

2023

Annual Report



EARTHROOTS

As we celebrate our 18th year, we reflect on nearly two decades of inspiring nature connection, tending the land, and growing in community. This year has been a remarkable journey filled with transformative experiences, passionate learners, and deepening roots in our shared mission.

Together, we have become a vibrant community that values the wisdom of the natural world. From hands-on learning, to empowering young leaders, each moment has contributed to our legacy of stewardship and sustainability.

Join us as we highlight our achievements, share stories of impact, and envision the path forward. Thank you for being an essential part of our journey.

MISSION/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 individual choices that improve the health of the earth, ourselves, 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 throughout the years allowed Earthroots to purchase a beautiful 39-acre property in Orange County, known as Big Oak Canyon in 2013. We are honored to care for and conserve this land year after year.



**OVERVIEW OF
JANUARY–DECEMBER 2023**

In the past year, Earthroots participants and volunteers have engaged in over 15,000 hours of nature connection. These amazing adults, teens and children have come from all parts of Orange County, and as far as Riverside, San Diego and Los Angeles Counties. The following summarizes Earthroots’ impact in 2023:



<p>194</p> <p>DAYS OF PROGRAMMING</p>	<p>1,148</p> <p>PROGRAM PARTICIPANTS</p>	<p>88</p> <p>VOLUNTEERS</p>
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TOTAL NUMBER OF HOURS IN NATURE **15,383**

<p>REVENUE \$238,044</p> <p>EXPENSES \$233,792</p>	<p>SCHOLARSHIP FUNDS AWARDED</p> <p>\$10,325</p>
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GRANT FUNDED EARTHROOTS ECOLITERACY IN SCHOOLS PROGRAM:
2 SCHOOLS, SERVING 200 STUDENTS



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My son has been able to be immersed in our ancestral practices thereby helping him see our native practices as valuable.

AYOPECHTLI



“

It's been amazing watching my child become more independent and peaceful through time in nature.

PARENT OF A FOREST KINDERGARTEN PARTICIPANT

“

Earthroots has encouraged us to learn more about plants and animals on our hikes, and we now keep nature journals as a family.

YOHUALITZTLI

“

In addition to homeschooling me, I am grateful that my mom introduced me to Earthroots. It established my love for nature and its freedom. I know that portions of my creativity, free spirit, and thoughtfulness were built through Earthroots. The field school was more than just a time to build shelters, make fire, and hunt and gather food. I was taught life lessons like how to be self-sufficient which involved working with limited resources to survive. I learned how to show respect to others and the Earth. I learned how to problem solve in nontraditional ways that made me step out of my comfort zone. Ever since then, I have used tools such as responsibility and independence to create lasting success for me and those around me. I am proud to thank Earthroots for teaching me discipline, self-sustainability, and being content with myself and my situation.

IAN MEAD, CURRENT COLLEGE STUDENT

Alumni Spotlight



The Land

Earthroots programs are held on ancestral lands of the Juañeno Band of Mission Indians Acjachemen Nation, Tongva/Gabrieleño and Payómkawichum/Luiseño tribes in the area known as Orange County, California.

PLACES WE VISITED

Big Oak Canyon

Bolsa Chica Wetlands

Crescent Bay Beach

Crystal Cove State Beach

Caspers Wilderness Park

Dana Point Tide Pools

Harding Canyon

Irvine Regional Park

Little Corona del Mar Beach

Maple Springs

Newport Back Bay

Nix Nature Center

Riley Wilderness Park

Treasure Island Beach

Trestles State Beach



Program Highlights

CLASSES

2023 was yet another exciting year of unique classes, programs, and events at Earthroots. Through a blend of exploration, play, and hands-on experiences, our youngest learners in Forest Kindergarten cultivated a deep connection to nature while making wonderful memories with their grown ups, and cherished friendships.

Homeschool students explored an array of natural landscapes with lessons including land restoration, bird language, animal identification, watershed, mapping, gardening, tracking, creek ecology, native plants, and more. These areas of study allow students to hone their outdoor skills and cultivate a profound sense of stewardship for the planet.



CAMPS + SPECIAL EVENTS

Earthroots Field School offered three weeks of immersive summer programs plus a spring break camp in 2023. From exhilarating tide pooling expeditions to Forest Kindergarten Camp, an enchanting Fairy Quest experience, and a Land Detective Camp, every experience served as a catalyst for growth and discovery while having fun.

In addition to Earthroots' family programs - Volunteer Day and Astronomy Night - this past year, we also offered a diverse array of workshops geared toward teens and adults including Basket Weaving, Herbs for Food and Medicine, Loom Beading, Women & Wild Plants, and Cordage Making.





BIG OAK CANYON

Stewarding the land strengthens our relationship with the very things that give us life. We are grateful to know the animals, plants, water, soil and all the living creatures of this generous landscape.

Trail camera images by Jason Andes

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

In 2023, our staff represented Earthroots by offering hands-on crafts for all ages, and selling native plants from our nursery at the Celebration for Panhe, the Silverado Country Faire, and Journey School's Harvest Faire. We love making meaningful connections in the community and strengthening partnerships at outreach events.



ECOLITERACY IN SCHOOLS

Earthroots' Ecoliteracy in Schools (EES) programs are designed for schools that prefer on-campus field trips. EES classes provide opportunities for kindergarten through 5th grade students to connect with nature from the convenience of their own classrooms or school campus. Trained Earthroots instructors travel to schools throughout Orange County to facilitate hands-on, experiential, nature based lessons, aligned with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS) and California History/Social Science Content Standards (HSS). Earthroots Ecoliteracy curriculum is cyclical and grade-specific, each year building on the previous year's learning, and is aligned with childhood developmental stages to optimize engagement.



In our efforts to expand our reach, we have created a new webpage for our Ecoliteracy in Schools program (earthrootsfieldschool.org/ecoliteracy-programs-for-schools). The webpage outlines the various program offerings, tailored to meet the needs of different grade levels and school settings, in addition to identifying the grade-level standards that will be met by each specific lesson.

As we reflect on the many achievements and milestones of the past year, Earthroots Field School remains steadfast in its unwavering commitment to inspiring environmental stewardship, nurturing a profound love for the natural world, and empowering communities to forge deeper connections with the ecosystems that sustain life on Earth. Together, we stand at the forefront of a transformative journey toward a more harmonious and sustainable future for generations to come.

SCHOOLS WE WORKED WITH IN 2023:

- Cabrillo Point Academy**
- Garfield Elementary School**
- Head Heart Hands Education**
- Innovations Learning Academy**
- Journey School**
- Madison Elementary School**
- Maple Village Waldorf School**
- Sanderling Waldorf School**

Partnerships

JOURNEY SCHOOL

Thank you Journey School for entrusting us with your students for the past 14 years!

In 2009, Earthroots proposed an after-school gardening program at Journey School in Aliso Viejo. Parents were eager to have their kindergarteners spend a couple of hours after school planting seeds and caring for plants in their school garden. Little did we know that relationship would grow through the years to become such a lasting partnership. With the support of parents, administrators and teachers, that after-school program quickly became an on-campus requirement for grades 2-8, then shifted to grades K-5 as it is today. The Earthroots Ecoliteracy program provides hands-on, outdoor lessons and activities, developed specifically for each grade level. Gardening, ancestral skills, habitat restoration, food preservation, and bird language, are a few examples of the topics covered in the curriculum developed to deepen students' relationships to the natural world around them.

We are honored to provide these programs at Journey School each year.

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This internship has significantly contributed to my aspirations of becoming an elementary school teacher. As I observed classrooms, interacted with children, and learned from seasoned educators, I found the experience to be profoundly rewarding. The first-hand exposure to the importance, joy, and challenges of the teaching profession has solidified my determination to work with children in the future. The unique opportunity to closely work with both teachers and students at Earthroots has been an invaluable aspect of my educational journey.



TAIYO SHINTAKU
FALL 2023 INTERN, SOKA UNIVERSITY

THOMAS COYNE

Thomas Coyne Survival School teaches occasional weekend classes at Big Oak Canyon throughout the year on topics including wilderness first aid, survival skills, apothecary, shelter building, and finding and purifying water.

ELEMENTAL DESIGN

Elemental Design's Permaculture Design Certificate course for adults at Big Oak Canyon made a lasting benefit to the land. One section of that course, led by Benito Olamendi and Shane Brown, students were guided to build a check dam, partially filled with dried branches. As flowing water carried sediment to the area, small step terraces were created where there was once erosion. These simple and functional earthworks stabilize the land and allow more water to be stored in the ground rather than quickly flowing away.

INTERSHIPS

Earthroots is proud to partner with local colleges like Soka University, to provide valuable internship opportunities for students. Through this partnership, interns like Miko and Taiyo are able to immerse themselves in our programs, gaining hands-on experience and invaluable insights into the field of education and environmental studies.

“

I loved the opportunity to experience and gain insight into classrooms and the Earthroots activities. Various kind and welcoming staff members supported me. I could interact with and assist children of different ages and backgrounds and learn alongside them. From gardening, harvesting, and identifying plants, it was amazing to experience all the fun nature-based activities.



MIKO MILOSAVLJEVIC
SPRING 2023 INTERN, SOKA UNIVERSITY

Instructor Training

Earthroots instructors bring inspiration and excitement to our classes year round. They need to be nourished to keep their students engaged, and for classes to run smoothly. We are so grateful to the Mara W. Breech Foundation, who has provided funding for ongoing Earthroots instructor training, and to Karen Graham, our Program Director, for designing and running these vital trainings. Some of the topics included in our 2023 instructor trainings included rainwater harvesting with guest instructor Brook Sarson of Catching H2O, group games, song sharing, friction fire making, orienteering, organic gardening, knife safety, wood carving, sewing crafts, behavior management, and early childhood development. Additionally, instructors have attended ancestral skills gatherings, naturalists workshops, and educational training locally and out of state.



Volunteers

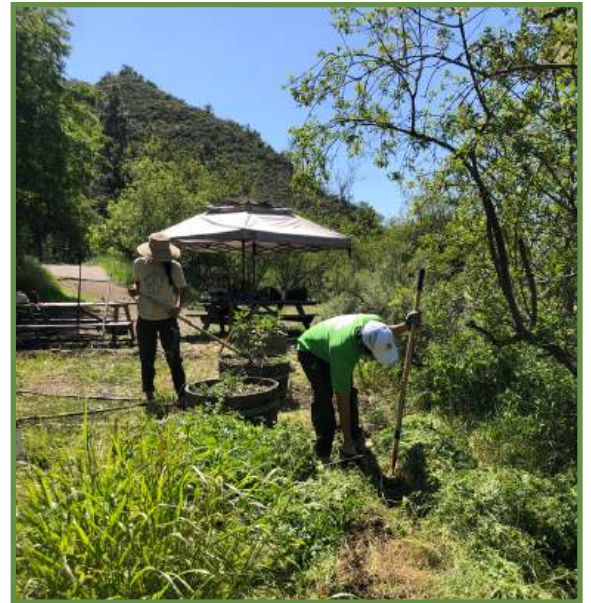
We extend our deepest appreciation to the dedicated volunteers who generously help maintain Big Oak Canyon. Local community members, both solo volunteers and families alike, are led by Shane Brown and Carina Lavin to contribute to a wide range of meaningful projects on our 39 acres. Projects include removing invasive species, pruning trees, planting native plants, nursery work, and spreading mulch. Volunteers also assist with tasks including crafting and organizing educational kits, and inventorying and arranging class supplies.

Our achievements are amplified exponentially through the invaluable contributions of our volunteers!

TOTAL VOLUNTEER HOURS: 494

Youth Mentor

Our youngest participants are mentored by a seasoned Earthroots participant, Soren Atchley. Each week, Soren joins the Forest Kindergarten instructors in leading students through the wanders and activities of the day. We often see her holding hands with the students, who reach out to her for connection. She is mentored by Earthroots instructors, and is an asset to the program. We are grateful that Soren chooses to spend one day a week as a volunteer Youth Mentor with Earthroots Forest Kindergarten class.



“My favorite memory of Forest Kindergarten is when we went down to the creek and there was a frog. Me and all the kids were chasing it around the little pools. And we were like, ‘oh we gotta catch the frog!’ We almost caught it but it hopped away.”



SOREN



Diversity, Equity + Inclusion

One of Earthroots DEI goals is to make outdoor learning accessible and inclusive, fostering a deeper relationship with the natural world for students of all backgrounds. This year, we were able to make progress on this goal by serving over 200 elementary school students at two Title 1 schools in our region through our Earthroots Ecoliteracy in Schools program. Because of this grant-funded program, five 4th grade classes at Madison Elementary School received lessons on habitat, botany and cultural connections to land and food, and participated in engaging hands-on activities such as making gourd cups and processing acorns into food. Three 1st grade classes at Garfield Elementary experienced similar interactive lessons building bird nests and exploring the life cycle of bees. These initiatives aim to cultivate a deeper understanding of nature and inspire

a sense of responsibility for protecting our planet among young learners who may otherwise lack the resources and availability of nature connection opportunities in their school and community. Earthroots Ecoliteracy in Schools program integrates lessons that align with Next Generation Science Standards (NGSS), and California History/Social Science Content Standards (HSS), ensuring that students not only gain environmental awareness but also build essential knowledge and skills that are foundational to their academic success.

Thank you Frances R. Dewing Foundation, Western Digital Foundation, and Foundation for Sustainability and Innovation for making this possible.

Expressing Gratitude

TEA WITH A VIEW

We honored our Tree of Life Giving Community members with a special event at Big Oak Canyon called Tea with a View. These community members provide regular, recurring gifts. Regardless of the amount of the donations, this commitment has a tremendous impact. Consistent donations enable us to make long-term decisions knowing that we have the continued support of our community. Additionally, we are able to minimize fundraising costs and take advantage of situations that enhance our outreach efforts.

Recurring donors receive special invitations to private events at Big Oak Canyon with Executive Director Jodi Levine and staff.



SUELLEN ZIMA

Suellen Zima lived a remarkable and adventurous life, characterized by her love of travel, teaching, and writing. Her experiences as a global wanderer led her to publish her first book *Memoirs of a Middle-aged Hummingbird* in 2006, which shared her stories of exploration and cultural discovery. She left behind a legacy of curiosity, kindness, and cultural connection that touched many lives around the world. Suellen was a strong supporter of Earthroots’ mission and generously included a donation in her will to benefit our programs. We are immensely thankful for her kindness and the lasting impact her gift will have on our community and the children we serve.

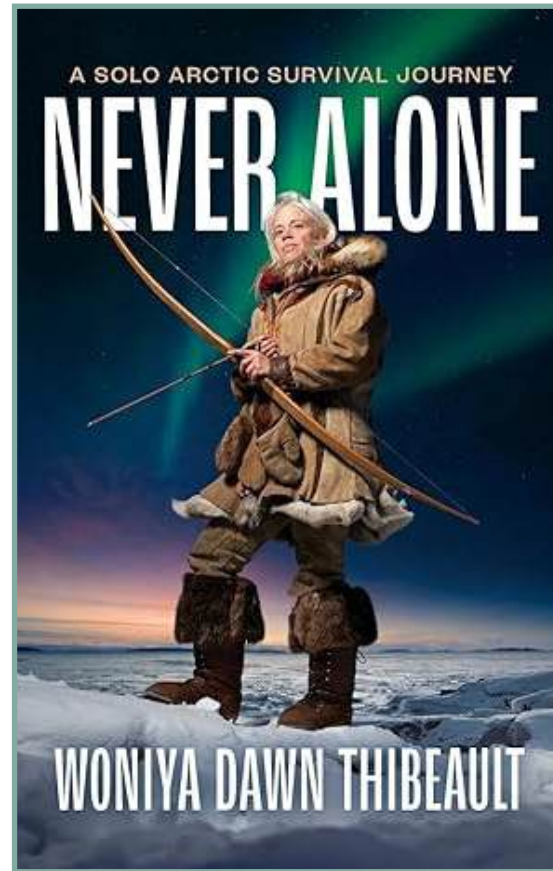
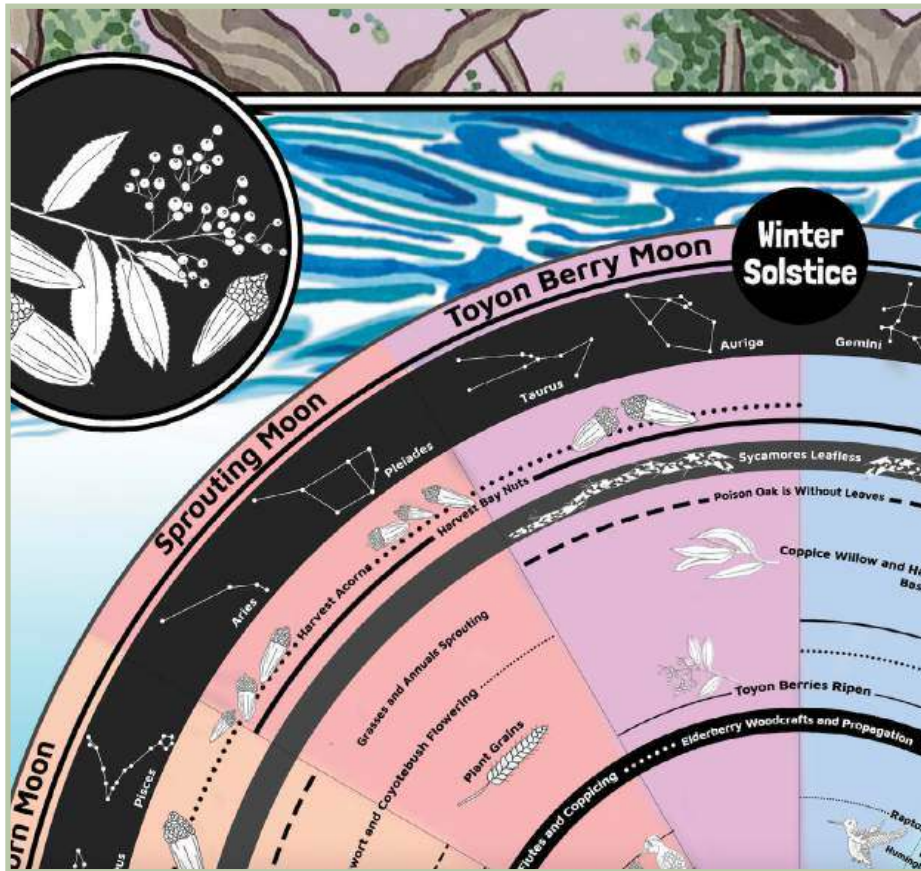


FUNDRAISING & GIFTS

As a non-profit organization, we rely on the generosity of public and private foundations and the wonderful Earthroots community to keep our programs going, ensuring that nature-based experiences remain accessible to all members of the community. Money raised also allows us to accomplish essential projects on the land. For example, students sold delicious and nutritious granola to raise funds for a new shelter. Thank you Nom Nom Nola! Additionally, we raised over \$40,000 in our end-of-year fundraising campaign thanks to our wonderful community and a generous donation match from the TPC Foundation. Funds from this campaign went toward essential BIPOC and needs-based scholarships, preservation and care for Big Oak Canyon, and sheltered learning spaces at Big Oak Canyon. We are so grateful to those who believe in our mission and give of their hearts, time, and money to keep our mission of nature connection alive.

WE EXPRESS OUR DEEP GRATITUDE TO THOSE WHO HAVE PROVIDED CONTRIBUTIONS EXCEEDING \$5,000, DIRECTLY SUPPORTING THE EFFORTS OUTLINED IN THIS REPORT.

**Mara W. Breech Foundation | TCP Foundation | Western Digital Foundation | VELA Fund
 Spieker Family | Frances R. Dewing Foundation | Foundation for Sustainability and Innovation
 Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project’s Community Wetland Restoration Grants Program**



Special Projects

KINSHIP CONVERSATIONS

The Kinship Calendar continues to be a powerful teaching tool for students and teachers alike. We have been receiving incredible feedback about how it has been illuminating the seasonal connections of what is observed on the land, helping make sense of the rhythmic patterns of nature.

With that in mind, Jodi interviewed Woniya Thibeault, the first female winner of the History Channel's reality competition show *Alone* to discuss how she uses seasonal observations to benefit her life. Woniya shared insights from her time living off the land, highlighting the physical, mental, and emotional challenges of surviving for 73 days alone in the wild Arctic. She discussed how traditional skills like fire-making, shelter-building, and foraging not only promote self-reliance but also foster a deeper connection to nature. These skills represent a way to reconnect with the earth and gain a greater sense of empowerment, echoing the values that Earthroots upholds.



Looking Ahead

EARTH SPEAKS

Since 2005, Earthroots has been leading ecoliteracy programs for people of all ages through in-person classes in southern California. We have become leaders in the field of nature connection, helping others develop their own nature schools and mentoring thousands of families on their journey to becoming more ecoliterate. In 2024-2025, we will launch our first nationwide ecoliteracy mentoring program, Earth Speaks (previously called Earthroots Treehouse). Using a virtual platform, we will invite parents, youth group leaders and teachers to gain the skills and confidence they need to raise today's generation of children to be ecoliterate leaders of the future.

Participants will be able to access Earthroots unique hands-on Ecoliteracy lessons from around the globe, and receive support from Earthroots' mentors on how to use them with their communities. The Ecoliteracy curriculum on our online portal will be searchable by grade level and topic, with downloadable PDFs, training videos, audio recordings of songs and stories, and monthly group video calls to ensure participant success. Earth Speaks teaches invaluable life skills that build resilient, creative and resourceful humans who care for the earth. Participating adults will gain confidence and have access to the resources they need to lead the children in their lives into nature.

ALISO CREEK COMMUNITY RESTORATION PROJECT

Earthroots Field School is honored to be part of the Aliso Creek Community Restoration Project, funded through the Southern California Wetlands Recovery Project's Community Wetland Restoration Grants Program. In collaboration with OC Parks, the Juaneño Band of Mission Indians, Acjachemen Nation, and Soka University, Earthroots and Laguna Canyon Foundation (LCF) will lead fifth grade students in hands-on restoration activities along Aliso Creek. Through educational assemblies and stewardship events, students will learn about riparian ecosystems, conduct a stream survey, and participate in habitat restoration, fostering a personal connection to their watershed and empowering future environmental stewards.

For the 2024-25 school year, the team will provide programming to fifth graders from four Title 1 schools within the Aliso Creek watershed. Each school will receive a two-hour on-site presentation followed by a three-hour field trip to Aliso Creek, where students will participate in restoration activities. While four schools have committed, outreach is ongoing to involve more schools in the future.

A Message from the Executive Director

Earthroots Field School is now 18 years old. Aligning our organization to human life cycles, Earthroots is officially an adult! It's amazing how significant this year has been, not just programmatically, but in terms of realizing goals and visions set years ago. One such goal was for Earthroots to lead grant-funded programming at Title 1 schools. On the outside, it may seem like a straightforward task, but it took years for Earthroots to establish a reputation of excellence, align the perfect team, and accomplish the steps to bring it to life. The impact has been astounding.

Earthroots Ecoliteracy curriculum has been in use for over a decade, but this was our first year introducing it to 200 new students at two new schools. Now that we have experience managing more significant grant funds, and have positive feedback from the teachers and students at both new schools, we look forward to expanding the impact further.

As an organization that is now becoming a more "mature adult", there may be bumps in the road, but together, we will grow toward our next goals. As we grow, Earthroots will continue to protect and preserve Big Oak Canyon while bringing engaging nature connection experiences to the community.

Thank you for being on this journey with Earthroots!



JODI LEVINE
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



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GUEST INSTRUCTORS

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Heidi Lucero
Ellen Sue Schneider