



## Kids in Parks

### *Getting kids outdoors for their health and the health of our parks*

Over the past few decades, people have become increasingly disengaged with nature, spending less time outdoors and more time interacting with electronic media. Recent studies show that, on average, kids spend 7.65 hours per day “plugged in” and only seven minutes per day participating in unstructured outdoor play. These trends have led to declining visitation rates at parks and public lands; and, concurrently, childhood obesity rates have increased, with one in three children in the United States being classified as overweight or obese. The Kids in Parks program grew out of a vision to address these trends by getting kids “unplugged” and physically active in parks, helping to mitigate the negative effects of sedentary lifestyles and cultivate the next generation of stewards for parks and the natural world.

Founded in 2008, Kids in Parks is a proven program that gets families outside to explore a network of TRACK Trails established through partnerships with municipal, state, and federal land agencies. There are currently more than 200 TRACK Trails in 12 states and Washington, D.C., crossing state and agency boundaries through a common mission to get kids and families reconnected with the joys of spending time in nature. TRACK Trails provide family-friendly adventures through the use of self-guided materials designed to support active family engagement, increase trail use, and introduce recreational opportunities available in parks, forests, and communities. After each excursion, kids can register their trail adventures at [kidsinparks.com](http://kidsinparks.com) to earn prizes designed to keep them engaged with the program. Data collection is built in to the delivery of those incentives to demonstrate impact, and Kids in Parks shares this valuable data with its park and funding partners.

To help link health with spending time outdoors, Kids in Parks created a complementary TRACK Rx program. Through TRACK Rx, Kids in Parks partners with doctor offices and hospital systems to prescribe TRACK Trails and other outdoor activity to patients; and through the program’s registration system, healthcare providers receive real-time notifications regarding their patients’ outdoor activity.

### Nature’s Impact

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

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



*350,000 family adventures completed on TRACK Trails.*

*With an average group size of 3.39 people, more than 1,250,000 total adventures have been completed.*

*More than 200 TRACK Trail partners have joined the network.*

*Over 600 healthcare providers writing prescriptions for outdoor activity on TRACK Trails.*



## History of the Program

Kids in Parks started with a vision to make existing trails more attractive and fun for novice users. In 2008, 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 network of trails and partners along the Blue Ridge Parkway in North Carolina and Virginia.

However, since the issues of childhood obesity, nature deficit disorder, and declining visitation rates affect kids and parks across the country—not just those living near the Blue Ridge Parkway, or the Parkway itself—the program expanded beyond the Parkway’s corridor in 2011. Due to the program’s effectiveness and ease of implementation, parks across the country rapidly embraced Kids in Parks. Today, the program comprises a national network of self-guided trails that include hiking, disc golfing, paddling, biking, geocaching, and citizen science adventures. To date, more than one million people discovered the joys of outdoor recreation and reconnected with nature during a TRACK Trail adventure.

## Data Demonstrating Success

Kids in Parks’ TRACK Trails are low-cost, proven interventions with built-in evaluation tools, making them an effective public engagement strategy for parks. Program data demonstrates that Kids in Parks gets kids unplugged and engaged in outdoor recreation.

### The health of our children:

- 11% of registrants were first-time hikers
- 635,000 miles hiked by kids on TRACK Trails
- 320,000 hours of outdoor adventures by kids on TRACK Trails
- 95 million calories burned by kids on TRACK Trails

### The health of our parks:

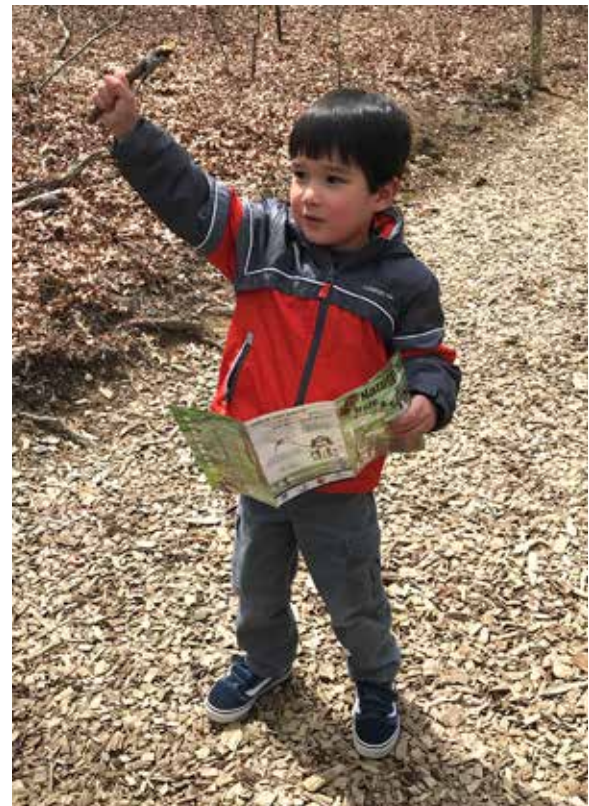
- 53% of registrants visited the park for the first time
- 51% intentionally visited the park to hike the TRACK Trail
- 47% of registrants returned for a second adventure
- 88% of returning users visited more than one TRACK Trail location

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



*“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 levels. Here is a timeline detailing a few of the program's milestones and accomplishments:

## June 2010 - Installation of "Gateway" TRACK Trails

Created trails in partnership with state parks, municipal parks, and other land management agencies in communities adjacent to the Blue Ridge Parkway, building a network of gateway trails.



## March 2012 - Kids in Parks Receives National Recognition

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



## October 2015 - TRACK Rx: Prescribing TRACK Trails for Kids

Formally launched the TRACK Rx program by partnering with doctors to prescribe TRACK Trails to kids and families through the release of the program's TRACK Rx displays, brochures, and prescription pads.



## June 2019 - National Expansion Continues

With the addition of Oregon and Washington, Kids in Parks has expanded its network of TRACK Trails to 12 states. Several other states have expressed interest in the program and are awaiting funding.



## August 2009 - Kids in Parks Opens the First TRACK Trail

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



## September 2011 - Testing the "Proof of Concept"

Installed a TRACK Trail at Custer State Park in South Dakota to test the replicability of the program in 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 15 National Parks in the Washington, D.C. area, including the National Mall, Manassas National Battlefield, and President's Park.



## March 2017 - Salzburg Global Seminar

Invited to participate in the Salzburg Global Seminar's session on "The Child in the City: Health, Parks and Play" in Salzburg, Austria to discuss the work Kids in Parks is doing to connect families with nature.



## 2019 - Progress to Date

Developed a national network of more than 200 TRACK Trails that link public land management agencies, health care providers, foundations, corporations, and other funders together through a common mission to get kids and families active outdoors.

# TRACK Trails: National Expansion

Kids in Parks was originally developed as a self-guided trail program for children visiting the Blue Ridge Parkway, one of the most visited units of the National Park Service in the country. However, since nature-deficit disorder and childhood obesity are not “Parkway”-specific issues, the program expanded its scope. 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 national parks, state parks, city/county parks, as well as forest service, army corps, private land, schools, and tribal sites across the country.

To expand the reach of the program to a wider audience, Kids in Parks adopted other outdoor recreation activities to complement the program’s traditional hiking TRACK Trails. These other forms of outdoor recreation include: disc golf, geocaching, paddling, biking, and citizen science.



Kids in Parks partnered with South Dakota’s Game, Fish, & Parks Department to spread TRACK Trails to almost every park in its system. The program also has TRACK Trails installed in partnership with the North Carolina and Virginia State Park departments. Currently, there are TRACK Trails in more than 75 state parks, with many more in development.



In addition to the National Park Service, Kids in Parks has partnered with other federal agencies, including the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The program has also been transferred to any U.S. Department of Land Management.



Kids in Parks partnered with San Diego County Parks Department to install TRACK Trails in California. In order to reach kids and families through parks closer to home, Kids in Parks has partnered with 80 municipal park sites across the country, linking city and county parks with national parks, state parks, and other public lands.



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, follows the Oconaluftee River under the terminus of the Blue Ridge Parkway, and continues into Great Smoky Mountains National Park.





Kids in Parks partnered with an elementary school to create a Citizen Science TRACK Trail that aligns with North Carolina curriculum standards for students in grades K-5. The trail has self-guided brochures, turning the schoolyard into a learning laboratory where students collect data and learn about science found in nature.



Kids in Parks has partnered with the National Park Service to install 33 TRACK Trails. Through a grant received from the *Healthy Parks Healthy People* program, 15 of those trails were installed in the National Capital Region, including the National Mall and Memorial Park, President's Park, Manassas National Battlefield Park, and the C&O Canal National Historical Park.



ational Park Service, Kids in Parks  
other federal land management  
the U.S. Forest Service and Army  
The program can also be easily  
S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau  
nt, or other federal land sites.



Kids in Parks has partnered with more than 140 doctor offices and enrolled more than 600 providers in their TRACK Rx program. TRACK Rx is an element used in the Blue Cross NC Blue Quality Physician Program (BQPP). The BQPP program rewards independent primary care practices for high-quality, low-cost, access, and patient-centered care.



## TRACK Rx: Prescribing Outdoor Activity on TRACK Trails

Over the past few years, Park Prescriptions (Park Rx) has been a growing movement, with healthcare providers formally prescribing parks and nature activities to kids and families. Due to Kids in Parks' network of trails in different park settings, variety of outdoor recreation activities appealing to many age groups and audiences, incentive system with built-in assessment measures, and suite of TRACK Rx materials, the program has become one of the leaders in the national Park Rx movement.

### AAP Endorsement

In 2011, Kids in Parks was endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics as a program physicians could prescribe to children. Following this endorsement, Kids in Parks began working on the development of the program's TRACK Rx materials. Today, the program has more than 140 doctor offices and 600 providers writing prescriptions for kids to participate in outdoor recreation through TRACK Trails.

### TRACK Rx Materials for Healthcare Providers

To increase the impact and effectiveness of the program, Kids in Parks created a pediatrician office trailhead sign to display in the lobbies of doctor offices and healthcare facilities. The display houses the program's self-guided TRACK Rx: Hiking Toward Health brochure that offers patient's fun outdoor activity they can do anywhere, including their own backyard. In addition, the program has developed rack cards and patient-room posters displaying the network of TRACK Trails in the doctor office's region. Healthcare providers can use the program's customized prescription pads to formally prescribe the program and its TRACK Trails to patients. Each prescription has a unique nine-digit serial number that corresponds with the doctor's office, doctor, and patient. When patients register their prescription through the program's website and enter the serial number, Kids in Parks records the fulfillment of the prescription and provides automated reports to the healthcare provider about the patient's fulfillment and any continued participation in the program.

**TRACK Rx**  
**Outdoor Activity in Nature**  
 Patient's name: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Today's Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Recommended Dosage: \_\_\_\_\_  
☐ Play outside  
☐ Play in a park  
☐ Go for a walk, run or bike ride  
☐ Play an active game or sport with friends  
☐ Go for a hike on a TRACK Trail  
☐ Other: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Unlimited refills!  
 Health professional's signature: \_\_\_\_\_  
 Parent/child signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Dr. Olson Huff  
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 Asheville, NC 28803  
 Ph: (866)308-2773 x384  
 Register your adventure at:  
[kidsinparks.com](http://kidsinparks.com)  
 Serial Number: **KIP-RX1-001**



*"The American Academy of Pediatrics would be delighted to support the national Kids in Parks' efforts to encourage more children and families to be involved in outdoor activities."*

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





## Partnering for Family, Park, and Community Health

The Kids in Parks program is unique because it partners with a variety of land management agencies, health care institutions, schools, nonprofit foundations, and corporate organizations to implement a singular on-the-ground program. Kids in Parks is innovative because it links often isolated groups together through a unified vision for the health and well-being of our children and families, parks and public lands, and communities. The problem affects us all and the solution will take all of us working together.

### Agency Partnerships

Multiple local, state, and federal agencies have joined the Kids in Parks network, making this program unique in its ability to cross agency boundaries by keeping 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. The program's intra-agency network allows families to think about accessibility and convenience, potentially bringing them to park locations they may not have chosen to visit otherwise.

### Community Partnerships

Communities across the nation are seeking ways to remain attractive and competitive as desirable places to live and work. Several communities have invested in Kids in Parks TRACK Trails as a low-cost and effective way to add value. Hiking trails, bike paths, disc golf courses, and greenways are being rediscovered by residents through the Kids in Parks network.

### Financial Partnerships

The program was initiated through a visionary partnership with the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation. The strength of the TRACK Trail and TRACK Rx networks in North Carolina is a direct result of this state-focused support. The true potential of the program lies in implementation of a national network supported at the local, regional, state, and national levels. Other partners, such as the BlueCross® BlueShield® of South Carolina Foundation, have seized the opportunity to establish a partnership to realize this broader goal.



### Financial Supporters

Blue Cross and Blue Shield  
of North Carolina Foundation  
BlueCross® BlueShield®  
of South Carolina Foundation  
Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation  
National Park Service  
National Park Foundation  
REI Inc.  
Appalachian Regional Commission  
Be Active Appalachian Partnership  
Blumenthal Foundation  
Wythe-Bland Community Foundation  
Private Individual Donor Support



### TRACK Trail Partners

#### National Park Service - 33

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

#### State Parks - 75

NC - Chimney Rock, Mount Mitchell, Stone Mountain, Lake James, and more  
VA - Grayson Highlands, Hungry Mother, Claytor Lake, and more  
SD - Custer, Lewis & Clark, Angustora, Big Sioux, Lake Louise, and more

#### Municipal Parks - 80

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

#### Other Agencies - 8

U.S. Forest Service: Pisgah, Cherokee, and Black Hills National Forest  
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers: W. Kerr Scott Dam and Reservoir, Fort Hamby

#### Private Lands - 4

Orchard at Altapass, Rockfish Valley, Fontana Village Resort

#### Schools - 4

Buncombe County Schools

#### Other Nations - 1

The Eastern Band of Cherokee Indians

TRACK Trail partners and locations are continuously being added to the network.



## Endorsements and Awards

The Kids in Parks program has been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics, reviewed favorably as a practice-tested intervention by the Center for Training and Research Translation—a program funded by the Center for Disease Control, mentioned in the 2014 National Prevention, Health Promotion, and Public Health Council's Annual Strategy Report released by the U.S. Surgeon General, and highlighted in the National Park Service's Healthy Parks Healthy People report in 2014. Kids in Parks was recognized by the White House with a "Let's Move! Champion of Change" award, earned the Outstanding Visitor Engagement Award from the Public Land's Alliance in 2015, and won the Youth Engagement Award at the 2018 SHIFT Festival.



## Partnering to Get Kids in Parks

Kids in Parks is able to work efficiently with agencies ranging from large national parks to small community greenways, and from private practices to entire hospital systems. The program's materials are ready to be replicated and disseminated to partners across the country, providing kids and families with fun activities that motivate them to get active outdoors.

As Kids in Parks continues to expand over the coming years, the formation of corporate, foundation, and additional philanthropic partnerships will help the program realize its mission.

**Contact us to find out how you can get involved!**



## Our Leadership Team



### Olson Huff, MD, 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 lifelong passion for helping improve the overall health of kids and communities.



### Carolyn Ward, Ph.D.

*Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, CEO*

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

## Join the Growing Network



### Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation Kids in Parks

322 Gashes Creek Road  
Asheville, NC 28803

KidsInParks.com  
(866) 308-2773, ext. 384



### Jason Urroz

*Kids in Parks, Director*

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