



2023 Annual Report

April 2024

Dear Friends of High 5,

More than two thousand years ago, Confucius defined what is a cornerstone of our work and mission: *“Tell me and I will forget, show me and I may remember, involve me and I will understand.”*

High 5 has spent the last 23 years providing services that demonstrate the impact of these words and, like Confucius, the educators we work with also understand how **involvement makes learning ‘stick.’** This is the essence of adventure and experiential learning, and it shows up in everything we do:

- Students in our Edge of Leadership program participate in activities and dialog that give them the skills to improve how they communicate and connect with others.
- Our adventure programming and challenge course services provide schools, camps, therapeutic centers, and other community-based programs the ability to engage with their community of learners in new ways. 2023 saw the completion of one of our biggest projects ever, in partnership with Rippleffect, a long-time customer committed to youth leadership and outdoor ed in Portland, Maine (see p. 3).
- Professional development opportunities empower teachers to profoundly change the impact they have on their students. Merrimack Valley School District has embedded experiential theory throughout its schools, and the outcomes include improved communication, understanding, collaboration, and a sense of community (see below).
- We debuted our NEW product, **Emotions by High 5®** as a way for educators to help their students understand, identify and manage emotions, both within themselves and in others. The positive feedback from customers is amazing and fuels our innovative spirit and mission.



From every corner of the organization, we could tell you stories about how our work creates transformative experiences and changes the way groups and individuals learn, live, work and play together. Our mission inspires our people, a growing team of 28 hard-working people to leave our customers with the tools they need to make their communities better.

We could not do this important work without your support – thank you for being a part of our story. Your belief in our mission fuels our efforts and amplifies our impact. Here’s to another year of adventure, growth, and REAL impact!

Warmest regards,

Jen Ottinger, Executive Director

Merrimack Valley School District on Course to Inspire, Educate and Empower

The Impact of Growing an Adventure Program

Flashback, to two years ago. It was time to chart a new course at Merrimack Valley School District (MVSD), a community of 8 schools, 2215 students, and over 300 educators and staff. Gone were the days of remote learning, and emerging were new ideas about reinvigorating learning and fulfilling the district-wide mission to **Inspire. Educate. Empower.** all learners.

Becky Kennedy, Director of School Counseling and System of Care Coordinator, and her colleagues were asked to think outside the box and develop a new approach to support the diverse needs of students with a heightened focus on behavioral health and wellness. Never veering from the guiding principles of the school’s mission, the implementation of the MVSD adventure program became a reality in 2022 and has evolved into a powerful and inspirational tool, providing a tangible representation of the district’s commitment to student well-being and holistic development. Opportunities for student (and



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The Impact of Growing an Adventure Program (continued from page 1)

educator) growth and well-being are expanding and changing the school environment. It all started with an idea...

The idea of implementing an adventure-based program in partnership with High 5 stemmed from a collaborative effort to address the diverse needs of students, particularly those requiring tier 2 and tier 3 behavioral health support. Through grant funding and brainstorming sessions, the district sought innovative ways to integrate wellness, leadership, creativity, and team-building into its educational framework. Their Multi-tiered System of Support for Behavioral Health and Wellness (MTSS-B) framework paved the way for the introduction of adventure-based leadership programs aimed at empowering at-risk students across all grade levels through tiered supports and approaches.

To garner support for the program and training, the district identified ten staff members who exhibited a willingness to embrace new approaches, challenges and diverse experiences. High 5 installed their new challenge course and these individuals received facilitator training, which left a profound impact on the group's collective professional development. Witnessing High 5's effective instructional style and communication techniques inspired educators like Jeff Neilsen, who hailed the training as the most valuable in his 25-year teaching career.

In Jeff's English course, "Outdoor Studies", he encourages students to reflect on the idea of what success looks like and the notion that all of us, regardless of age or ability, wrestle with failure. One student explained in a class survey,

"I learned so much about everyone in this class... all of these challenges with kids that I was never familiar with taught me that everyone is different in their ways and everyone is good at different things. You should never judge someone... because you never know what they have gone through and most of the time they are genuine people... Everyone in life is going to mess up—nobody's perfect—but it's what you do after that determines who you are."



Another example of the transformative power of adventure-based learning took hold at the Middle School. MSVD middle school counselors run a "new student group" for students who transfer into the middle school from outside of the district. The students especially enjoy engaging in activity and adventure-based programming. For this reason and others, they often request to stay involved even when they are no longer new. The counselors use the KYOOB, indoor climbing wall, and challenge course activities throughout the year as part of their monthly group check-in format. Its success has evolved into some of these students becoming 'ambassadors' for grades 7 and 8, who assist with activities and welcome new students. **This and other initiatives contributed to MVMS being recognized recently by The New Hampshire Excellence in Education Awards as the 2023 New Hampshire Middle School of Excellence.**

Overall, the program's success and sustainability can be attributed to robust support from the district, administrators, and educators, who collaborated to integrate adventure learning and challenge course programming into various facets of school life. From elementary summer enrichment camps to targeted behavior interventions and middle school transition programs, students and educators alike benefited from the experiential learning opportunities provided by the program. *Notably, it facilitated meaningful connections between students of varying abilities and backgrounds, fostering empathy, resilience, and leadership skills.*

By prioritizing experiential learning, collaboration, and holistic well-being, the program has become an integral component of the district's educational philosophy.

Innovative Educational Programming Our Edge of Leadership Program Delivers



Now in its 11th year in the public schools of Keene, NH, Edge of Leadership (EOL) has been adopted by the SAU29 School District as an enhancement curriculum that complements traditional academics for students in 5th through 12th grades. For the 2022-23 school year, EOL focused on topics such as how emotions influence our decisions and accountability for our actions—both key to adolescent growth and maturity.

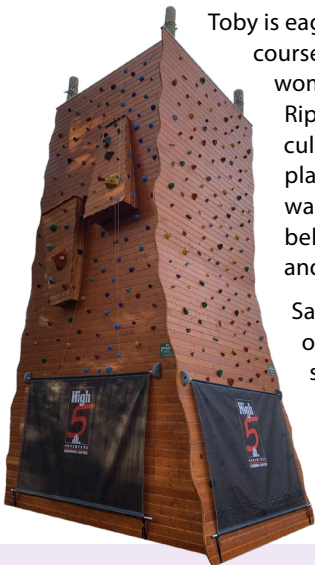
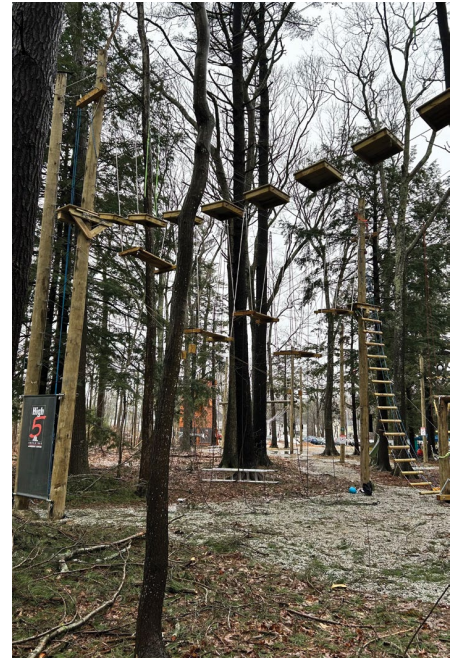
Form Partnerships with Lasting Roots - A Vision Becomes Reality

A New Adventure Program for Rippleffect in Portland, ME

High 5 made a multi-year planning process and vision for an outdoor adventure center a reality for longtime customer Rippleffect, a nonprofit that promotes youth development and leadership. After years of collaborative planning, it took two solid weeks, with all hands on deck (11 builders) to create a course combining dynamic and static elements, along with a 40-foot climbing tower. The folks at Rippleffect had worked with High 5 for over a decade, maintaining a seasonally-accessible challenge course located on Cow Island, in Portland Harbor. Used primarily for their summer adventure camp, the island course fostered a long and mutually beneficial relationship between our organizations, which share similar philosophies.

“High 5 has always felt like family - our organization too has this familial feel - and we deeply appreciate this spirit and ethos in our professional partner.” - Toby Arnold

What stands out to Toby Arnold, Director of Wilderness Education at Rippleffect, is “High 5’s genuine commitment to our work, observing the highest industry standards, and nurturing our relationship through honest and kind communication and feedback.” That’s why Rippleffect turned to us when it was time to add a second course, accessible year-round, for their adventure learning program serving the students of Portland’s public schools.



Toby is eagerly looking forward to programming on the new challenge course, being reminded of the transformative experience of a young woman, a new American, who attended an adventure program at Rippleffect’s Cow Island. He recalls it was the first time she had participated in an adventure program and her culminating experience on the challenge course was an opportunity to ride the zip line. As she stood on the platform, trembling with tears in her eyes, she paused and looked down at the other members of her group. It was as if the group could read her mind and knew what she needed: in a moment cheers rose from everyone below and a smile took over the young woman’s face. She looked at me, said, “Thank you”, yelled “Yeehaw!” and pushed herself off into space.

Safely down from the element she said, “At the beginning of this week, I would have been afraid to even look over the edge of the platform. Now I can not only look over the edge but fly in the sky!” With smiles and tears, she was embraced by her group to cheers all around. That moment was powerful for the young woman, but equally powerful for the entire group. We all shared that ride, we were all there in the sky together with love, support and belief in one another. The zip line turned out to be a very powerful culminating experience for this young woman’s adventure inward, outward and beyond. These types of transformative moments bring our mission and work into focus.

EOL Program Highlights

- **Emotions by High 5®** Responding to a need identified by teachers and students in the lab schools, the EOL team created a learning-socialization tool, Emotions cards, to support growth in emotional intelligence. The new cards were used in a prototype format last school year, and at the end of 2023, we launched the set as a NEW product, Emotions by High 5®, which is receiving glowing reviews for its effectiveness in supporting social-emotional learning.



- **EOL Summer Program** returned to campus in July. Twenty-three students and 5 adults from Greater Lowell Technical High School joined us for three days of meaningful and challenging activities building leadership skills and forging a team that returned to school to improve school and in-class culture.
- **EOL Expands to Support Teachers.** Piloted last year in our EOL-related Professional Learning initiative, we continued to work with cohorts of educators to create a facilitated experience that balances the growth of both the team of educational professionals and each educator, individually. Research indicates and our experience confirms a clear connection between educator well-being and student performance — when teachers do well, their students do better.



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Customers Served by Industry

High 5 is grateful to work with nonprofit organizations and for-profit businesses. Last year, our customers represented these primary industry segments.



45% Schools/Youth Leadership



9% Colleges/Universities



6% Therapeutic Organizations

36% Outdoor Ed/Camps



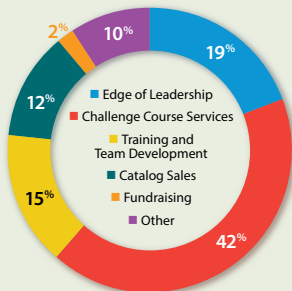
4% Organizations/Sports Teams



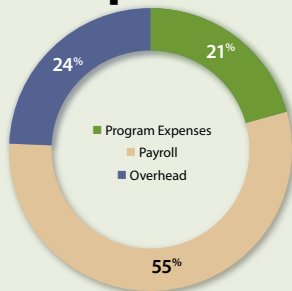
Financial Overview

The following charts reflect sources of High 5's Income and Expenses for FY 2023 (pre-audit)

Revenue



Expenses



Thank You New and Existing Donors

Our work in professional development for adventure educators is recognized worldwide, bringing hundreds of practitioners to our training programs each year. We strive to reduce barriers to choosing a career in this important work. This year's fundraising efforts focused on building a scholarship fund for students and others who might not otherwise have the financial resources to learn from us. Led by 100% in giving from the Board of Directors, our fundraising efforts included new records in total gifts received. We are grateful to all of you who supported us – you have made a vital contribution to our success!

Jim and Pam Baucom	Gina Goff	Rich and Marcia Keegan	Thomas Oxholm
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Our Mission

High 5 Adventure Learning Center is a non-profit educational organization dedicated to helping individuals, schools, teams, and communities use adventure experiences as an effective tool for improving the way they live, learn, work and lead together. High 5 provides educational experiences for all ages that develop a sense of connection and community in a learning environment of discovery, challenge, and fun.



High 5 Adventure Learning Center

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Connect.
Empower.
Lead.