



Kids in Parks

Partnering for the Health of Our Kids and Our Parks

Over the past few decades people have become increasingly disengaged with nature, spending less time in our parks and outdoor places, while spending more time “plugged-in” to electronic media. Recent studies show that on average kids spend 7.65 hours per day “plugged-in” and only an average of 7 minutes per day in unstructured outdoor play. The Kids in Parks program grew out of a vision to address these trends by getting kids “unplugged” and physically active in parks for their health and the health of our parks.



In the general population childhood obesity rates continue to rise, with one in three children being classified as overweight or obese, and visits to outdoor parks continue to decline. The Kids in Parks program is recognized by professionals across the country as a cost-effective intervention to address these issues. Kids in Parks encourages and supports active family engagement, increases trail use, introduces recreational opportunities available in parks, forests and communities, and creates a network that offers an almost unlimited variety of experience.



The benefits of outdoor play for children are dramatic and long lasting. From studies that show increased brain activity and higher SAT scores when children play in natural settings, to research that links a lower incidence of bullying, ADHD, and depression in kids that play outside, there is clear evidence that children benefit from spending time in nature. Increased physical activity decreases obesity, diabetes, ADHD and other physical and mental ailments that are becoming too common with today’s sedentary lifestyle.



Likewise, parks benefit when people use them. Finding ways to create stronger connections between children and our parks cultivates current and future stewards who understand the value and appeal of our public lands. These stewards can be advocates for protecting our public lands from current and future threats.

While there are many parks, trails and outdoor areas already accessible to both urban and rural families, hiking and other outdoor activities are often perceived to be too difficult, potentially dangerous or unexciting to newcomers. Kids in Parks is a proven program that gets beginners outside using a network of TRACK Trails established through partnerships with municipal, state, and federal partners to provide introductory level, family-friendly trails that are equipped with self-guided materials designed to make the experience more educational, enjoyable and fun.

Kids in Parks started with a vision in 2008 to improve the health of children and the health of our parks by making existing trails more attractive and fun for novice users. At that time, the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, National Park Service and Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation joined together to formally link the health of children to the health of parks by creating a strong network of trails and partners in the Blue Ridge region of the country.



The regional program was so successful that parks across the country rapidly embraced Kids in Parks TRACK Trails due to demonstrated effectiveness and ease of implementation. Today, there are more than 80 TRACK Trails in 7 states, and in Washington, DC, comprising a national network of self-guided adventures — including hiking, disc golfing, biking and geocaching — that inspire kids and families to be more physically active outdoors. Additionally, the program has received numerous national and international requests for information from other public land management and health care organizations.

As one of the only health related nature programs in the country with data demonstrating results, the program has been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, recognized by the White House with a “Let’s Move! Champions of Change” award, and reviewed favorably as a practice-tested intervention by the Center for Training and Research Translation — a program funded by the Center for Disease Control. After only five years, the Kids in Parks program is supported by a strong partnership of private and public groups investing together for the health of our parks and our children. This community of partners has banded together to celebrate results in health improvement, including:

The health of our children

- 13% of registrants were first time hikers
- 40,000 miles hiked by kids on TRACK Trails
- Approximately 20,000 hours of outdoor “unplugged” adventures
- At least 3,625,000 calories burned by kids on TRACK Trails

The health of our parks

- 40% of registrants were visiting the park for the first time
- 51% visited the park specifically to hike the TRACK Trail
- 26% of registrants returned for a second adventure
- 61% of returning users visited more than 1 TRACK Trail location

The rapid growth into a network of more than 80 TRACK Trails across 7 states in a variety of municipal, state, and federal parks is also an indicator of the program’s appeal. Parks have not only lost visitors in recent years, but funding as well. Kids in Parks TRACK Trails are a low-cost, proven intervention with built-in evaluation tools, making them an attractive strategy for parks. As the program continues to expand, adequate support for these partners is an important component to achieve the desired benefits for children and parks.

Kids in Parks is a proven,
affordable, accessible solution benefitting
the health of our children and the health of our parks.



*40,000 miles have been hiked by children on TRACK Trails.
With an average group size of 4,
160,000 total miles have been hiked*



“By turning existing, outdoor trails into kid-friendly hiking trails, the Kids in Parks (KIP) program increases access to and the number of places for physical activity. KIP influences multiple levels of the socio-ecologic model by directly changing the community environment and by providing incentives and organizational supports to promote physical activity through hiking, disc golf and other outdoor activities. Kids in Parks is a practice-tested intervention.”

Center for Training and Research Translation, 2013
UNC Center for Health Promotion and Disease Prevention

Since 2008, the Kids in Parks program has grown from a concept into a network of trails at the local, regional and national level. Here is a brief timeline history showing a few of the program's major accomplishments over the past 5 years.

June 2010 - "Gateway" Trails

Began installing "Gateway" TRACK Trails in partnership with other major land management agencies in communities adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway, building a network of partners.



June 2011 - Received Second Grant from BCBSNCF

Allowed Kids in Parks to expand its staffing and network of TRACK Trails in North Carolina state and municipal parks.

September 2011 - Proof of Concept

Installed a TRACK Trail at Custer State Park in South Dakota to test the replicability of the program into other regions of the United States.



September 2012 - National Park Service Expansion

Received a grant from the National Park Service to install TRACK Trails in 13 different National Parks in the DC region, including the National Mall, Manassas National Battlefield and the White House.



March 2014 - Progress to Date

We have installed a total of 80 TRACK Trails in 7 different states and Washington, DC and in partnership with several different types of land management agencies. More than 40,000 miles have been hiked by children on TRACK Trails with a return rate of more than 25%.

2008 - Received Original Grant from BCBSNCF

Allowed for the creation of the Kids in Parks program: staffing, trails, website, data collection, incentive system, and operations.

August 29, 2009 - First TRACK Trail Opens

Installed in partnership with the Blue Ridge Parkway. This allowed Kids in Parks to begin collecting data on trail use and visitor preferences.



July 2010 - Municipal Park Expansion

Began installing TRACK Trails in municipal parks with the intent of reaching kids and families at parks closer to their homes.



March 2012 - National Recognition

Received the "Let's Move! Champions of Change" award from the White House for getting kids active outdoors.



September 2013 - Coast to Coast

Partnered with the San Diego County Parks Department to open 3 TRACK Trails in Southern California. We now have TRACK Trails in 7 different states and in Washington, DC.



TRACK Trails: National Expansion

The Kids in Parks program was originally developed as a self-guided trail program for kids on the Blue Ridge Parkway. However, it quickly became apparent that the brochure-led adventures created for use on the Parkway were applicable to a wide variety of public lands. In an attempt to create a regional network of trail opportunities, Kids in Parks began installing “gateway” trails in communities along the Parkway. Today, the network has grown to include several national parks, numerous state parks, various city/county parks, as well as forest service, army corps, private and Tribal land sites.

In order to expand the reach of the program to a wider audience, Kids in Parks has also adopted other outdoor recreation activities to complement the program’s traditional hiking TRACK Trails. These other forms of outdoor recreation include: disc golf, geocaching, and bike riding.



In 2011, Kids in Parks partnered with the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks Department to test the program’s “proof of concept” and determine if the program could be replicated at any park in the country. Today, Kids in Parks has 14 TRACK Trails in South Dakota, with 12 of them being the program’s Nature Trail Disc Golf Courses designed to reach teenage and young adult populations.



Kids in Parks has partnered with Buncombe County to install Nature Trail Disc Golf Courses for teens and young adults. The courses are available during non-school hours.



In 2013, Kids in Parks partnered with the San Diego County Parks Department to install 3 TRACK Trails in California. In total, Kids in Parks has partnered with nearly 30 different municipal park sites in 4 different states, linking city/county parks with national parks, state parks and other public lands across the country.



Kids in Parks partnered with the Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians to install a TRACK Trail on Tribal lands in Western North Carolina. The trail begins in the Cherokee community, following the Oconoluftee River under the terminus of the Blue Ridge Parkway, and into Great Smoky Mountains National Park.



Besides the National Park Service, Kids in Parks has also partnered with other federal land management agencies to install TRACK Trails, including the US Forest Service and Army Corps of Engineers. The program could also be easily transferable to any US Fish and Wildlife Service or Bureau of Land Management site.



In 2012, the Kids in Parks program received a grant from the National Park Service to install 13 TRACK Trails in the National Capital Region as part of the Healthy Parks Healthy People DC program. Park locations include: the National Mall and Memorial Park, President's Park, Manassas National Battlefield and the C&O Canal National Historical Park.



Partnered with schools to create self-guided Course trails designed to reach all ages. Through joint-use agreements, trails are available for use by the public during school hours.



Kids in Parks has partnered with North Carolina State Parks to spread TRACK Trails to almost every park in the system. The program also has TRACK Trails installed in partnership with Virginia and South Dakota's State Park departments. In total, there are 30 state parks that have TRACK Trails, with many more currently in development.



Financial Supporters Include:

Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation
 Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation
 Wythe-Bland Community Foundation
 National Park Service
 National Park Foundation
 Be Active Appalachian Partnership
 Blumenthal Foundation
 Buncombe County
 Appalachian Regional Commission
 Private Individual Donor Support
 San Diego County Parks
 Nelson County
 Rockfish Valley Foundation



Trail Partners Include:

National Park Service - 15
 Blue Ridge Parkway, Overmountain Victory Trail, National Mall & Memorial Parks, President's Park, C&O Canal National Historical Park, Manassas National Battlefield, and more.

State Parks - 30
 NC - Chimney Rock, Hanging Rock, Stone Mountain, Lake James, and more.
 VA - Grayson Highlands, Hungry Mother, Claytor Lake
 SD - Custer, Lewis & Clark, Angustora, Big Sioux, Lake Louise, and more.

Municipal Parks - 27
 Mount Airy Greenways (NC), Pierre Arboretum (SD), San Elijo Lagoon (CA), and Wytheville Community Park (VA), more.

Other Agencies - 3
 US Forest Service - Pisgah National Forest
 Army Corps of Engineers - W. Kerr Scott Dam and Reservoir

Private Lands - 3
 Orchard at Altapass, Rockfish Valley, Mountain Meadow Farm Corn Maze

Schools - 3
 Buncombe County High Schools

Other Nations - 1
 The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

More Partnerships and TRACK Trails are continuously being added to the program.

Together we form the partnership for health: children's health, the health of our parks and the health of our communities.

The Kids in Parks program is unique because it has been able to partner with various land management agencies, health care institutions, schools, community and non-profit foundations and corporate organizations to create a singular on-the-ground program that has crossed agency boundaries and linked often isolated groups in a unified vision for the health and well-being of our communities as a whole. The problem affects us all and the solution will take all of us working together.

Agency Partnerships

Multiple local, state and federal agencies, private lands, schools and Tribes are joining the Kids in Parks network, making this program unique in its ability to cross agency boundaries and keep a forward-looking focus on benefits for children and families. Typically land management agencies only implement agency-specific programs, making Kids in Parks even more unique. This intra-agency network is focused on families that think more in terms of accessibility and convenience rather than jurisdiction.

Community Partnerships

Communities across the nation are asking themselves how they can remain attractive and competitive as desirable places to live and work. Several communities have already invested in Kids in Parks TRACK Trails as a low-cost and effective way to add value. Bike trails, disc golf courses, and greenways are being revitalized and rediscovered as part of the Kids in Parks network.

Financial Partnerships

The program was incubated and nurtured through a visionary partnership with Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation and has only been realized due to their stalwart financial support. The strength of the network of trails in North Carolina is a direct result of this state-focused support. However, the true promise of the program lies in implementation of a national vision with vibrant networks crossing the nation. There now exists an opportunity for a corporate partner to establish a branding relationship with Kids in Parks to realize this national vision.



Prescribing Kids in Parks

Over the past few years, there has been a growing movement for doctors and pediatricians to prescribe parks and nature to kids and families called Park Rx, or Park Prescriptions. The Kids in Parks program—with its network of trails in different types of park settings, various types of outdoor recreation activities appealing to different age groups and audiences, incentive system with built-in assessment measures, and pediatrician office trailhead and prescription pad piece—is poised to be a leader in the National Park Rx movement.

“Getting our children unplugged and outside is one of the most beneficial things we can do for their overall health. Kids in Parks is an elegant solution.”
 - Olson Huff, M.D.

AAP Endorsement

In 2011, the Kids in Parks program was endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics as a program pediatricians could prescribe to children through the Park Rx concept. Following this endorsement, the Kids in Parks program partnered with the National Park Service’s Healthy Parks Healthy People program in Washington, DC to install 13 TRACK Trails in National Parks in the National Capital Region, including the National Mall and President’s Park (White House).

Pediatrician Office Trailhead Signs and Prescription Pads

In an attempt to increase the impact and effectiveness of the program, Kids in Parks created a pediatrician office trailhead sign that is displayed in the lobbies of pediatrician and doctor offices. The display has a generic self-guided brochure that offers kids a fun outdoor activity they can do anywhere, including their backyard.

In addition to the trailhead display, the program has also designed a prescription pad the pediatrician can use to prescribe TRACK Trails.



“The American Academy of Pediatrics (AAP) would be delighted to support the National Kids in Parks’ efforts to encourage more children and families to be involved in outdoor activities.

We would be very appreciative if you [KIP] would also involve the local AAP Chapters in the areas where parks are being established.”

Errol R. Alden, MD, FAAP
 Executive Director/CEO

Partnership for a Healthier America

From large national parks to small community greenways, Kids in Parks offers an easy-to-implement and proven program that builds a healthier America.

The benefits of outdoor play for children are dramatic and long lasting. From physical to mental benefits, children's health improves from time in nature. Likewise, parks benefit when people use them. Finding ways to more deeply connect visitors and children to our parks cultivates the health of both our parks and those that use them.

Over the past five years, Kids in Parks has installed 80 TRACK Trails across seven states, generating data that proves TRACK Trails are effective! The program has been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, recognized by the White House with a "Champions of Change" award, and reviewed, evaluated, and certified as a practice-tested intervention by the Center for Training and Research Translation—funded by the Center for Disease Control.

With a proven record of success, the goals for the next several years include continued expansion, strengthening program infrastructure to support growth, and providing adequate partner support that will ensure quality programming across the network.

Together, we have partnered with community groups both big and small: city and county parks, state parks, National Forest Service, National Park Service, private foundations and other caring and dedicated groups throughout the country to create a network of trail opportunities designed to get kids and families "unplugged" and active outdoors for both their health and the health of our parks and public lands.



Our Leadership Team



Olson Huff, M.D., FAAP

Medical Director Mission Children's Hospital – Retired

An award winning pediatrician and founder of the Kids in Parks program, Dr. Olson Huff has had a life-long passion for helping improve the overall health of our kids and communities.



Carolyn Ward, Ph.D.

CEO – BRP Foundation

Carolyn Ward, an award-winning author, researcher, professor and program designer, created Kids in Parks to give kids the same connection to nature she found as a young girl in the Blue Ridge.

Join the Growing Network



BRP Foundation – Kids in Parks

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Jason Urroz

Director – Kids in Parks

A dedicated program designer and manager, Jason Urroz has provided kids with meaningful connections to nature throughout his career, serving as the Director of Kids in Parks for 4 years.