



**EARTHROOTS**

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ANNUAL REPORT

**2018  
2019**

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**Creating opportunities for people  
to transform through new and  
deepening connections with nature.**

**As we reach this annual milestone we reflect with gratitude and joy at Earthroots' impact during the 2018-2019 academic year. Thank you for being a part of the Earthroots community. Together, we are creating opportunities for people to transform through new and deepening 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.

## **Year in Review 2018-2019**

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#### **Overview of July 2018 through June 2019**

In the past year, over 19,000 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. The following table summarizes the Earthroots impact during the past school year (2018-2019).

#### **Earthroots Impact (2018-2019 School Year)**

**193**

Days of  
Programming

**912**

Program  
Participants

**300**

Volunteers

**19,235**

Total Number of  
Hours in Nature

**16**

Average number  
of Hours in Nature  
(per person)

**"I alone cannot  
change the world,  
but I can cast a  
stone across the  
waters to create  
many ripples."**

Mother Teresa



Children's Garden at Big Oak Canyon



CHILDREN'S GARDEN  
In loving memory of  
Phyllis Fischer



## 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, school field trips, 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.

If it's been a while since you have spent time at Big Oak, you will notice great strides have been made this past year. Much of this is due to the presence of a new dedicated caretaker, Shane Brown. Since his arrival in late 2018, he has started an on-site nursery, designed a mid-scale compost system for program use, hand-dug and planted garden terraces in the one-acre orchard, led volunteers in native habitat restoration and site improvements, and has been a voice for the animals who make Big Oak Canyon their home. That is all in addition to leading adult programs and supporting our youth programs. Read more about his work and discoveries on "Shane's Corner", a regular blog on our website.

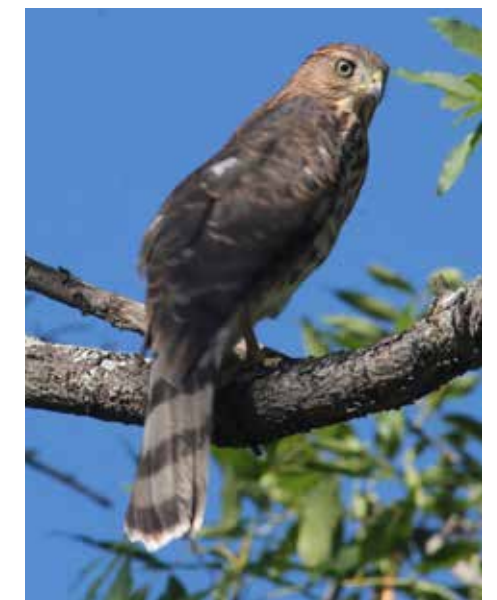
The orchard & gardens at Big Oak Canyon have been planted, tended and harvested by our youngest and eldest participants alike. Starting by improving soil fertility and moving up from there, we are growing food at Big Oak Canyon! Using strategies of regenerative agriculture, we put extensive care into tending the soil to ensure high microbiological diversity. Improving soil fertility yields abundant and healthy plants, giving us more nutrition and joy! A big Thank You to Vans, Sunpin Solar and Chantal Lamourelle for your contributions to the orchard, gardens and composting area. We are grateful for you, our sponsors, volunteers, donors and all who lend a hand at Big Oak.

We share this land with a diverse range of wildlife and bring their presence into focus to expand ones' awareness of bird language, animal behavior, value of wildlife, regenerative living values and importance of community. If you missed the video, or just want to be in awe again... check out the trail camera video of 4 mountain lions moving through the land last November on our blog.

Inter agency partnerships are important to us in the canyon. With a helicopter pad on site, Big Oak has been used by OCFA for fire safety and emergency response for decades. Recently, Southern California Edison used the site to assist with a local pole repair.



Golden giant amaranth and garbanzo beans



Top: Mountain lion at Big Oak Canyon  
Bottom: Cooper's Hawk in tree



Rockwell Automation installing wash basin at Big Oak Canyon



"Evening Under the Oaks"  
fundraising dinner.

## Program Highlights

### **An Evening Under the Oaks Benefit Dinner**

What a night! We feasted on local, organic eats including wild harvested herbs from Big Oak, we drank, danced, and celebrated with Earthroots community the beauty that is growing in our 14th year. We look forward to having you join us at the next "Evening Under the Oaks" on April 25, 2020.

### **Eco-Literacy**

Eco-Literacy on Campus is a weekly program developed for grades K-8 and held at local elementary schools. Now in its 11th year, the program at the Journey School site has become a true demonstration of sustainable living practices, mentoring 230+ 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 through education and inspired action.

### **School Field Trips**

Field trips are designed to create an experience that enhances students in-classroom lessons. Three schools brought their students, grades K-5, to Big Oak Canyon to experience hands-on lessons in botany, wild crafting, making elderberry syrup and herbal healing salve, wood-working and tool safety, friction fire techniques and animal tracking.

### **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 2018-2019 academic year.

### **Homeschool Field Class**

Last year's homeschool class was able to dive deeply into nature connection, spending five hours each week, 32 weeks a year with the same group of twelve students and two instructors at locations throughout the county. These students, ages 6-14, developed compassion towards each other, gained physical strength, and became confident in nature. Experiences included hiking local waterways from the mountain to the sea to better understand how "water is life", starting and tending an organic garden as a source of food, medicine and crafts and touring the landfill and Orange County Water District facility to learn how our personal actions affect the earth on a larger scale. Favorite topics include animal tracking, bird language, whittling as well as shelter building.

### **Staff Training**

Thanks to a third year grant from the Mara W Breech Foundation, Earthroots instructors have further expanded their deep nature connection trainings to enhance our breadth of offerings to the community. In the last few months, three Earthroots instructors have attended 15 days of workshops and trainings in Permaculture Design with San Diego Sustainable Living Institute and Coyote Mentoring with the



Mother and son using a grinding stone at Big Oak Canyon

8 Shields Institute, and a Bird Language course, also with the 8 Shields Institute. Another instructor will attend a 72 hour permaculture design training at Quail Springs Permaculture Farm as well! We look forward to seeing how this investment in our staff will blossom in the months and years ahead.

### **Natural Building**

Earthen structures are fire resistant, have thermal mass, are non-toxic and are fun to build! Each year, Earthroots inspires hundreds of children to build miniature cob houses with clay, sand and straw. We hope to one day have a full size cob house at Big Oak. Until then, our cob bench project is engaging the community with earthen building techniques. Teo Briseño, a seasoned, organic builder from San Diego is working with Earthroots to create a lasting earthen sitting bench at Big Oak Canyon. This past year, Forest Kindergarten students made adobe bricks that were used to strengthen the backrest, while adults worked with Teo to sculpt the artistic designs into the bench.



Forest Kindergarten (above) and Homeschool Field Class (below) at Big Oak Canyon



### Big Oak Stewardship Council

A dedicated group of 30 members, comprised of past and present 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 advanced 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!

### Family Beach Day

This annual family fun day draws long time Earthroots community and new friends alike for a day in the sun and waves. The day flies by while catching up with old friends, learning beach safety skills and making hands-on nature crafts. This year the youngest kids made a sand boat with Miss Linnie and rowed their imaginations out to sea while the older children lashed sticks together making miniature rafts to ride the waves.

### Ancestral Arts Series

The purpose of the series is to connect participants with nature through practicing ancient human traditions and life skills that involve interacting with and honoring nature. Each session had a unique theme; shelter, fire, food, clothing, animal tracking and more, and included practical skills, storytelling and wildcrafting ethics. A sample of the class... "During the Shelter workshop, participants learned how to identify and harvest flexible poles from local plants and tie them into a frame for a simple livable shelter. During the Tracking session, participants learned about traditional uses and the necessity for



(Left) Debris shelter

(Center) Shane Brown holding a Speckled Rattlesnake skeleton found at Big Oak Canyon

(Right) Creating shelter using pine and yucca.



tracking. They learned about identifying and interpreting local animal tracks and sign, including how to age tracks, then went on an off-trail adventure to find deer by following their tracks. During the Fiber session, participants learned how to process different types of plant and animal fibers, spin them into yarn, and do simple weaving and braiding. The practices of gratitude, creativity, and awareness were encouraged throughout the series. This was a series of 7 daytime classes throughout the spring for ages 8 and up. A total of 13 participants attended one or more sessions.

### Volunteer Days

Earthroots holds one volunteer day a month at Big Oak Canyon in Silverado, CA. With the help of volunteers each month, we are able to work towards creating a more resilient native ecology. This past year, volunteers prepared the land for ecology and agricultural education programs by removing invasive plant species, planting native species, stabilizing the soil, sweeping the roads, setting up a handwashing system and assisting with various site preparations. All ages are welcome to

assist with restoring and stewarding the land. Groups that volunteered in 2018-2019 included Camden Development, Orange Coast College, Boy Scout Troop 727 (Rancho Santa Margarita), Levi's Corporate, Taiwanese American Professionals of Orange County, Lion's Heart Teen volunteers, Van's Inc, Rockwell Automation, Sunpin Solar and OneOC. Many hands make light work!

### Private groups

Private groups who have hosted their events at Big Oak Canyon include medicinal plant workshops, new moon gatherings, a beekeeping workshop, birthdays and blessingways.

### Toddlers in the Garden

Our youngest participants explored backyard orchards, planted seeds, got to know tide pool creatures at the beach and adventured on local trails with their parents. Toddlers in the Garden is one of our longest running programs and serves families with children ages 1-3.

Forest Kindergarten (left) class showing their newly made cattail dolls (right) snack time



Volunteers at Big Oak Canyon

## Goals for 2019-2020

This year we are dreaming big to connect the regenerative agriculture practices with practical cooking and nutrition education by creating a Community Kitchen at Big Oak Canyon. Thanks to inspired donors and a grant from AXA XL Insurance, we have received the initial funding to give confidence to the vision. Further funding is needed to break ground, and we hope that by next year we will be able to share a meal with you in our new farm to table kitchen.

One group of children who would benefit from field trips to Big Oak to learn about the connection of growing food, cooking and nutrition are those attending title one schools in Orange County. Earthroots is developing curriculum and applying for funding to make that happen. If you are interested in this vision and have resources that can help bring this vision to life, please join us!

We are excited to share the new programs taking flight this coming year!

**Spanish Immersion in Nature** has launched for families with children ages 6-10. We look forward to seeing how the children blossom in language acquisition with Earthroots all outdoor classes.

**Nature Mentor Training** is a year long certification program weaving together permaculture principles with nature connection mentoring. This training has been designed for educators wanting to incorporate more nature connection into their curriculum, parents and grandparents who want to enhance their time with young people and those wanting to deepen their own connections with nature.

**Full Moon Campouts** will be offered on a monthly basis, giving community members an opportunity to experience Big Oak at their own pace - either lending a hand in the orchard, hiking or taking in the scenery.

**“Unless someone like you cares a whole lot – nothing is going to get better. It’s not.”**

Dr. Seuss

Join caretaker, Shane Brown on monthly donation-based **Nature Walks** to learn the flora and fauna of Big Oak Canyon.

We aim to **expand volunteer opportunities** in the coming year to include more youth volunteers through partnering with Lion’s Heart and Boy & Girl Scout troops.

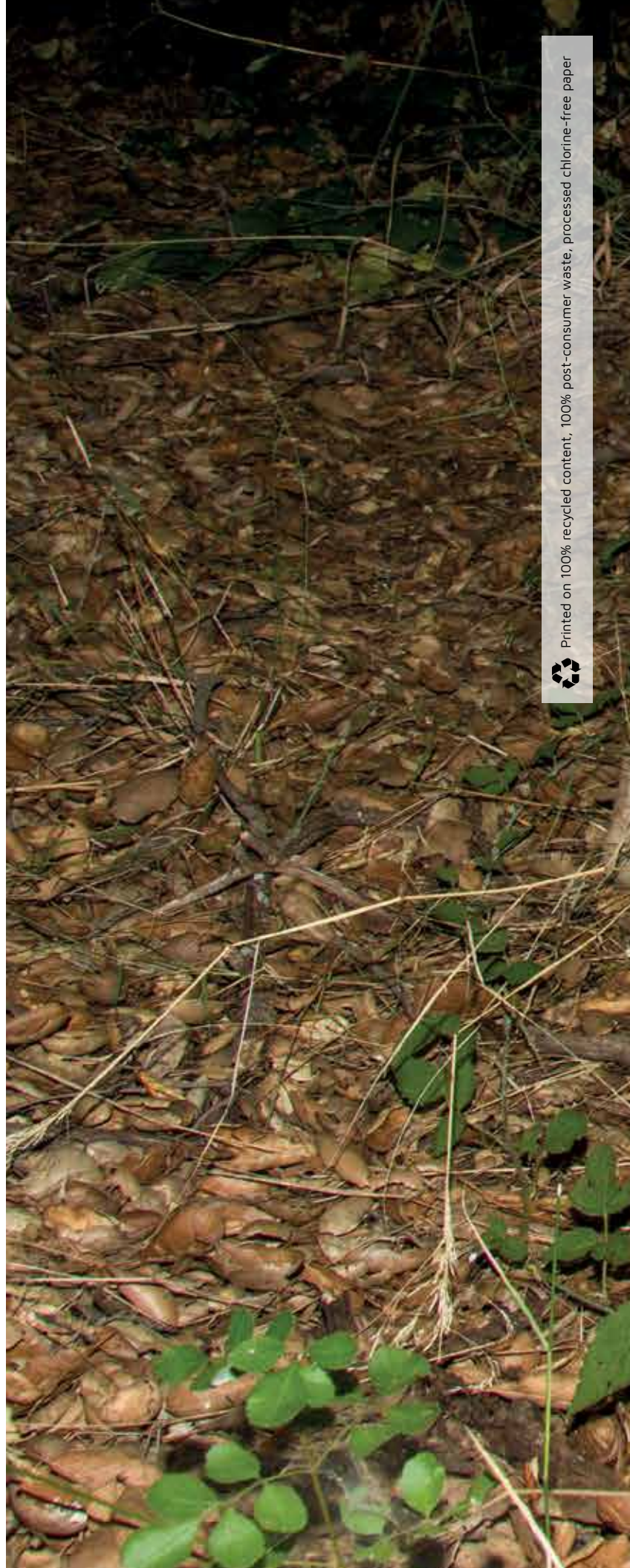
We all need a place to look to where there is hope for the future and our dreams can come true. Thank you for being a part of Earthroots and bringing the dream of nature connection, earth care and community to life!

*Jodi Levine-Wright*  
Jodi Levine-Wright, Executive Director

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Trail camera photo of bobcat at Big Oak Canyon  
Photo: Mark Girardeau



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