



POB 872, Cave Junction, OR 97523  
Location: 27746 Redwood Hwy, Cave Junction  
541-287-2164

## Update Report

November 2017

### SUN School



In 2016 and 2017 we began SUN School, (Summer Nature School), as part of our on-going Children's Programming which has three areas:

- SUN School
- Girls Build
- Nature Presentations for local schools.

SUN School offers summer school activities for 1st through 6th grade in a nature based, outdoor environment for sliding scale tuition. In a holistic and engaging learning venue, there is a balance of both academic and enrichment activities. SUN School is outdoor summer school aimed at preventing summer learning loss for elementary kids in Illinois Valley. It is funded by donations, parents, the Carpenter Foundation and the Cow Creek Umpqua Indian Foundation.

There is no public summer school available for elementary school children in our valley. Summer school is an important component of fostering academic success & closing the achievement gap. Summer learning loss is real and cumulative. In more affluent districts, students have enrichment and

academic opportunities over summer and often gain ground. In our valley, where the majority of kids in the elementary school come from families below poverty level, students lose approximately two months' reading achievement over summer. Summer learning programs can play a critical role to inspire learning, provide academic enrichment, increase confidence for at-risk kids, keep kids safe and healthy, and support working families. Out-of-school programming has proven to be most effective for lower income children, whose graduation rates are significantly below the average.

SUN School is aligned with state Core Curriculum areas and addresses Science, Math and Natural History. Writing Workshops address Reading, Writing and Theatre skills. Subjects include Organic Gardening, Life of Pollinators, Amphibians and Dinosaurs. Students are actively engaged in explanatory activities, such as demonstrations about how dinosaurs became fossils, or how pollinators help plants. Hands-on activities are guided by the instructor & adult volunteers. A lunch is followed by outside activities to lend depth to the subject matter.

Learning Goals: For summer 2017, students had the following learning objectives:

1. Increase scientific knowledge with inquiry learning. Each week started with a "wonder question," using fiction and nonfiction and journal entries about the natural world.
2. Build strong relationships with students' local ecosystem. Every day, teacher-guided and student-guided explorations led the class through meadow, forest, and riparian ecosystems.
3. Strengthen students' interpersonal and intrapersonal social-emotional learning. SUN School brings together children from different cultural, religious, and political beliefs. Children come from a variety of experiences to gather together under one summer sky. During every day at SUN School, there is ample time provided for the kids to bond and make new friends. This is important social-emotional growth that is so vital to growing up balanced, self-knowledgeable, and able to navigate a diverse world.





This project serves underserved children and their families in the immediate community of Illinois Valley, Oregon, where there is high unemployment and a 35% poverty rate. Our community children have a critical need for safe, positive, fun and healthy outdoor recreational opportunities, as well as summer learning and enrichment activities. This valley remains one with high levels of unemployment and poverty. Children in the area are particularly hard hit by these conditions. At our local elementary school, 83% of students qualify with poverty status for low cost free meals at school. Local schools lack the funding necessary for enrichment activities such as outdoor field trips, sports, arts and summer school. It is well-documented that enrichment activities and out-of-school programs contribute significantly to positive youth development.

Through a series of surveys and focus group meetings we found there is an overwhelming need for a safe environment for outdoor enrichment and recreation activities for kids, as well as a need to address summer learning loss. The Children's Programming and SUN School at Rusk Ranch Nature Center address these needs by providing nature-based enrichment activities and positive recreational experiences for area children and youth. Research shows a strong correlation between mental and physical wellbeing and positive interactions with the outdoors and nature. Out-of-school programming is positively associated with skills such as student confidence and can provide positive adult role models to at-risk youth.

## **O.N.E. Discovery Center** (Oregon Nature & Environmental Discovery Center)

Our Mission is to benefit the community and to provide opportunities for the public, particularly young people, to appreciate the natural world and instill a sense of stewardship toward the earth and its inhabitants, and to preserve and conserve nature and wildlife. We value the healing power of nature and nature's ability to nurture creativity, to inspire a sense of belonging, and to build community by showing us our deep inter-connectedness. We value the long-term wholeness of recognizing that people and nature are inseparable.

Two specific needs addressed by the organization are: the needs of families and children for safe outdoor space for recreation and the need for revenue coming into this impoverished area. We provide enriching outdoor experiences for children & families, **turning visitor donations into services and programs for local children** and supporting pride-of-place for area residents. The center offers hands on nature activities for kids such as observing the life of native caterpillars & butterflies, frogs and pond creatures, viewing bugs under a teaching microscope, and feeding butterflies & birds. The center helps to meet the needs of children in the valley for enrichment activities and expanded education about our natural world.

Two years ago we began moving toward building the Nature Discovery Center. Generous donations from our ANGELS group (all-in supporters of the vision) enabled us to pay for the architectural and landscape drawings. Then community donations for Giving Tuesday began our work with exhibits design. In 2016 we did a "Campaign Readiness" study with a consulting group as preparation for acquiring funding, and we adjusted our planning with recommendations from the study.

This year we acquired grant funding from Meyer Memorial Trust foundation to fund two part-time positions that will allow us to maintain services while we continue toward our long-term goal of opening the ONE Discovery Center.

Currently we are working to acquire a temporary facility to serve as the initial visitor center, and install electricity, thus allowing us to remain open most of the year. The facility would have some indoor exhibits and some outdoor. We need to be able to garner revenue from all season visitors and offer expanded nature exhibits to bridge the gap between where we are now, with the Butterfly Pavilion & Natural Playground, to the all season architecturally designed Nature Discovery Center.

With the listed activities above and many more, the organization takes in community feed-back, tailors programs to compliment area needs, and expands services to benefit the community.

We live in a world with increasing alienation from nature, rising childhood obesity and dependence upon digital media. Opportunities provided by the center, for hands-on positive experiences with nature, peak an interest in science, support a life long appreciation for nature conservation and feed a deeper understanding of the interaction and interdependence of people and nature.