



2017-2018 Annual Report



As we reach this annual milestone we reflect with gratitude and joy at Earthroots' impact during the 2017-2018 academic year. Thank you for being a part of the Earthroots community. Together, we are creating opportunities for people to transform themselves and the world through new connections with nature.

Mission and Vision

Earthroots is a non-profit 501(c)3 educational organization dedicated to cultivating a sense of care and connection between people and the natural world. Earthroots vision is to create a world where people of all ages, abilities, cultures and affiliations understand how our actions influence the world around us. With this understanding, the hope is to inspire choices that improve the health of the earth, themselves, and each other.

Since its founding in 2005, Earthroots has grown both programmatically and structurally to enable the organization to serve an ever broadening range of local residents including school children, families, universities, and businesses. This growth and community engagement has further allowed Earthroots to purchase and conserve a beautiful 39-acre property in Orange County, known as Big Oak Canyon.

2017-2018 Year in Review

*“Study nature, love nature, stay close to nature. It will never fail you.”
--Frank Lloyd Wright*

Overview of July 2017 through June 2018

Earthroots experienced tremendous growth this year. Many of our regularly offered programs were again fine tuned with our constant commitment to improving the impact of Earthroots. In addition, new opportunities presented themselves giving us a glimmer of what more is to come in the near future. The following table summarizes the Earthroots impact during the past school year (2017-2018).

Earthroots Impact (2017-2018 School Year)	
Days of Programming	228
Number of Program Participants	812
Number of Volunteers	183
Total Number of Hours in Nature	20,837
Average # of Hours in Nature (per person)	20

In the past year, over 20,000 hours have been logged by Earthroots participants and volunteers. These amazing adults and children have come from all parts of Orange County, and as far as Riverside, San Diego and Los Angeles Counties to share time with Earthroots' mentors and gain connections with nature.

Land Updates

Big Oak Canyon

This land is truly taking shape as a place to connect with our natural world and learn the art of regenerative living. Unique outdoor events held at Big Oak Canyon this year have included a wedding, private retreats, a movie shoot and an alfresco fine dining event. Many people are attracted to the beauty and peaceful setting of our 39-acre wilderness property.



One incredible change you may notice on your next visit to Big Oak: our new emergency communication system. Thanks to a generous donation from Skybridge Renewables, Big Oak Canyon has solar power! They designed the system, brought in materials and installed it all as a gift because they love what Earthroots is doing and want to see us succeed. Thank you Skybridge Renewables! This system supplies electricity to our satellite wifi and phone, allowing us to feel more connected with the wider world. Guests at Big Oak will still be “off grid” at most of the property, but when the need arises to be in communication, it is wonderful to have it accessible. With this new connectivity, we have been able to share on Facebook Live real time events at Big Oak with our social media followers.

Another very meaningful addition at Big Oak is the Creek Trail, named in memory of Katie Hatch Reich. Katie was a long time family friend of founder, Jodi Levine-Wright. Upon her passing, Katie’s family made a generous donation to Earthroots to honor her life while inspiring others to connect with nature. The trail is a newly opened footpath that connects the upper and lower portions of Big Oak Canyon, following the spring-fed creek. Walking this path opens up a whole new experience for visitors.

Earthroots Forest Kindergarten classes continue to meet at this very special location on a weekly basis. In addition, school field trips give children a chance to walk among steep mountains and touch fresh flowing water. University students have lent a hand restoring the native landscapes. Corporate volunteers helped to build a rain shelter and prepare the land for fire season by removing invasive grasses. Orange County Fire Authority and Cal Fire removed several trees growing alongside our roads to allow for improved emergency access.



Program Highlights

Eco-Literacy

Eco-Literacy on Campus is a weekly program for grades 2-8 held at a local elementary school. Now in its 10th year the program at the Journey School site has become a true demonstration of sustainable living practices, mentoring 160+ students each week during the school year. Teachers, students, volunteers and administrators actively engage in growing fruits and vegetables, harvesting rainwater, composting lunch waste, recycling, minimizing single use containers and restoring native habitat. Our unique grade appropriate Eco-Literacy curriculum is building future environmental stewards.

After School Programs

Two after school programs were initiated by request this year, one in Laguna Beach and the other in San Juan Capistrano. A total of 50 students enhanced their days learning with Earthroots through outdoor experiences. The Laguna Beach students spent low tide days at the beach and high tide days in the hills. San Juan students focused on improving their wilderness survival skills at their private school campus. Earthroots mentors worked with students on crafts ranging from dyeing fabric with plants, to making bows and arrows.

Festival Fundraiser

Big Oak Canyon was once again the site of our Annual Festival and Fundraiser. Martin Espino led our group through music of Native California and Mexico. Chrisha Favors taught us to hula hoop and displayed her amazing talents. There were two delicious food trucks this year, along with many fun booths and activities for kids of all ages: face painting, bake sale, reptile zone, instrument making, a healing sanctuary and more. Over 200 guests, volunteers and staff enjoyed the day at Big Oak Canyon at the 12th Annual Festival and Fundraiser.

Forest Kindergarten

Songs from the voices of young children fill the air at Big Oak Canyon every week. The children, ages 3-6, with their parents spend their Forest Kindergarten days wandering the creek and crafting with what they find in nature. Earthroots mentors create a rich tapestry for learning within this seemingly innocent experience. The children's learning has been profound and includes: learning songs and the alphabet in multiple languages, plant species identification, uses of plants for food, shelter building, medicine and tools, as well as sharing and developing emotional intelligence and how to be comfortable outdoors in all weather conditions, year-round. These youngsters have taken a leadership role in the protection and preservation of this land. A new willow weaving garden has been planted and hundreds of seed balls with native seeds have been dispersed by these little hands. Each participant, young and old, spent 160 hours at Big Oak Canyon during the 2017-2018 academic year. Due to the amount of enthusiasm for this program, a second day of Forest Kindergarten has been added to the upcoming semester class offerings.



Homeschool

Last year's homeschool class was able to dive deeply into nature connection and learning in a unique experiential style only possible when you spend five hours each week, 32 weeks a year with the same group of ten students and two mentors. These students, ages 6-14, developed compassion towards each other, gained physical strength, and became confident in nature. Experiences included hiking from the peak of San Mateo watershed to the ocean at Trestles beach to better understand watershed health, to discuss Acjachemen land rights issues, and to learn water quality testing techniques. Homeschool students started and tended an organic garden, which they harvested and ate from together. They learned about animal tracking, bird language as well as shelter building, just to name a few wonderful experiences.

Educators in Nature Training

One of our mentors, Jon Young says that "you can only mentor others in nature to the level that you are connected with nature". Training adults has always been a key foundation of Earthroots' mission. This year, in addition to training our own instructors, Earthroots hosted a three-day training for educators who lead programs for other schools and organizations in Orange and San Diego Counties. This training supported 19 educators representing seven different organizations. A big Thank You to the instructors who came out to teach at this impactful training: Captain Alex Carney, Cristin Geestman, Jodi Levine-Wright, Verna Sundquist and Mindy Uranga.



Jodi Levine-Wright, in camouflage, surprises her daughter on the trail during the Educators in Nature Training.

Staff Training

Thanks to a second year grant from the Mara Breech Foundation, instructors were able to participate in deep nature connection trainings to enhance our breadth of offerings to the community. In the last few months, three Earthroots instructors have attended 17 days of workshops and trainings in the Art of Mentoring with the 8 Shields Institute, and a Bird Language course, also with the 8 Shields Institute. Additional trainings are to come!

Natural Building Workshop

Earthen structures are fire resistant, have thermal mass, are non-toxic and are fun to build! Teo Briseño, a seasoned, organic builder from San Diego is working with Earthroots to create a lasting earthen sitting bench at Big Oak Canyon. During our first two-day workshop, participants experienced the beauty and function of working with stone, clay, sand and straw. After learning the applications, materials and process for working with these abundant resources, the group made adobe bricks and cob, creating the base of our new earthen bench. Each participant spent 12 hours learning about natural building techniques during the two-day workshop.

Photo: Participant carrying adobe bricks in her wheelbarrow.



Traditional Skills Gathering

A dedicated group of 30 members, comprised of past Earthroots instructors, their families and other hearty nature enthusiasts have spent nine nights camping at Big Oak Canyon this past year (divided into three separate weekend campouts). Their goal has been to share and learn traditional survival skills in a community setting. Skills shared this past year have been knife safety and advance carving techniques, shelter building, archery, consensus decision making, willow basketry, cordage making with various fibers and natural building. This group serves as a deep well of strength and inspiration for Earthroots staff and the broader community. This group will continue to meet in the upcoming year for nine more nights at Big Oak Canyon!

Traditional Skills Series: Food, Fire, Shelter, and Water



This series inspires participants to look at the basic needs of human survival in a new way. Together, people of all ages spent one day exploring each topic: harvesting and preparing food from native plants, building fire by friction, building a survival shelter with no modern tools and harvested water from the land and learned to purify it.

Participant testing out the overnight emergency shelter built during the Traditional Skills: Shelter class while her child looks on.

GOALS FOR 2018-2019

"In every walk with nature one receives far more than he seeks."

--John Muir

As we look forward to the new school year, we are excited to know that more people will be coming to experience the natural beauty of Big Oak Canyon. Class participants at Big Oak Canyon will enjoy the new nature trail that was completed in Spring 2018 as well as continue working on the earthen bench, habitat restoration projects and tending the wild.

The upcoming semester and year will see an expansion of two tried and true programs. Earthroots is doubling our reach for young explorers by adding a second day of Forest Kindergarten at Big Oak Canyon. We are grateful to have Caroline Colesworthy returning to teach the program that she co-founded many years ago. Eco-Literacy at the Journey School is growing to now offer programs for grades kindergarten through fifth to compliment their new Hybrid Homeschool classes.



In addition to the rich nature-connection programs listed in this review, Big Oak Canyon will host unique private events and retreats in the coming year. Keep an eye out for a dedicated Big Oak Canyon website coming in early 2019.

Through Earthroots unique programming, a culture of connecting with nature is being created and deepened for our current generations, thus creating a stewardship way of life for many generations to come. By creating opportunities for our community to engage in nature, Earthroots is cultivating a sense of care and connection between people and the natural world. We look forward to seeing you at the next adventure.

Thank you for being a part of Earthroots!

Handwritten signature of Jodi Levine-Wright

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