meet the needs of all of these partners (even when those needs changed on a weekly basis!).

Bethany reached out to Friends of Outdoor School in 2018 to talk about her dream of creating an immersive, place-based Outdoor School program for her community in Grants Pass. We were thrilled to work with her in a supportive role as part of our special services program. One of her first moves was to connect with a consultant to help her build the program on a foundation of equity, diversity, and inclusion. Once she started on that path, we worked to connect her with resources to build the organization and the program.



Every time a curve was thrown her way, Bethany navigated it with tenacity and creativity. When securing program insurance for a startup was looking bleak, she discovered a company that specialized in insuring outdoor and conservation programs. When it looked like students would never see their partner site, Camp Latgawa, in-person, she worked with partners to create an interactive map of the location so students could virtually experience Oregon's

first-ever Outdoor School site. When school district and public health requirements were in constant flux, Rogue Outdoor School changed from virtual to in-person to hybrid and back again.

In the end, Rogue Outdoor School connected 500 students in southern Oregon to nature in their communities, both virtually and in-person. Much of the curriculum and activities they developed for use during the pandemic will find new life helping students prepare for and follow up from their in-person experience in the coming years. We look forward to the possibility of students again filling the forests at Camp Latgawa, contributing to a legacy that began in 1957. And we are confident that Rogue Outdoor School will become a critical piece of students' learning in southern Oregon.



Our Shared Vision: Outdoor School is a place where every child can belong.



What's Happening at Outdoor School

Recently we visited with camp leaders from around Oregon about their experience running summer camp in 2021. These leaders rose to the extreme challenge of providing a safe and enriching summer camp experience during a global pandemic, and they did it with near zero transmission of Covid at their camps. Their insights, experiences, and advice will prove invaluable as Outdoor School programs plan and implement their work this school year.

While students in a few districts were able to attend an overnight program this fall, many districts are waiting for spring when their students can be vaccinated. A spring Outdoor School experience also makes sense in areas of the state where climate change has increased wildfires and the smoke that comes with it well into fall. This pause is creating time and space to work on more inclusive programming and site improvements. The work of justice, equity, diversity, access, and inclusion is, of course, long-term and ongoing. Having focused time is helping that work get a good start, and we continue to advocate for Measure 99 funds to support it.

In some areas around the state, public health guidance has warranted a moratorium on busing students away from school. So, for many students, this fall's Outdoor School learning will feature excursions to local parks and explorations of schoolyard habitats. Students will get a chance to meet and become comfortable with Outdoor School educators and, in most cases, can plan on meeting them again when they can resume their Outdoor School experience with an overnight trip in the spring. This may provide an opportunity for Outdoor School programs to better partner with schools and families and be better prepared to support students throughout the experience.

We are especially interested in how to rethink Outdoor School in other ways. Covid has broken the box in which we have operated. Seeing potential outside the box will be key to the continuous improvement that Outdoor School strives for--and a challenge to pause, reflect, and then walk together down the path toward our vision where Outdoor School is a place where every child can belong.



Three Cheers for Outdoor School

Outdoor School was fully funded for the next biennium during the 2021 legislative session! This means that during this upcoming legislative session, we can focus our advocacy efforts on connecting with legislators about why Outdoor School is so important and how to support the work of equity and inclusion.

We will share your stories to give decision-makers a sneak peek into the world of Outdoor School, send thank you notes to officials who continue to support Outdoor School, and have personal conversations with elected leaders to make sure they have the information they need to confidently make decisions about Outdoor School in the future. We can't do these things without your help! Here are some ways that you can continue to advocate for Outdoor School:

- Write or record a video sharing your Outdoor School story. It doesn't have to be fancy, you can record it with your phone. Please send to sophia@friendsofoutdoorschool.org
- Write your legislator an email thanking them for supporting Outdoor School and what their support means to you! Find your legislator: <https://bit.ly/3aTdgBB>



Statewide Outdoor School Work Groups

This winter Friends of Outdoor School launched a statewide work group to support and advance high school leadership programs at Outdoor School. We needed to hear directly from high school leaders themselves about their experience at Outdoor School. We started with training on engaging youth voices and planning for hearing from a panel of youth. A deep and powerful session followed in which youth from programs across Oregon shared their love for Outdoor School, challenges they had faced, and recommendations for making the experience stronger for future high school leaders. Next we'll work to incorporate more youth voice in program improvement and collaborate across programs to support this valuable youth leadership experience.

Friends of Outdoor School also recently launched a network about seasonal and program staff at Outdoor School. Our priority was to learn not just from the administrators of Outdoor School programs, but also from the staff who are affected by administrators' decisions.

In two subgroups - one made up mostly of program decision-makers and one made up of mostly seasonal staff, the network is looking for solutions to real life issues that seasonal and program staff face. We look forward to supporting these groups as they work to make being an Outdoor School staff member the best job ever!

In Memory of "Mo" Bierwirth



We were saddened to hear of the passing of Mary Bierwirth at age

39 in September. At Outdoor School, Mary was known as "Mo," where she was a creative and reflective soil field

instructor. Students, teachers, staff members and high school leaders were blessed with Mo's enthusiasm for learning and teaching. She had a gift for using her deep knowledge of geology to make science come alive for children. Always curious and always innovative, Mo pushed Outdoor School forward in service to students. We will miss you, Mo.

Give!Guide 2021

Give!Guide runs November 1st through December 31st. Give!Guide is an annual effort to raise funds for, and draw attention to, the good works of local nonprofits throughout the Portland Metro area. Here are some ways that you can connect, support, and advocate for Friends of Outdoor School during Give!Guide:

Connect: Follow us on Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter and keep an eye on your email for regular updates. You can also add Friends of Outdoor School to your contacts so we don't go to your junk mail.

Support: Donating through Give!Guide is an awesome way to support Friends of Outdoor School, especially when you can win some super cool prizes! You can also help spread the word with friends and family by sharing our emails and social media posts or even sharing our Give!Guide donation page!

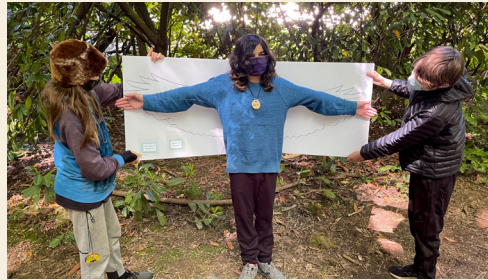
Advocate: Share a video about why you belong at Outdoor School! Make a short video (under 1 minute) and share it with us on social media or email it to sophia@friendsofoutdoorschool.org.

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