



2025 ANNUAL REPORT



OUR MISSION

First Descents provides life-changing adventures for young adults impacted by cancer and other serious health conditions.



FROM OUR ALUMNI



“Being a caregiver as a young adult is incredibly isolating. I left with a newfound sense of self, a family that understands the challenges we face, and newfound energy to keep moving through life.”

– Outer Banks Caregiver Program Participant “Stitch”



“What I experienced in that short week was one of the most significant events in my life. I know that the program has made me a better husband, father, son, and a more complete and thoughtful human being.”

– Blackfoot ONC Program Participant “Giggles”



“Looking forward to the FD trip kept me going on some of the hardest days of my MS journey. Going on an outdoor adventure where my diagnosis was known, understood, and accommodated was incredibly freeing.”

– Outer Banks MS Program Participant “Rapunzel”



“What a unique opportunity to get out of your head, but also examine it at the same time as you tune in more to the mind-body connection — all while in nature and with community. Thank you!”

– Adirondacks Healthcare Worker Participant “Champ”

LETTER FROM THE FOUNDER



Dear FD Family,

This year asked a great deal of our community.

We experienced the loss of a leader whose commitment to First Descents and belief in the power of adventure helped shape our path forward. Ryan “Wolf” O’Donoghue’s legacy lives on in the culture of care, courage, and connection that continues to guide our work. While moments like these can bring uncertainty, they also reveal the depth of an organization’s foundation. Ours proved to be strong.

The 2025 program season was one of growth, momentum, and renewed purpose. Through shared adventures across rivers, mountains, and coastlines, and within a supportive

community, young adults living with cancer and multiple sclerosis rediscovered their confidence. Programs once again filled rapidly, alumni engagement deepened, and our staff and volunteers delivered extraordinary experiences with steadiness and heart.

As we step into our 25th year, we do so with both appreciation and vision.

First Descents has spent a quarter century building a lifelong community where healing and belonging flourish. Now, through our Go Beyond capital campaign to fuel our Montana Base Camp on the Clark Fork River, we’re investing in the future through expanding access, strengthening programs, and ensuring that more young adults can experience the life-changing impact of adventure and connection.

What remains constant is the people who make this mission possible. Participants, alumni, staff, volunteers, and supporters continue to form the steady current that carries First Descents forward.

Our past has built a powerful legacy. Our present reflects resilience and stability. And our future, shaped together, is a buoyant river filled with possibility.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'BL' or similar initials.

*Brad “Cosmo” Ludden
Founder of First Descents*

WHAT WE DO

FD programs bring challenge-by-choice adventures and healthy behavior principles to outdoor experiences for young adults. By creating immersive experiences with peer groups, we inspire outdoor physical activity, resilience, and social connection that extends well beyond the clinical setting.

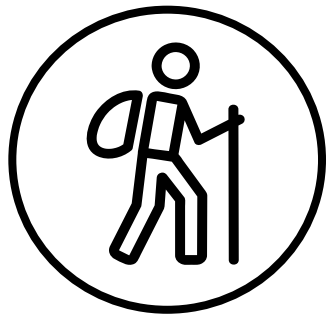
Program Delivery Channels: Pillars of Service



Core Destination Programs

(5-6 days; professionally guided; all-inclusive)

Free weeklong whitewater kayaking, rock climbing, and surfing adventures in epic destinations around the country.



Community Adventures

(local, low/no-cost, year-round engagement)

Local outdoor experiences created and facilitated by the FD alumni community. Everyone 18+ is encouraged to join.



Lifestyle Pathways

(ongoing)

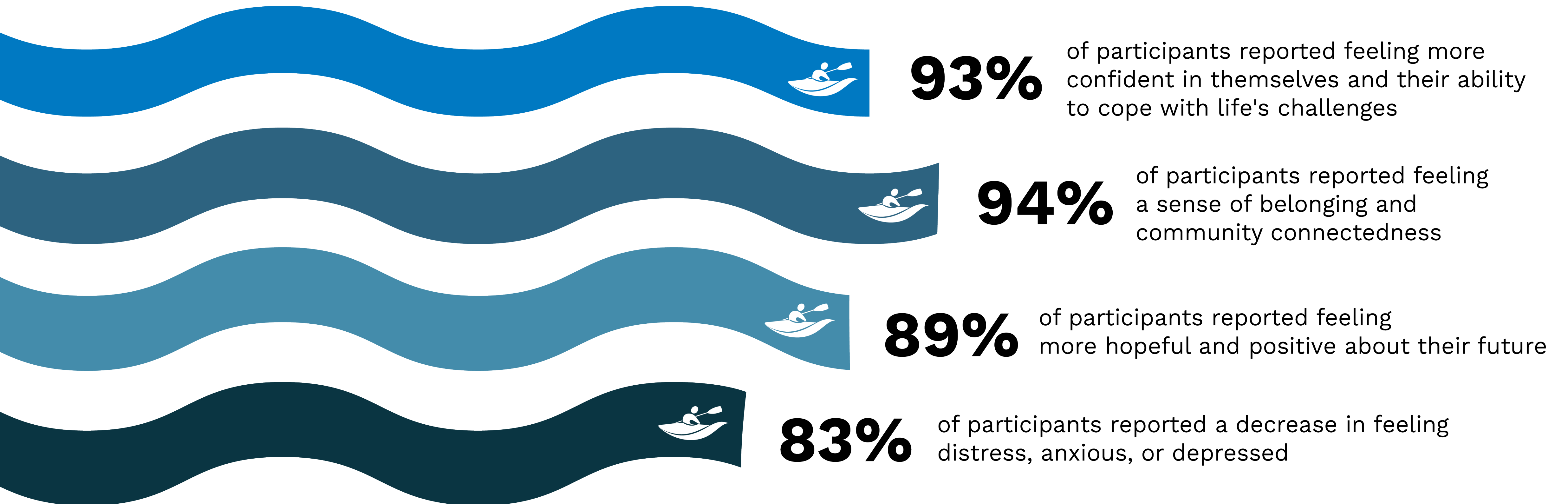
Exercise, nutrition, mindfulness, and wellness offerings, plus peer networks and digital touchpoints to sustain behavioral changes.



OUR IMPACT

At the end of every Core Program season, participants are invited to complete a survey about their First Descents experience and how it impacts their daily lives.

Through 2025 our impact included:



OUR HIGHLIGHTS



37

WEEKLONG
PROGRAMS

1,726

PARTICIPANT
INQUIRIES

1,598

PARTICIPANTS
SERVED

\$4.15M

FUNDS RAISED

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES:



Expand Programs

Grow the impact and scale of our initiatives and offerings.



Build Community

Provide human connection and ongoing supportive peer-to-peer relationships.



Prescribe Adventure

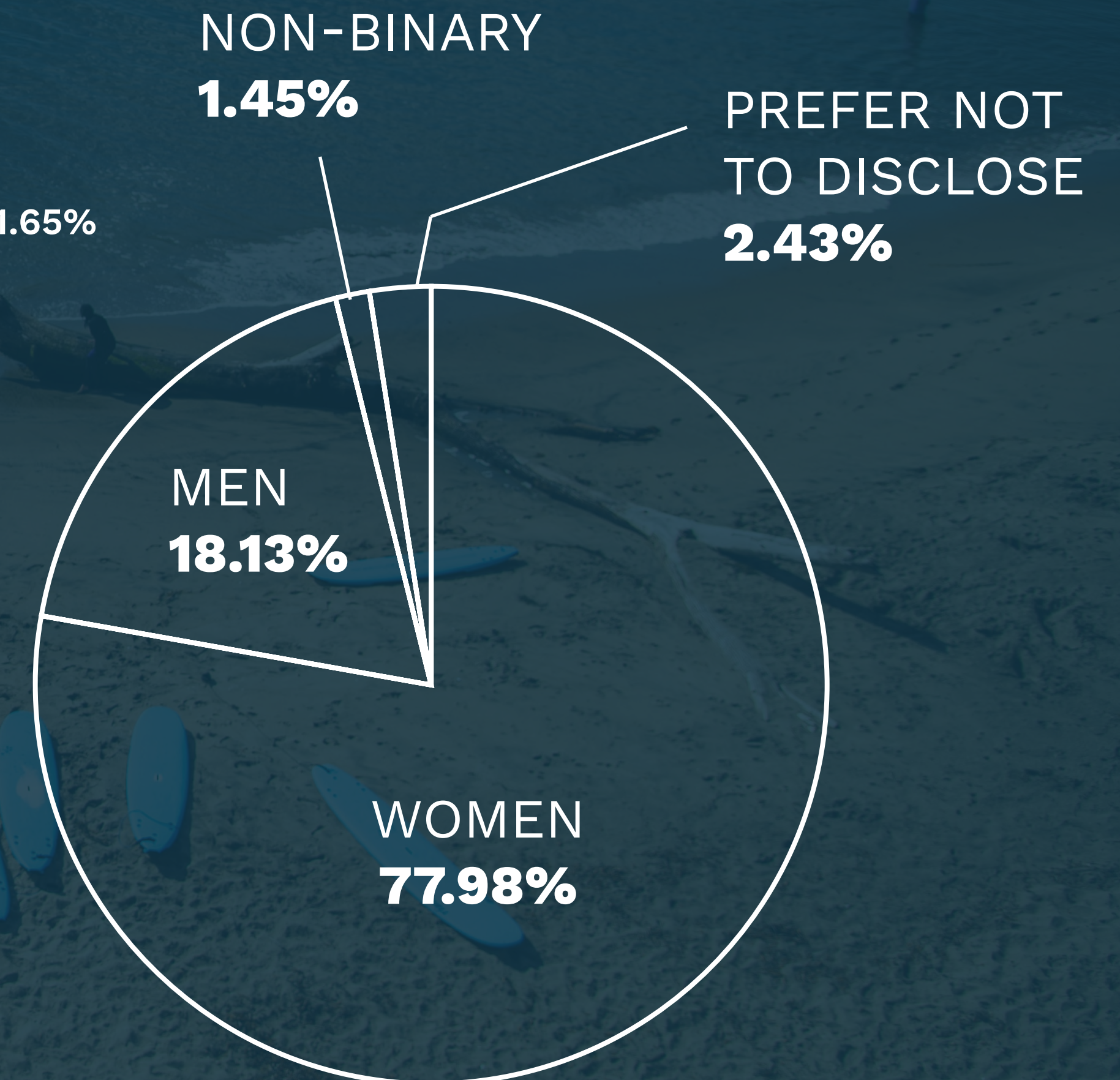
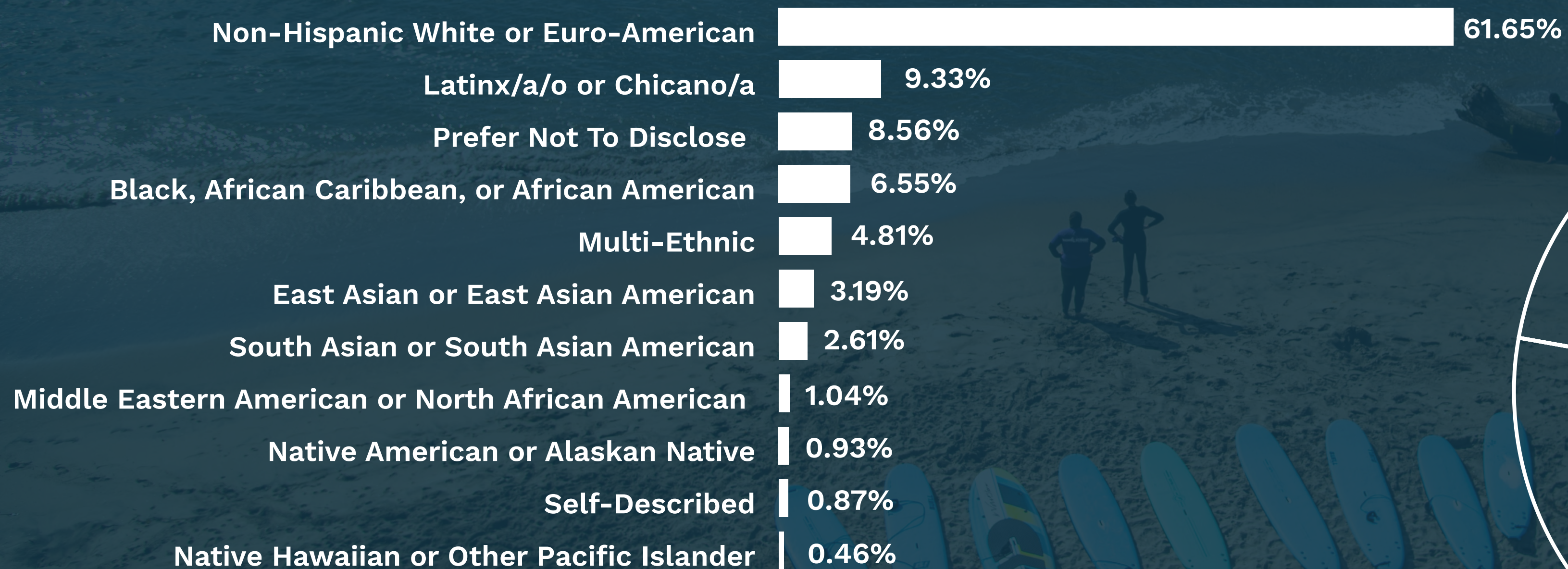
Reach more young adults through partnerships and awareness.



BUILDING COMMUNITY

First Descents operates at the confluence of two industries with significant and systemic inequities: healthcare and outdoor recreation. FD strives to address disparities within outdoor and healthcare spaces through its ongoing commitment to learning, growing, and improving health equity. We believe that everyone deserves to experience the healing power of adventure.

The graphs below highlight the ethnic background of the 1,726 inquiries in 2025 (left) and the self-reported gender breakdown of participant inquiries in 2025 (right).



COMMUNITY ADVENTURES

Community Adventures are locally led meetups that merge the thrill of outdoor adventures with the power of human connection in a welcoming and inclusive space. They offer a way for potential participants, alumni, friends, family, and supporters to come together year-round for free or low-cost activities like hiking, climbing, snowshoeing, and canoeing.

131 COMMUNITY ADVENTURES

1,127 ATTENDEES

55 LOCATIONS NATIONWIDE



“The Community Adventure was really fun and helped me connect with the local FD community. I had just finished with my weeklong First Descents program, and it helped me process all those feelings and emotions of missing my new First Descents family.”

– 2025 Community Adventurer

COMMUNITY ADVENTURES: Alumni Ambassadors

26 ALUMNI
AMBASSADORS

In 2025, we launched our new Alumni Ambassadors program that celebrates our most connected FD alumni. Our 26 inaugural Alumni Ambassadors — passionate First Descents alums who committed to sharing the healing power of adventure and community connection for a full year in their areas — powered Community Adventures forward with inspiring momentum, leading 65 adventures around the country.

In addition, through our Prescribe Adventure initiative, several of our Alumni Ambassadors represented FD at conferences, including AYAs Take Chicago, CancerCon, AOSW and AdventHealth Littleton National Cancer Survivors' Day.



PRESCRIBE ADVENTURE



The Prescribe Adventure initiative aims to reach more young adults through partnerships and awareness by better assisting healthcare professionals and advocacy groups in sharing information about the healing power of adventure with their patients and constituents.

In 2025 we established 66 new Healthcare Partners, including relationships with NCI-designated hospitals, community-based hospitals, and patient advocacy groups. We sent out 332 Prescribe Adventure Kits (PAK) to healthcare contacts and connected with healthcare professionals at the following conferences: Oncology Nursing Society Congress; Consortium of Multiple Sclerosis Center Annual Meeting; Academy of Oncology Social Workers Annual Conference; CancerCon; Academy of Oncology Nurse & Patient Navigators Annual Conference; Leukemia and Lymphoma Society Blood Cancer Conference; National Oncology Conference; and the Society for Integrative Oncology Conference.

ADDITIONAL HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDED:

- Optimized peer-to-peer recruitment tactics through PAK orders. This led to 240+ alumni PAK orders, including 175+ different hospitals/medical centers.
- Among the 66 new healthcare partners, we initiated an ongoing partnership with SHARE Cancer Support and established five new NCI-Designated Cancer Center partnerships: Holden Comprehensive Cancer Center; Mayo Clinic Cancer Center; Harold C. Simmons Comprehensive Cancer Center; Lineberger Comprehensive Cancer Center; and Rogel Cancer Center
- Starting in 2021, FD began collaborating with the NIH to study the impact of our programs for healthcare workers responding to COVID.

Read the study published in 2025: <https://peerj.com/articles/19109/>

PRESCRIBE ADVENTURE SPOTLIGHT



In 2025, we partnered with the Tigerlily Foundation's ANGEL Advocates, the foundation's advocacy program that supports those dealing with breast cancer to share their experiences and impact health equity in breast cancer by eradicating disparities in age, stage, and color.

Highlights of our collaboration included two informative sessions for Tigerlily ANGEL Advocates to learn about upcoming FD activities and excursions — including an opportunity to connect with the FD team in a Tigerlily Empower Chat, a “virtual campfire” to share alumni spotlights — and shared opportunities to get involved through the FD newsletter and ANGEL Opportunity emails. This ultimately led to 15 additional inquiries and two ANGELS joining FD on a weeklong program.

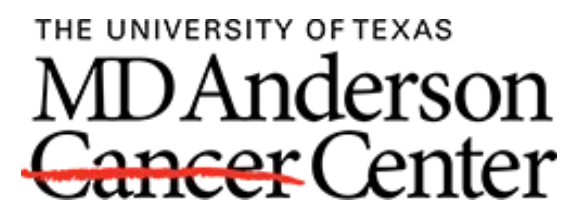


“My First Descents experience was an absolutely amazing retreat to the Great Smoky Mountains in North Carolina. Having this time to step away from the stressors of cancer and everyday life was so therapeutic. Being able to relate with other participants dealing with cancer and survivorship was comforting.”

– T’Ana Johnson, Registered Nurse, MBC Thriver, ANGEL Advocate



Our Prescribe Adventure healthcare and advocacy partners join us in our initiative to share information about the healing power of adventure with their patients and constituents. The following hospitals and advocacy groups include our top referral partners.



Memorial Sloan Kettering
Cancer Center



OUT LIVING IT PROJECT

Whether pushing personal limits or rallying supporters, the Out Living It Project offers a dynamic platform for FD community members to make a lasting impact, either through their own unique fundraisers or to join existing projects and races, all with the goal of raising awareness of and funding for young adults impacted by cancer and MS.

In 2025, Team FD athletes competed in high-profile races across the country, including the Leadville Trail 100 Run and Leadville Trail 100 MTB, and the TCS NYC Marathon. **To date, the Out Living It Project has raised more than \$9M across 2,563 projects with 48,882 supporters.**



\$432,819

RAISED

2,321

DONATIONS

73

CAMPAIGNS



“Since I was a kid, doing outdoor activities has always been instilled in my way of life. As I got older, I looked for ways to be outdoors and challenge myself at the same time. The Out Living it project allowed me to take on the ultimate outdoor challenge by running in the Leadville 100 run. It was so extremely easy picking an organization that’s so amazing like FD, that allows young adults who are taking on the fight of their lives to get out and enjoy the most amazing thing we have on this planet — and that’s the outdoors.”

– Chance Thackston, OLIP Fundraiser



FINANCIALS

In 2025, our generous community generated more than \$4.15 million, representing an exceptional fundraising year that included \$540,000 toward our Go Beyond Capital Campaign.

In recognition of our financial transparency, Guidestar once again awarded FD with its coveted platinum ranking. In addition, Charity Navigator recognized First Descents with a 4-star rating, the highest possible score for accountability, transparency, and financial stewardship.

www.firstdescents.org/documents

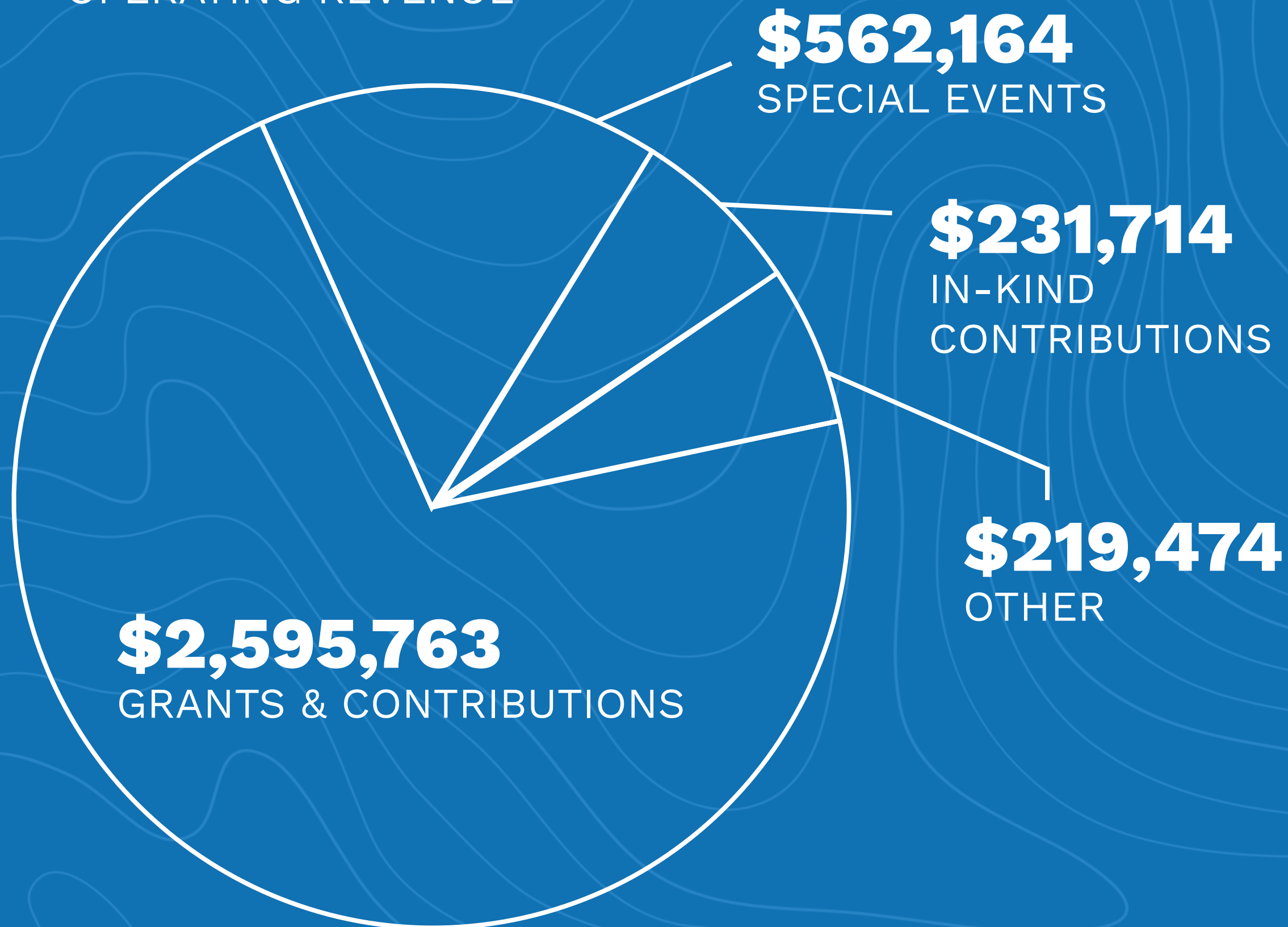
Charity 
Navigator



REVENUE AND EXPENSES

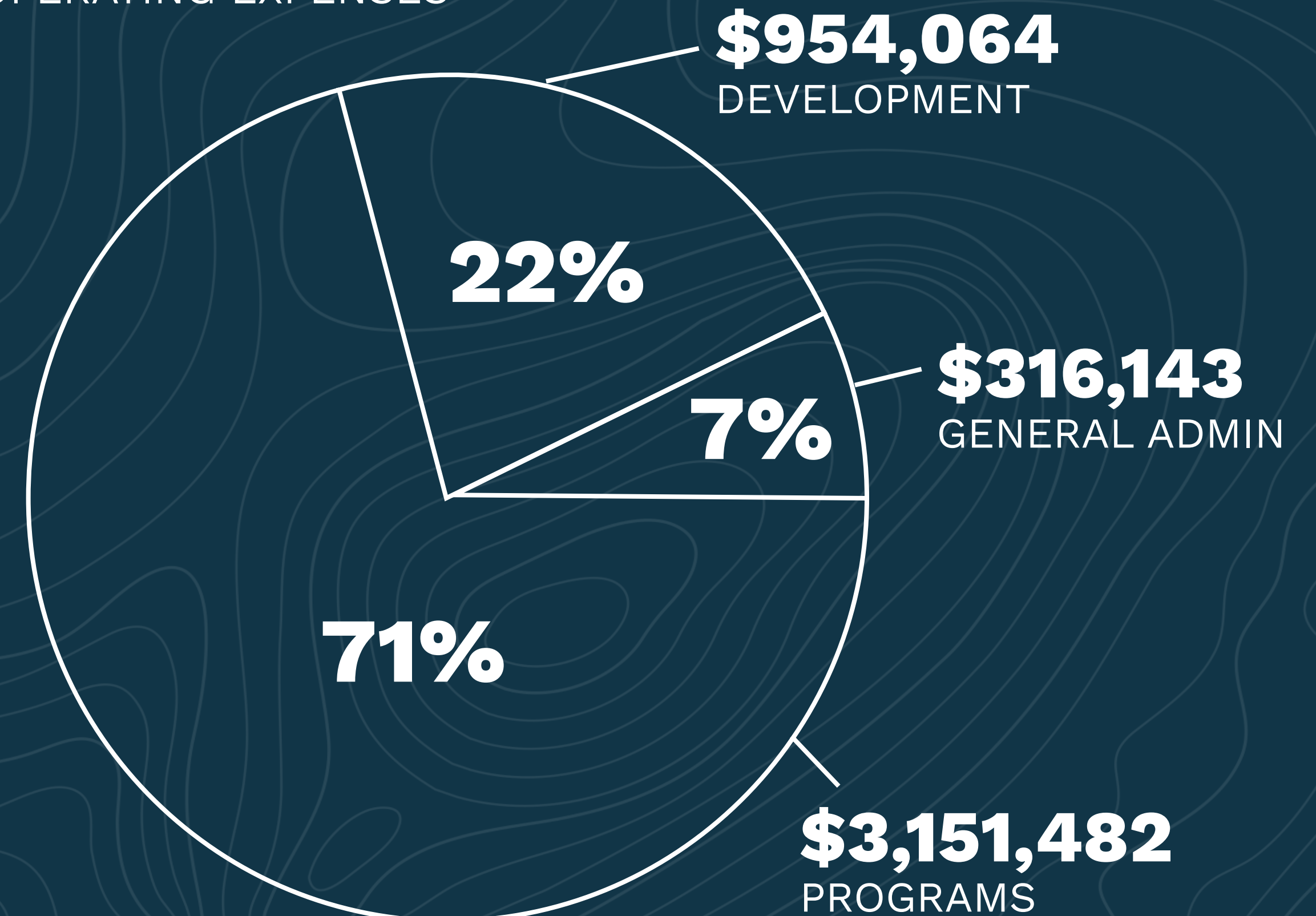
\$3,609,116

OPERATING REVENUE



\$4,421,688

OPERATING EXPENSES



*An additional \$540k was raised for the Go Beyond Capital Campaign, resulting in total revenue of \$4.15M.

GIVING SOCIETIES

FOUNDERS CIRCLE

Michael Gross
Joel Appel
Brent & Lisa Goldstein
Anonymous
Jeremy & Sandra Shevlin
Josh & Jennifer Behr
Beyer Family in honor of Cynthia Powell
Jennifer Feikin
Rise Above It (RAI)
Wacky Warriors
Kip Cross & Jessica Martin
Eva Ho
The Kantor Family
Grady Durham
Kirk MacKenzie
Always Keep Pedaling Foundation
Anonymous
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James & Crystal Dean
David & Iris Gordon
Katie & Tom Morgan
Amy "Wildflower" Lin
Cathleen "Chunks" Robinson
Nancy Oaks
Rich & Diane Easton
Katherine & Doug Milham
Mindy Boyum
Patrick Johnson

Jeff & Anna Gardner
Jay Mazurowski in honor of Danielle "Unicorn"
Mazurowski

AMG EDDYFLOWER

Andreas Harl
Austin Mayeux
Ben Wright
Brad Ludden
Brent Goldstein
Corbin Clement
Danielle's Dreams
Gutkin Family
Greg McFadden
James Dean
Jennifer Jackson
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Travis Stover
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Lindsey Cannon
Teddy Leonard
Laura Minard
Joseph Guilmartin
John Wittry
Aspyn Repp
Jessica Wunderlich
Susan Krapinsky
Tami Yinger
Colin Mitchel

20 YEARS OUT LIVING IT

Alix & Hans Berglund
Jennifer Mills
Nancy & Rob Samit
Sandy & Joe Samberg
Kevin & Whitney Zimmerman
Brent & Lisa Goldstein
Mark & Marshall Stockseth
Rita Lamoureux
Wacky Warriors
Shine Foundation

DONORS

\$100,000+

Vytalogy Wellness
ImpactAssets, Inc.
The Hovde Family
The Michael Gross Family Foundation
Sandy & Joe Samberg
Anonymous
The Offield Family Foundation
Tap Cancer Out
The Gateway Fund II of the Denver Foundation
(DBA: The Beacon Fund)
The Flourish Trust

\$50,000 - \$99,999

Kirk MacKenzie
Robbie Lamoureux Swanson
The Oak Foundation
The Char & Chuck Fowler Family Foundation
Steve Hovde
Michael Beber

\$25,000 - \$49,999

Patrick & Jenny Johnson
The Anschutz Foundation
Anonymous
Brent & Lisa Goldstein
The James J & Joan A Gardner Family
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Kevin & Elizabeth Keating
Chuck Ludden
Joel & Tiffany Appel
Monica Liley Skok & John Skok
BDT & MSD Partners
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The Precourt Foundation
Scott Lynes & Brian Coulthard
Marianne Keating
Grady & Lori Durham
Phillip Beyer
The Gray Foundation
Heli Adventures, Inc.
Jay Mazurowski

\$10,000 - \$24,999

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Cary Hayes
Anonymous
Brandon & Courtney Hayes-Lattin
Anonymous
Soul Ryeders
The Triford Foundation
Russell & Sara Hirsch
Candice Willmon
Nancy Oaks
Anonymous
The Mellam Family Foundation
James Koons
Fairplay Markets LLC - DBA Prather's Market
Kathryn & Nick Raffensperger
Michael Harger
Will & Kristin Flanary
Daiichi Sankyo Inc. (DSI)
The Baskin-Robbins Joy in Childhood
Foundation
Servier Pharmaceuticals LLC
Thomas & Sandy Usher
The Murray Foundation
MidWestOne Bank
The Seabury Foundation
Matt & Ashley O'Reilly

DONORS

Jennifer Risser
The Mann Family Foundation
The Epperson Family Foundation
Berglund Architects, LLC
John Geller
Edward & Kathleen Quinn
The BT Foundation
Jose Perez
PJT Partners
Gunnar Sachs
Mark Gould
Lacy's - The Topp Drawer
Obermeyer Wealth Partners

\$5,000 - \$9,999

Elizabeth Wigginton
Jesse Sanders
Jenny & Greg Baldwin
Marc & Lindsey Gutman
Jonathan & Stacey Seligson
The El Pomar Foundation
Norman Goldberg Trust
Lori & Kevin Pederson
Jason & Amanda Lee
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Matthew Des Biens

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Sanderson Family
The Eberly Wallace Family Fund
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Gilead Sciences, Inc
Kip Cross & Jessica Martin

\$2,500 - \$4,999

Zack Ein
Bill Johnson
Susan Velani
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Whitney Kelly
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William & Molly Gilmore
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The Jones S. Davis Foundation

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Erin & Doug Stockalper
The Kruse Family Philanthropy Fund
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Victoria Johnson
The Enterprise Mobility Foundation
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Mike & Marisa Sharkey
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\$1,000 - \$2,500

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Downtown SLC B Retail Condo LLC
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Andy Funk
Lindsey Trees
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Matty Swanson
Brian Ciciora
Shehrazad Joudeh
David Weaver

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\$1,000 - \$2,500 (CONTINUED)

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Backbone Media
The Ho Foundation

Pfizer
JP Morgan Chase
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Jack Singleton

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HERE'S TO ANOTHER YEAR OF OUT LIVING IT

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