

A full-page background image of a person rock climbing a steep, grey rock face. The climber is wearing a helmet, a light-colored tank top, and dark pants. A blue rope is visible running vertically alongside the climber. To the left of the rock face is a dense forest of tall evergreen trees under a bright blue sky with scattered white clouds.

# 2016 ANNUAL REPORT

A white line-art silhouette of a mountain range spanning the width of the page, positioned above the 'EXPLORE AUSTIN' text.

**EXPLORE  
AUSTIN**  
LEADERSHIP MENTORING ADVENTURE





## LETTER FROM THE CEO

*Dear Explore Austin Family,*

Here we are again, another year written in history for Explore Austin. But not just any year, 2016 was a major milestone year for Explore Austin in many regards. In June, we celebrated the ten year anniversary of Explore Austin. That's a decade of leadership, mentoring, adventure, and most importantly, a Decade of Change. I've had the pleasure of serving Explorers, Mentors and their families for eight of the past ten years. Due to the constant efforts of our caring and committed Explore Austin community, I can say with great confidence, the best is yet to come.

2016 was a major planning and preparation year Explore Austin. We hired more staff, prepared to launch the first ever Mentor Training summit, a weekend-long educational conference for our Mentors, and piloted the Community Wilderness Trip program where we send donors on week-long trips similar to those our Explorers take. These initiatives will carry a legacy from here on and I am excited to see where they lead.

Also in 2016, Explore Austin launched Friends of Explore Austin. Friends of Explore Austin exists to support Explore Austin through fundraising events and advocacy. This group will undoubtedly become a source of not only monetary support, but also as a pool of vetted individuals for future recruitments.

A partnership we are thrilled to announce from 2016 is the Explore Austin + Kammok Hammocks Give Adventure partnership. Kammok Hammocks is dedicating its philanthropy efforts to "give adventure" to underserved youth. To do this, Kammok partnered with Explore Austin through 1% For The Planet to donate one percent of their revenue each year to fulfill the Kammok Give Adventure mission of equipping and inspiring for life changing adventure. We are so grateful for this incredible opportunity with a company whose mission matches our own. Stay tuned for more about how Kammok is helping advance the Explore Austin mission.

As we look back on 2016 and as we look ahead to the future, I am immensely grateful for your support. I am proud to be on this journey with you and look forward to the next decade of continuing to, with your support, change lives. To quote C.S. Lewis, *"There are far far better things ahead than any we leave behind."*

Explore on,



Mike Braeuer  
President/CEO





**2006**  
Program begins!

**2007**  
Program doubles in size!

**2008**  
Summer Wilderness Trips span 3 states

**2009**  
First girls team begins their journey

**2010**  
Received the Greenlights Nonprofit  
Excellence Award

**2011**  
Recognized by the Greater Austin  
Hispanic Chamber of Commerce at  
the Texas Small Business Awards

**2012**  
Awarded the John Covert  
Watson Award for Vision by  
the Children in Nature  
Collaborative

**2013**  
100% of Class of 2013  
Explorers are accepted  
into universities

**2014**  
Expanded the program to a  
second partner school, doubling  
the rate of annual recruitment.

**2015**  
Expanded the program to  
third and fourth partner  
schools, Wayside and  
Austin Achieve

**2016**

## 10 YEARS OF ADVENTURE



10 YEARS OF LIFE CHANGING ADVENTURE  
**10**







2016 SUMMER

# DESTINATIONS

## 6<sup>TH</sup> YEAR EXPLORERS

Two teams of 11th graders went mountaineering in the Wind Rivers Range in Wyoming

## 5<sup>TH</sup> YEAR EXPLORERS

Two teams of 10th graders went mountaineering in the French Gulch in Colorado

## 4<sup>TH</sup> YEAR EXPLORERS

Two teams of 9th graders went mountain biking in Buena Vista, Colorado

Two teams of 7th graders went rock climbing in the Wichita Mountains in Oklahoma and two teams of seventh graders canoed the Buffalo River in Arkansas

## 2<sup>ND</sup> YEAR EXPLORERS

Four teams of 6th graders traveled to Camp Eagle in Texas

## 1<sup>ST</sup> YEAR EXPLORERS

## 3<sup>RD</sup> YEAR EXPLORERS

Two teams of 8th graders canoed the Buffalo River in Arkansas







2016

## ACCOMPLISHMENTS

**11,280**

Miles Paddled,  
Hiked, Biked,  
and Climbed  
During  
Summer  
Wilderness  
Trips

**222**

Hours of  
Mentoring  
Provided Per  
Explorer

**2,160**

Hours of  
Community  
Service

**162**

Saturday  
Challenges

**18**

Summer  
Wilderness  
Trips

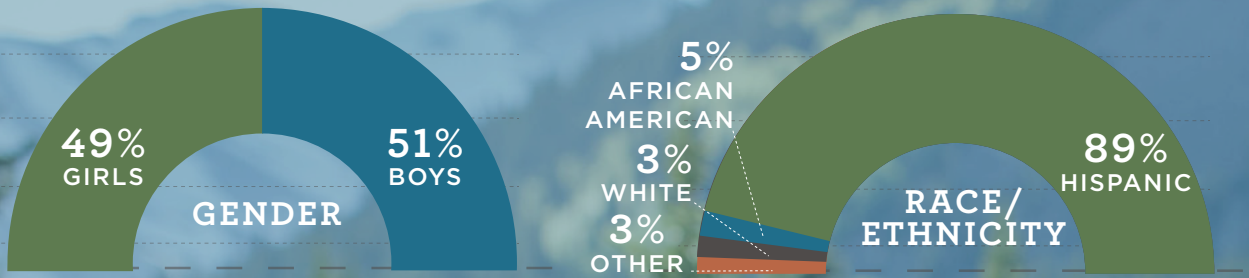


**IN 2016** *Explore Austin* grew to serve **260 KIDS**

*and* **102 VOLUNTEER MENTORS.**



## EXPLORER DEMOGRAPHICS

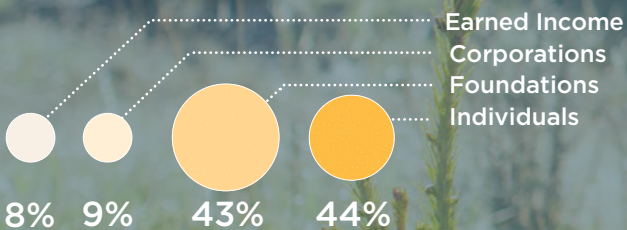


## MENTOR PROFILE

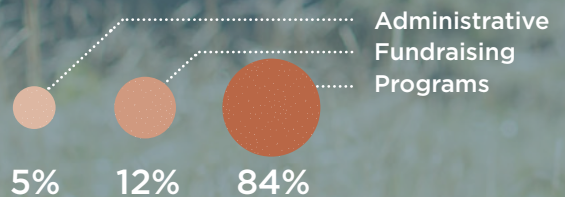


## FINANCES

### INCOME



### EXPENSES



## HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES

### MENTOR RETENTION

91%

100%

### EXPLORER RETENTION

88%



## After successfully completing an outdoor adventure, youths and young adults report:\*

- » higher levels of self-efficacy
- » higher levels of mindfulness
- » lower levels of stress, particularly with regard to troubles and demands

\*Data provided by the Journal of Adolescence



### LIFE CHANGING ADVENTURE



Young people with mentoring relationships in their lives were far more likely to stay in school, enroll in college, become active in sports, become leaders and generally pursue higher goals than those who do not.



### MENTORING MATTERS



Young adults at-risk for falling off track but had a mentor are:\*

**55%**  
more likely  
to enroll in  
college

**78%**  
more likely  
to volunteer  
regularly

**130%**  
more likely to  
hold leadership  
positions

**90%**  
are interested  
in becoming a  
mentor

\*Data provided by The National Mentoring Partnership





ALUMNI

## SPOTLIGHT

**ADAN CANTU**, alumni of the 2015 boys group, “was first attracted to Explore as a sixth grader wanting to go mountain biking in Colorado”. He never thought he could do something like mountain biking on his own and so joined Explore Austin as a way to help him pursue his interest in the outdoors. Today, only two years after graduating high school, Adan is a trip leader with Explore Austin and gets to enjoy the outdoors and share his passion with others as part of his job.

*“Adventure is my life now. I’m always outside climbing or biking, if I’m not outside I’m looking forward to it.”*

Explore Austin didn’t just further Adan’s interests in outdoor adventure, it also gave him the confidence necessary to finish school, stay out of trouble, and become a leader. He recognizes Explore Austin’s unique model of allowing kids to try, and fail, as encouraging him to become a stronger leader. He says, “Explore helped me realize that I could do lots of things I didn’t think were possible.”

Adan’s Mentors played a crucial role in his development from a young boy to the man he is today. He still stays in touch with his Mentors and recalls the impact that these men had on his life, “As a child without a father in the picture I think it played a big difference in my life having three older men I could go talk to.” Later in life Adan would like to become a mentor to make an impact on a kid’s life just like his Mentors impacted him.

In addition to working for Explore Austin and taking care of kids after school, Adan is also part of the National Guard and spends several months each year training to serve our country. He is pursuing his passions, giving back to his community and “living in the moment.”

**JONATHAN HENDERSHOT**, alumni of the 2015 boys group, completed all six years of Explore Austin. Today, he is a guide for Crux Climbing Center, a climbing coach, and a guide with Explore Austin. While his life is now focused on new outdoor adventures, Jonathan says that without Explore Austin, “I wouldn’t



say yes to new opportunities or... even want to go outdoors.” Explore Austin expanded Jonathan’s interests and gave him the chance to pursue his new passions.

When he looks back at his time as an Explorer, Jonathan remembers the “challenging tasks with meaningful lessons” that he and his fellow Explorers faced during their Saturday Challenges and Summer Wilderness Trips. He says that, “those lessons stuck with me ever since.”

Some of these lessons came from the physical challenges of climbing, mountain biking, canoeing and mountaineering while others came from emotional and mental experiences. On the last night of one Summer Wilderness Trip, Jonathan’s recalls that

*“Half of the [Explorers] didn’t like the other half. But on this night, we almost encountered a bear so all of the Explorers crammed into a single tent. In that tent, we were forced to talk to each other, and during that time, we connected and became one big family.”*

Friendships among Explorers and relationships with Mentors don’t end when Explorers graduate from high school. Jonathan still spends time with his fellow Explorers and Mentors each month and says, “my Mentors still mentor me and they still give me very good advice about my personal goals.”

Jonathan’s Explore Austin Mentors gave him the desire to become a mentor himself in the near future. He hopes to not only guide kids through climbing as he does today but also to guide them through the challenges of life just as his Mentors did for him.





EXPLORER & MENTOR

## SPOTLIGHT



**EDWARD ROBLEDO**, graduate of Explore Austin, attributes his growth over the past few years to his experiences with his Mentors and fellow Explorers. When Edward joined he described himself as “an emotional mess ... on track to take a back seat to [his] own life”. His past experiences with authority figures made him wary of his Mentors, and he was hesitant to let himself fully enjoy his Saturday Challenges and Summer Wilderness Trips.

Gradually, Edward learned that his Mentors truly cared for him even when he pushed them away. With their support, he came out of his shell and began to gain confidence both in Explore Austin activities and in his personal life.

One day, affectionately dubbed “Terrible Tuesday”, is especially engrained in Edward’s memory. His team was on an eleven-hour hike through “torrential downpours”. He was exhausted and discouraged both physically and mentally but his Mentors encouraged him to push on. After finally reaching camp and enjoying hot soup and a good sleep, Edward woke up refreshed and now says,

*“Ever since then, any challenge has never seemed insurmountable because I feel as if I can accomplish anything set in my path.”*

Edward’s Mentors empowered him to grow from shy and bitter to confident and hopeful. Because of their impact on his life, he now wants to become a Mentor in his own community and to impart the knowledge and skills he has learned to others. Edward says,

*“I cannot imagine having grown up without my Mentors. Although I only spent one Saturday per month and one week in the Summer with them, those short days have equated to years of wisdom that have been my guiding light.”*

**RYAN MCLAGAN** A recent college graduate, Ryan became an Explore Austin Mentor in 2009. Like many of our Mentors, he had several mentors in high school and it was his experiences as a mentee as well as his love for the outdoors that inspired him to join Explore Austin.

“Outdoor adventure has been a lifetime passion of mine. What attracted me to Explore Austin was being able to share that passion [for adventure] and help a group of young men through a crucial part of their life.”

Ryan treasures his memories “sitting by the buffalo river in Arkansas or on the side of a mountain in Wyoming” and says “it is pretty epic to be able to impact a kid’s life by empathizing and coaching them through their hardships.”

Like Edward, Ryan will never forget “Terrible Tuesday”. He recalls, “It was probably the hardest day of any of their lives. I will never forget at the end of the week, how proud they were of themselves for persevering and pushing themselves past their limits. All of them always remember this day when times are tough in life, and know that if they can get through that, they can get through anything.”

Ryan’s Explorers’ took this lesson in perseverance to heart and, five years later, all of his Explorers graduated from high school and went on to attend college. Watching his Explorers graduate is Ryan’s proudest moment as a mentor and he says, “it was amazing to see all of them follow their dreams.”

Explorers aren’t the only ones to grow and learn from their Explore Austin experiences. Our Mentors are also strongly impacted. Ryan says that because of Explore Austin,

*“I learned humility and gratitude, and will never take life for granted. I hope to teach my kids someday the lessons I learned out on the trail from all those kids.”*





DONOR

## SPOTLIGHT

**CRYSTAL AND DANIEL PERRY** were first introduced to Explore Austin in October 2015 at the Explore Austin Ascent Speaker Luncheon. The Perrys have been involved with mentoring programs over the years and felt a deep connection with Explore when they learned about how the Explore Austin curriculum combines mentoring with the outdoors. They believe outdoor adventure is an effective way to break down the walls necessary to change Explorer lives.

Since their initial introduction, Crystal and Daniel have become extremely involved with Explore Austin as volunteers, donors, and major supporters. They served on the host committee for the 2016 Quest for the Summit and then were chairs for the Ascent Speaker luncheon that same year. Daniel and his 14-year-old daughter, Aidan, have attended Saturday Challenges with the 8th grade girls to get to know the Explore Austin program better.

Daniel believes the most important part of Explore Austin is the mentoring provided for the Explorers. Having had experience as a mentee himself, he feels a deep connection to this part of the program.

*“When I was in high school, I was involved in Young Life. The counselors I met during those are some of the most influential people on my character today, almost 30 years later. The relationship and character development that the mentors have the opportunity to build with the Explorers is by far the most important part of Explore Austin,” says Daniel.*

Crystal grew up outside of Houston and Daniel grew up in Dallas. They both attended Texas A&M for undergrad and then Daniel earned his M.B.A from The Stern School of Business at NYU. Daniel currently serves as the Chief Financial Officer at American Campus Communities and Crystal is stay at home mom.

Daniel and Crystal are proud parents of their two children, Aidan, 14, and Brynn, 11, who also play a role in



*The Perry Family*

motivating Crystal and Daniel to stay involved with Explore Austin. They want other children to experience the joy of the outdoors as their children do. As a family they enjoy time spent on the lake tubing and surfing. They hike often and never miss their annual family ski trip. Every summer Crystal and the girls travel to Colorado to ride bikes and hike.

Explore Austin is so thankful for the leadership and support shown by Crystal and Daniel over the past two years. Their care and commitment is unparalleled and we look forward to many more years of changing lives, together.



# THANK YOU



**WE ARE DEEPLY GRATEFUL** *to everyone who supported*  
*Explore Austin and* **HELPED TO MAKE** *each Explorer's*  
**LIFE-CHANGING JOURNEY POSSIBLE.**

## PATHFINDERS CLUB

By making a three-year commitment to give \$5,000 or more each year, Pathfinders lead the way in empowering underserved youth to become leaders through mentoring and outdoor adventure. By offering a reliable stream of support, Pathfinders provide the foundation for Explore Austin to grow – allowing staff to focus on creating new programs, reaching new supporters, and building new relationships.

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