

# TREKKERS ANNUAL REPORT

trekkers 25  
CELEBRATING 25 YEARS

 trekkers  
TRAINING INSTITUTE

September 2018 - August 2019



our community of families, schools,  
volunteers, donors, partners, and many  
more who make our work possible



## Celebrating 25 Years

Twenty-five years ago, the first Trekkers trip brought together caring adults with local at-risk teenagers. Through shared wilderness experiences, we forged authentic relationships and a community support network to help young people navigate the transition to adulthood.

We know from both research and our own experiences that today, **our work is more important than ever**. To evaluate each student's social and emotional wellbeing, Trekkers uses the Holistic Student Assessment (HSA), a tool developed by the PEAR Institute of Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital. Its tiered system indicates the supports necessary for students to thrive. Students in need of Tier 1 support report more strengths than challenges and will likely thrive with typical resources in place. Students in need of Tier 2 response require additional support. And students in need of Tier 3 support report more challenges than strengths.

In the past five years, the number of students needing Tier 2 and 3 supports steadily increased. In 2018, 41% of students needed Tier 2 or 3 support. In 2019, that rose to 51%. **The percentage of students in need of Tier 3 support doubled over this same period**. Our students are facing unprecedented social and emotional challenges related to the prevalence of adverse childhood experiences, chronic trauma, and generational poverty.

**The good news is high quality, long-term mentoring is one of the most effective strategies to build strengths and resiliency in young people.** Throughout our 25-year history, Trekkers has identified a number of strategies that help students develop into resilient, self-reliant, connected, empowered, and engaged adults who are actively realizing their full potential. These strategies are to:

1. Prioritize relationships with youth, both formal and informal, and develop a skilled network of caring adults and peer networks
2. Provide expeditionary, experiential, and environmental learning opportunities for youth
3. Promote meaningful engagement and collaboration with youth through consensus-based decision making
4. Identify individual strengths and needs to inform individually focused programming and to link students to other community supports

We know that the challenges young people face change and evolve over time, but we are committed to being there for them for the next 25 years and the 25 years after that. **Thank you for being an important part of our first 25 years** and for sharing our belief in the power and potential of young people.

  
Stu Rich  
President of the Board

  
Amie Hutchison  
Executive Director

# Our Six-Year Step-Ladder Model

Throughout the year, students meet regularly as a group and individually with Program Managers and volunteers. Over time, students develop foundational social-emotional skills, and progress on to build a support network and skills they can carry with them into adulthood.



7TH  
GRADE

**SKILLS:** Foundational relationship-building with peers and adults, belonging to a community, self-esteem through healthy risk-taking (hiking, canoeing, rock climbing), basic outdoor skills

**EXPEDITION:** 3-Day to Acadia National Park

8TH  
GRADE

**SKILLS:** Self-direction, planning ahead, voice and choice, consensus decision-making, personal reflection, group discussion, critical thinking, mediation

**EXPEDITIONS:** 3-Day and 10-Day, both within the Northeast

9TH  
GRADE

**SKILLS:** Civic engagement, exposure to historical perspectives and landmarks, cultural awareness, empathy, identity, the ability to understand the world outside of coastal Maine and see themselves in it

**EXPEDITION:** 10-Day to historical landmarks in Boston, New Jersey, Philadelphia, Washington, D.C.

10TH  
GRADE

**SKILLS:** Appreciation and awareness of natural resources, exploration of cultures outside New England, development of personal strengths and aspirations

**EXPEDITION:** 10-12-Day to states across the country, typically in a western region

11TH  
GRADE

**SKILLS:** Exploration of post-secondary opportunities, goals, strategies, preparation and practice (interviews, resume writing, engagement with local businesses)

**EXPEDITION:** 10-Day to explore colleges, careers, and alternatives in New England

12TH  
GRADE

**SKILLS:** Acknowledgement and preparation for transition into adulthood, personal responsibility, self-expression, trust

**EXPEDITION:** 5-Day in New England, including a 36-hour wilderness solo

*“It’s good to push yourself and I can do a lot of things I thought I couldn’t.”*



## 7th Grade | The First Trip

At the end of May, two groups of the newest 7th grade Trekkers embarked on a three-day trip to Mt. Desert Island. This was an outdoor experience steeped in tradition and rich with opportunities to form meaningful relationships with adult mentors. Each group of twenty students, high school student leaders, adult volunteer mentors, and a Program Manager boarded a Trekkers bus headed to Acadia’s Blackwoods Campground, which served as the basecamp.

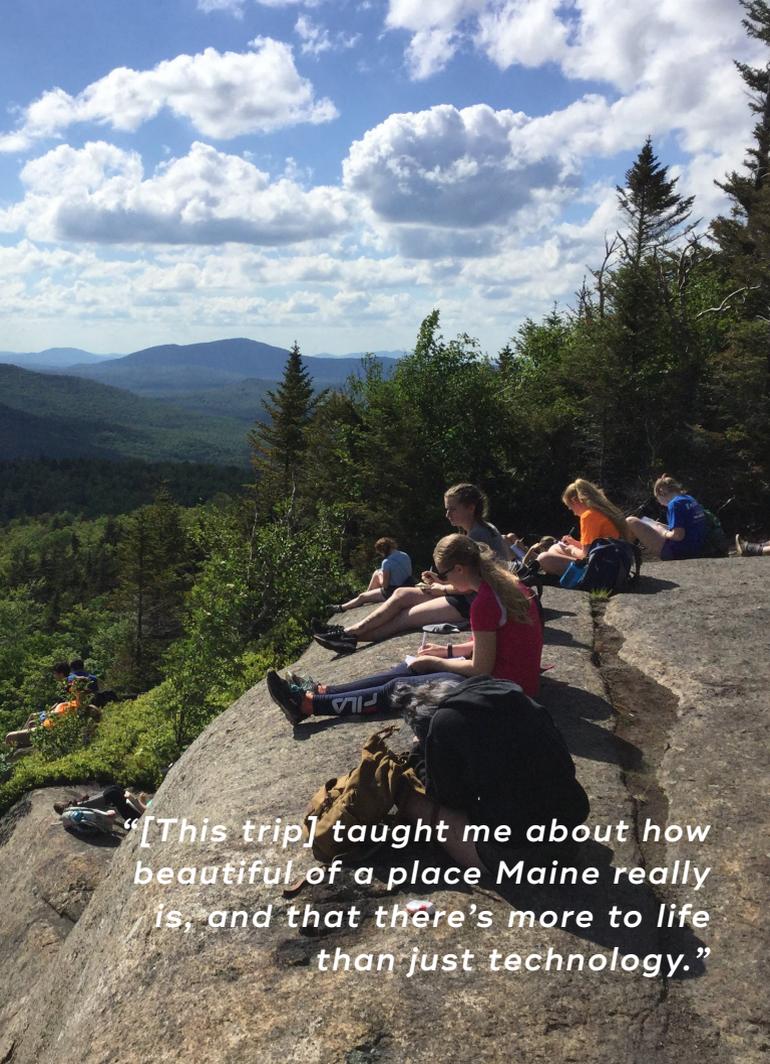
Mainers may recall that last spring was characterized by above-average rainfall and below-average temperatures. Such was the case for both teams’ hikes. At Trekkers, we say, “A prepared Trekker is a happy Trekker,” which meant dry clothes back at camp, and a warm meal and hot cocoa around the campfire. Fortunately, sunshine prevailed on Saturday when groups went canoeing

and rock climbing at Otter Cliffs, followed by a game of kickball and ice cream in Bar Harbor. Technical rock climbing pushes many students out of their comfort zone – a real-life metaphor for the kind of supported risk-taking that Trekkers encourages students to try. With a vested commitment from Program Managers and mentors, Trekkers students formed deep relationships with adults and peers and gained self-confidence.

Sunday morning began with a traditional hearty breakfast prepared and provisioned by leader mentors. Following breakfast, clean-up, and pack-up, students and leaders joined together at the Blackwoods Amphitheater for games and reflections on what they were going to take away from the weekend, a fitting way to end their first expedition and the beginning of their six-year Trekkers journey.

## HOW IT BEGINS

Trekkers serves students from the rural Midcoast towns of Cushing, Owls Head, Thomaston, South Thomaston, Rockland, and St. George and works closely with area schools. Each fall, Trekkers staff are welcomed into 7th grade classrooms to present an overview of the program to students. Come spring, Trekkers holds a community meeting for interested students and families to learn about the program and apply. To encourage socioeconomic diversity, student dues are kept purposefully low, and Trekkers offers fundraising opportunities for students to raise money for program dues, as well as a scholarship. No student is turned away because of an inability to pay.



*“[This trip] taught me about how beautiful of a place Maine really is, and that there’s more to life than just technology.”*



## 8th Grade | It All Starts With a Plan

Planning for the 8th grade expedition begins when the school year starts. Cohorts meet regularly until they depart for the trip. In the fall, students go on a three-day excursion to begin the planning process and learn consensus decision-making. Itineraries are structured to satisfy Trekkers’ five learning objectives: community service, adventure-based learning, environmental stewardship, wilderness exploration, and cultural awareness.

Shortly after the close of school, two eighth-grade teams, Vesuvius and Krakatoa, took to the road to visit four states outside of Maine. Over the course of their ten-day trips, both teams performed acts of community service at Violet Hill Farm and Terra Farm, a large animal rescue. Team Vesuvius cooled off with whitewater

rafting while Krakatoa zip-lined at the edge of the White Mountains in New Hampshire. All activities were guided by students’ interests, and both teams explored cultural experiences centered on spiritual practice and lifestyle. Team Vesuvius visited a Buddhist Monastery in Burlington, Vermont, where they learned about meditation and engaged in a five-minute practice with Dan Brown of the Shambala Meditation Center. Team Krakatoa learned about Amish culture at the Menonite Informational Center. Students sampled Amish pretzels, learned about growing and processing grain, and interacted with farm animals.

Team Vesuvius traveled to the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, to meet Kristina Benzanson, an urban forester and University

faculty member, and Sean Libbey, a forester from the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation. Kristina and Sean spoke about sustainable forestry, on topics like how to maintain clean waterways while harvesting timber, as well as the importance of trees in urban spaces.

Ten days is a long time to be together. When plans did not go as expected, students practiced their consensus-based decision-making skills. They shared cooking chores, reflected on their experiences through journaling activities, made the best of the occasional downpour, visited fun sites such as Ben and Jerry’s Ice Cream and Six Flags Amusement Park, and grew closer as a team through shared experiences.

## 9th Grade | Similarities Despite Differences

Throughout the year, the cohort met to continue fostering relationships and to understand the backdrop of civic and cultural awareness for their expedition. This preparation culminated in Teams Albatross and Osprey's trip south during February break, after adjusting their departure due to snow. Their expedition included an exchange with Trekkers sister program Urban Trekkers in Camden, New Jersey, and retracing significant U.S. historical events in Boston, Philadelphia, and Washington, D.C. Together, Trekkers and Urban Trekkers students discussed similarities, differences, and stereotypes about

rural and urban life. Over ten days, Trekkers students learned about urban life, seeing depictions on public murals and learning about the restoration efforts on the Cooper River, including ongoing clean-up and water-quality monitoring to bring back the river's natural beauty. Students visited and learned about the monuments in Washington, D.C., in the context of the Civil Rights Movement. Students visited the U.S. Capitol to learn about how the government works, along with the National Air and Space Museum, Holocaust Memorial Museum, National Museum of Natural History, and Arlington

National Cemetery. Students sampled the legendary Philly Cheesesteak in New Jersey, ate at Ben's Chili Bowl in Washington, D.C., and were treated to homemade Ecuadorian food prepared by an Urban Trekkers parent. Riding public transportation, particularly the subway, was another first for many students. Capping off their urban experience, students walked Boston's Freedom Trail before heading home to Maine.

***"I learned I can successfully make friends with complete strangers. I had never done that before."***



### MEETING URBAN PEERS

Our annual 'Hood to the Woods option is designed to give Trekkers high school students the chance to engage with peers from other backgrounds and geographies with our sister organization, Urban Trekkers, based in Camden, New Jersey. Through meaningful relationship-building and activities, students practice civil discourse and develop empathy for other perspectives.



*“I will think more about how my choices affect others around me.”*

## 10th Grade | Gaining Perspective

For their highly anticipated trips, both Team Atlas and Team Beacon chose to explore different areas of the West. In July, Team Atlas set out to explore Wyoming and Montana while Team Beacon headed to Oregon and California.

Ecology and environmental awareness figured heavily into the trip planning and activities. Melding outdoor adventure with learning, Team Beacon hiked Mount St. Helens’ lava tubes and learned about the volcano’s impact. Team Atlas hiked to Lake Louise in the Wind River Range of Wyoming. Students dipped their feet in the glacial lake and learned about the role of glaciers in maintaining the flora and fauna of the region.

Team Atlas met with a U.S. Forest Service ranger who came to their campsite at Clearwater Creek near Cody, Wyoming, to speak with the group about wildfires and the types of trees located in the area. Team Beacon toured the Oregon Caves National

Monument and Preserve and learned about the biodiversity of the region and the cave system watershed. Their community service included a visit to a nursing home, where students played Bingo and memory games with residents, and a clean-up of Benson Beach in California. Collectively, the teams visited Crater Lake National Park and Yellowstone National Park, went whitewater rafting near Bozeman, Montana, hiked 8,934-foot Mt. Scott at sunrise, visited Oregon Dunes National Recreation Area, soaked in the Bozeman Hot Springs, and attended the Teton County Fair and a rodeo in Jackson, Wyoming.

Over twelve days, students practiced self-reflection skills through journaling and group conversations, in the context of new activities and the expansive, stunning, western landscape.

# 11th Grade | Preparing for the Future

Some time ago, Trekkers recognized that graduating from high school was not enough and that further preparation for post-graduation life was needed. **Six years ago, the LEAP (Launching Empowered and Aspiring Professionals) program was created to help students gain the necessary skills to prepare for their professional lives.**

The program has specific goals and objectives for 10th, 11th, and 12th grade students. The 11th grade program highlights the transition students make to life after high school – especially their aspirations and a plan to achieve them. The college

and career expedition offers students in 11th grade the chance to explore college, trade school, and gap-year programs via a focused, yet fun, nine-day expedition throughout New England and Mid-Atlantic states.

In April, Teams K2 and Everest decided to join forces and embark on the trip together as Team Denali. Team Denali visited Bowdoin College, Boston College, Lasell College, Johnson & Wales, Lehigh College, Yale University, Drexel University, the University of Connecticut, and a gap-year program. Students also found time to perform community service and visit their Urban Trekkers peers in

Camden, New Jersey. Students came away with a deeper understanding of the college application process, a perspective on the pros and cons of different types of colleges, and awareness of what a gap year could look like.

***“It made me more certain of what I’m looking for in life and in colleges. It also reminded me never to settle for anything less.”***



*“The overall Trekkers experience has prepared me for life because it’s made me realize how to deal with certain emotions and challenges and really made me a better and more open-minded girl.”*



## 12th Grade | A Rite of Passage

Rites of Passage is the bittersweet grand finale of the Trekkers experience and marks the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Students, their Program Manager, and mentor leaders spend five days together reflecting on their Trekkers experience and pondering big questions about the future in both a group setting and a 36-hour outdoor solo. For both students and leaders, the trip is deeply moving and poignant as experiences of extreme closeness counterbalance the realization that this is the final experience of a six-year journey. This year, both expeditions took place at Stump Sprouts in western Massachusetts.

Safety is always the top concern. Students were prepped thoroughly on safety precautions before beginning their solo activity, which included reflective writing, writing a personal mission statement, and making a parting gift for another Trekker. These memories and relationships will last a lifetime.

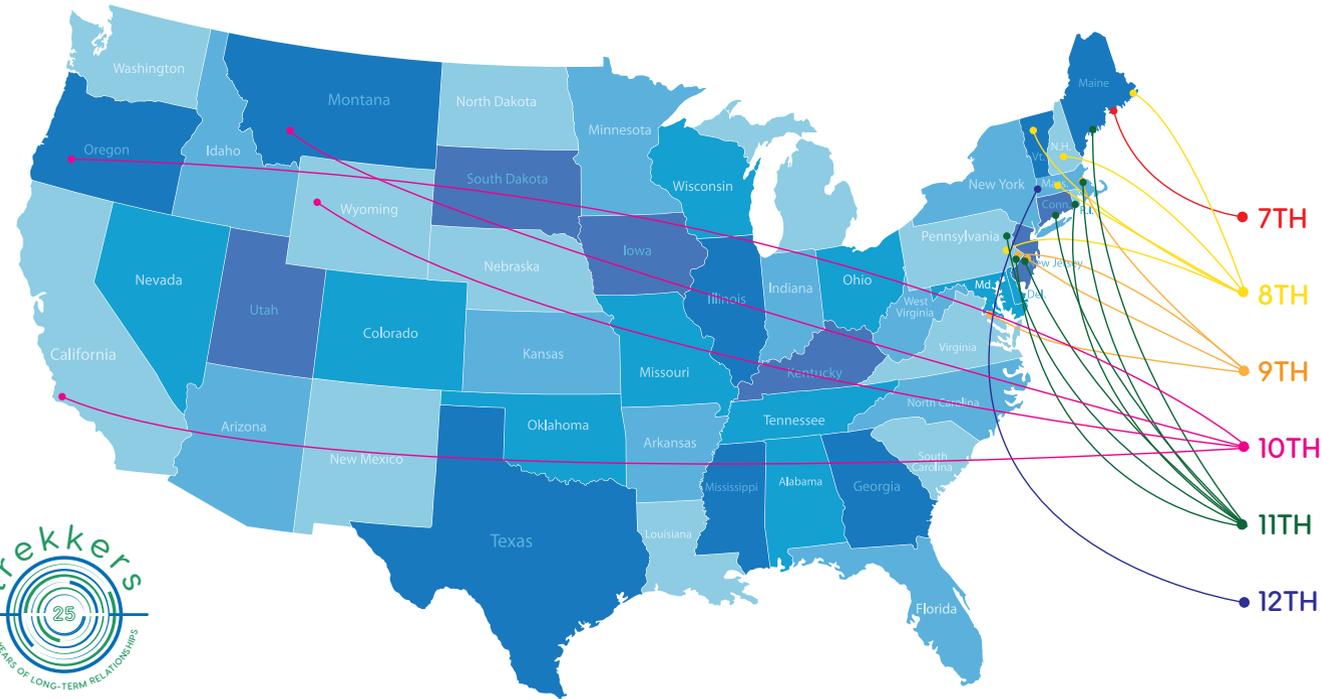
### LEADERSHIP TRAINING

What does it mean to be a leader? The Trekkers Leadership Training Program for 11th and 12th graders explores this question. Through a series of overnight leadership retreats, students learn, reflect, and discuss community and global leadership. After the trainings, students join the 7th, 8th, and/or 9th grade expeditions as student leaders, often as mentors to younger Trekkers, and frequently return to volunteer as adults.



# WHERE OUR STUDENTS WENT IN 2018-19

Trekkers is a six-year program that connects young people with caring adults. These steady, evolving mentoring relationships are strengthened and enriched through our year-round programming, which includes adventures in the wilds of Maine and across the country.



# THE YEAR IN REVIEW

Students' social-emotional strengths and challenges are evaluated at the beginning and end of the school year, and students are asked to report on Trekkers' impact.

## LEARNING & EDUCATION

93%

reported increased interest in **learning**  
reported increased interest in **critical thinking**

76%

reported increased **academic motivation**

## RESILIENCY INDICATORS

94%

reported higher levels of **empathy**

90%

reported higher levels of **optimism**  
reported increased **assertiveness**

## RELATIONSHIP MEASURES

90%

reported improved relationships with **adults**

94%

reported improved relationships with **peers**

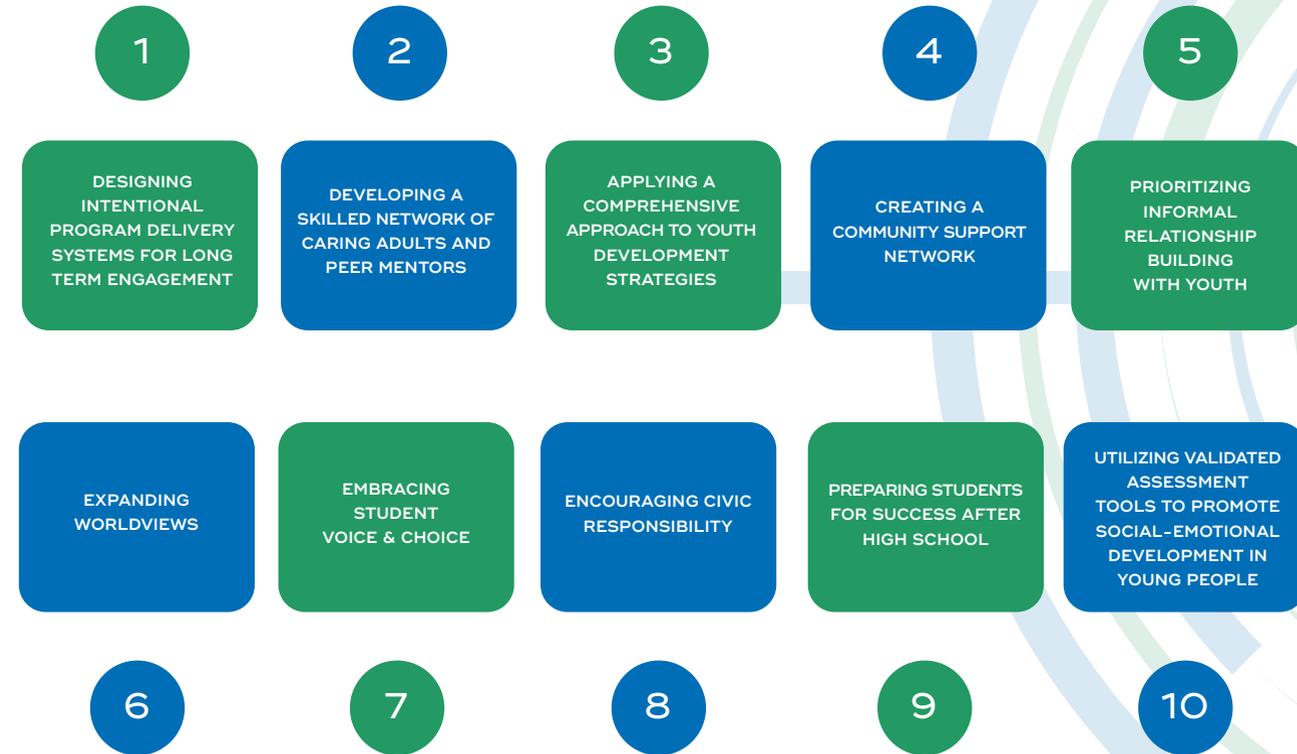
Permission to use the Holistic Student Assessment (HSA) was obtained from The PEAR Institute at Harvard Medical School and McLean Hospital.

**In 2019, students reported positive changes** in learning, resiliency and relationships with others because of Trekkers' programming.



# Our Programming Principles

The Trekkers model is based on our Youth Programming Principles – a flexible, responsive model for nurturing social and emotional development.



# Creating Impact at Scale

Throughout the six-year program, Trekkers students develop aspirations, strengthen resiliencies, and build supportive mentoring relationships. Recognizing the need to provide even more young people with the opportunity to benefit from the Trekkers' program model, the Trekkers Training Institute was founded in 2016 and began to offer training, coaching, and professional development opportunities to youth development practitioners. Offerings are based on twenty-five years of experience and a unique model called the Trekkers Youth Programming Principles. Backed by leading industry research and proven by evidence, our principles are built for application and honor what other programs already provide their student populations.

Organizations, schools, and youth development practitioners can work with the Trekkers Training Institute to apply the principles and evaluate independently. For example, powered by the Emanuel & Pauline A. Lerner Foundation and in partnership with the Trekkers Training Institute, the Aspirations Incubator is a six-year pilot initiative designed to raise and sustain the post-secondary aspirations of students in rural Maine. The pilot project is made up of six youth-serving organizations in rural Maine towns and small cities and is independently evaluated by the Data Innovation

Project at the University of Southern Maine. Each program applies the Trekkers Youth Programming Principles with their unique population of students from 7th through 12th grades and focuses on mentoring relationships with caring adults and older peers. Aspirations Incubator site partners include Apex Youth Connection, Chewonki, The Game Loft, the EdGE Program of Maine Seacoast Mission, Old Town-Orono YMCA, and the UMaine 4-H Camp and Learning Center at Bryant Pond.

To read more about the Aspirations Incubator, please visit [aspirationsincubator.org](http://aspirationsincubator.org). For more information about the Trekkers Training Institute and its programs, or to get in touch with our team, please visit [trekkersinstitute.org](http://trekkersinstitute.org).



# Belonging to a Community

Trekkers students work hard, have fun and form life-long relationships with people they meet. Students meet peers and adults from across the community – from adult volunteers to business leaders to engaged seniors to AmeriCorps volunteers – who influence and expand their point of view. We believe that when students sense they have a place in the community, they are more likely to find their place in the world.

The Trekkers community has been instrumental to the successes highlighted in this report. We are fortunate to benefit from the many individuals, local businesses, charitable organizations, private foundations, corporations, and local communities who make our work possible.

– THANK YOU –

JOIN TREKKERS IN INVESTING IN YOUNG PEOPLE  
AND THE FUTURE OF MAINE.

[trekkers.org/donate](http://trekkers.org/donate)

# Carpenter Legacy Circle

Since our founding, the Carpenter name has been synonymous with Trekkers' mission to support Maine's young people. To honor, celebrate, and recognize the tremendous impact of Jack and Don and their lifelong vision

for, and commitment to, the power of personal relationships in building young people's lives, Trekkers is delighted to launch the Carpenter Legacy Circle. Planned and estate gifts, of any size, symbolize thoughtful and visionary

support of the future of Trekkers and the young people that we serve.

**Membership in the Carpenter Legacy Circle is an enduring affirmation of your belief in Trekkers' mission.**

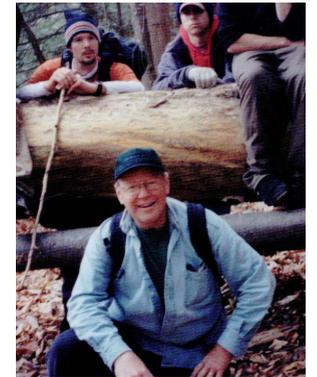
Jessica, a young woman in her late thirties, recently approached me after a school board meeting. With great feeling, she said, "Jack, I want to thank you for changing my life when I was a kid." I knew her; she was a participant in our very first Trekkers expedition in 1994.

I was moved to tears, and stunned. Why stunned? Because in those early days Trekkers was such a small program—a 7th grade trip and a service project to Hurricane Island in the 8th grade. But what we provided Jessica and friends was a whole lot of time spent with them informally—caring, building trust, modeling, listening. She reminded me: it was enough to change her life.

Nowadays Trekkers has a full six-year program, well planned and executed with all the ingredients to help build young lives. Thankfully, building meaningful relationships is still at the core of Trekkers' mission. As a result, more and more lives are being changed. Jessica has a daughter in the 7th grade who recently became a second-generation Trekker!

I have included Trekkers in my estate plans because I want Trekkers to go on changing young lives long after I'm gone . . . not only to benefit Jessica's daughter and my granddaughters currently in the program, but for their children and coming generations!

– Jack Carpenter



Names in this story have been changed.

Have you included Trekkers in your plans? We can help you determine exactly how you would like your gift to be used and invite you to join the Carpenter Legacy Circle. For more information visit [www.trekkers.org/carpentercircle](http://www.trekkers.org/carpentercircle) or contact our Development Office at (207) 594-5095.

## Board of Directors

Stu Rich—President and Parent of Trekkers Alumni

Edmund (Dee) Megna—Vice President

Douglas M. Erickson—Treasurer

Alyssa Landrith—Secretary and Alumna

Jack Carpenter—Founding Member

Rodney Chamberlain

Thomas E. Crosslin

Susan B. Grover

Mike Hersom—Parent of Trekkers Alumnus

Makaila Hickey—Trekkers Alumna

Bryson Cowan King—Trekkers Alumna

Kathleen Meil

Fletcher Smith-McNaboe

Wyatt Winchenbaugh—Current Trekkers Student



## The Student Board Member Perspective

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In a youth-focused organization like Trekkers, all of the decisions and policies we make are to continue providing students with a safe place to learn about themselves, form lasting friendships, and go on fun adventures. That is why student representation is so crucial to our mission. Without the input of those we serve, we wouldn't be able to adapt to the evolving needs of youth in Midcoast Maine. In many cases, what students really need is someone to listen to their concerns and address them in whatever way possible.

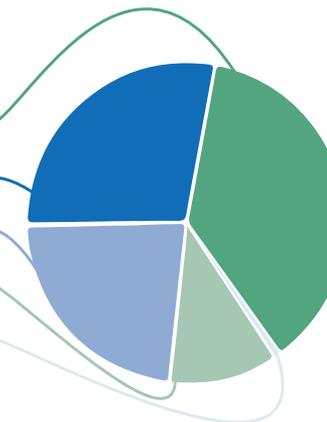


- Wyatt Winchenbaugh, Current Trekkers Student”

## 2019 FINANCIAL REVIEW

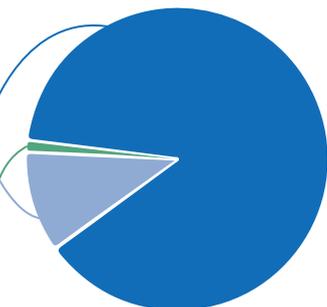
### REVENUE

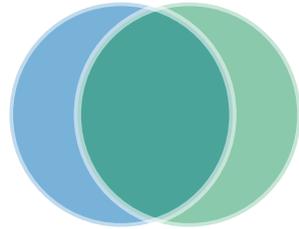
Grants	\$300,416
Student and Participant Dues	\$225,460
Contributions	\$184,906
Events	\$94,450
Other Income	\$3,132
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$808,363</b>



### EXPENSES

Program	\$677,337
Admin	\$82,880
Fundraising	\$9,771
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>\$769,880</b>





trekkers  
TRAINING INSTITUTE



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Cultivating the inherent strengths of young people through  
the power of long-term mentoring relationships

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