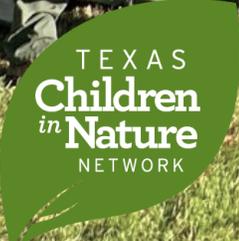


# 2023 ACCOMPLISHMENTS REPORT

Texas Children in Nature  
Network



## ABOUT TCINN

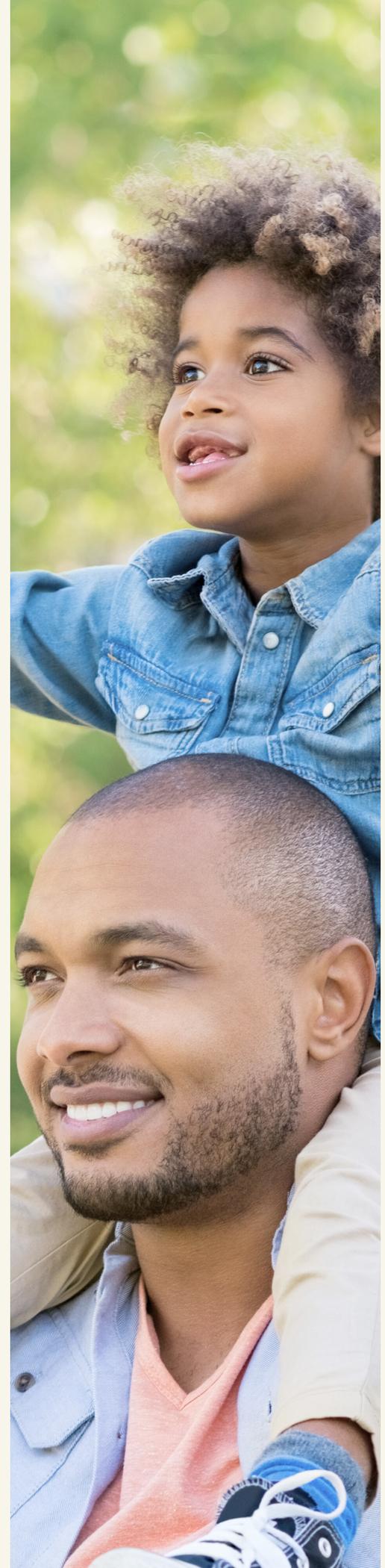
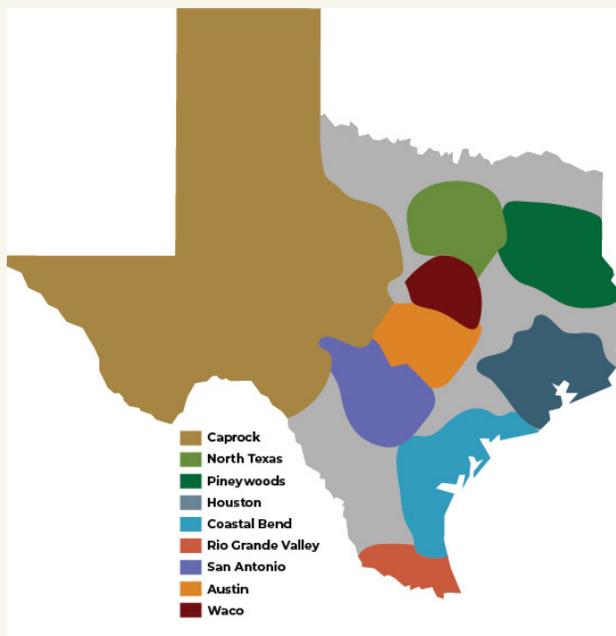
We strengthen and leverage the work of over 800 state and local partners across Texas, working in the health, community development, education, and conservation fields. With our partners we work towards creating equitable access and connection to nature for all children in Texas. Through our partner programming and projects TCiNN engaged over **7 million families** in Texas during 2023.

The Texas Children in Nature Network supports the children in nature movement through the sharing of resources, production of an annual summit, and technical support to our partners. With our partners TCiNN has created the strongest statewide nature collaborative in the nation.

## ACCOMPLISHMENT HIGHLIGHTS

### **In 2023 we accomplished the following:**

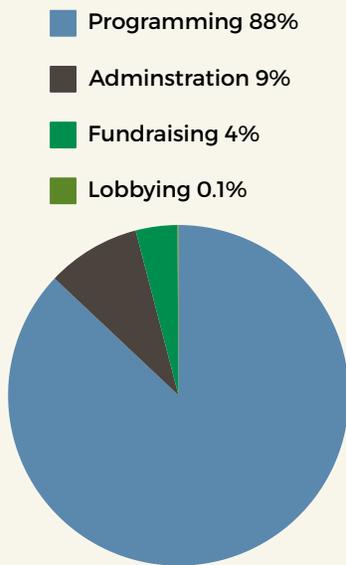
- In December we hosted our 2023 Summit, "Kids Need Nature, and Nature Needs Kids," at the C. Baldwin Hotel in Houston for 298 attendees
- Hosted webinars and shared resources for 3134 attendees
- Our three Health and Nature Liaisons working in the Rio Grande Valley, North Texas, and Gulf Coast regions of Texas launched and expanded the Library Explorer Adventure Pack Nature Smart Library program. They are working on coalition building and developing initiatives to engage more children and families in nature - including an upcoming Park Prescription program
- Worked with the University of Texas on an innovative program with High School and Early College Students in Pharr, Texas to address climate change and empower students to make change in their communities
- Provided Technical Assistance to over 200 partners throughout the year



# THE FIGURES

## HOW YOUR DONATIONS WERE USED

This graph shows the percentages of spending for 2023



## GROWTH OF PARTNERSHIPS

Collaboration across the state is growing

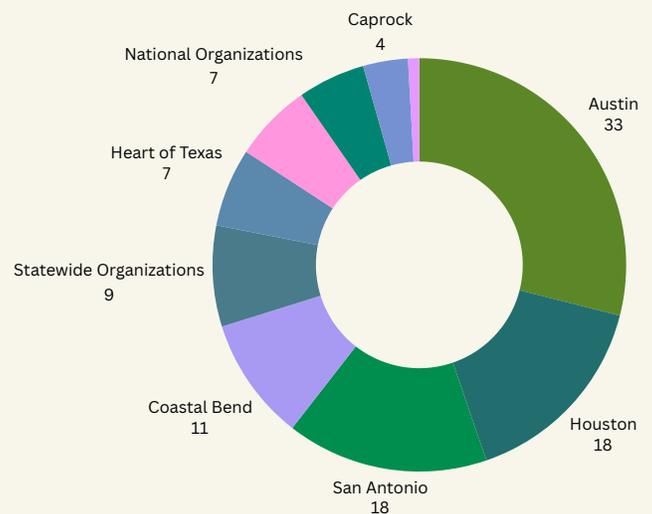


## GRANTS WE RECEIVED IN 2023

- Department of State Health Services - Community Conversations on Health - \$300,000
- University of Texas Planet 2050 Initiative: \$12,000
- Driscoll Health Plan - Library Explorer Adventure Packs: \$12,700

## TECHNICAL ADVICE VISITS BY REGION

Where we provided support this year



# MAJOR PROJECTS



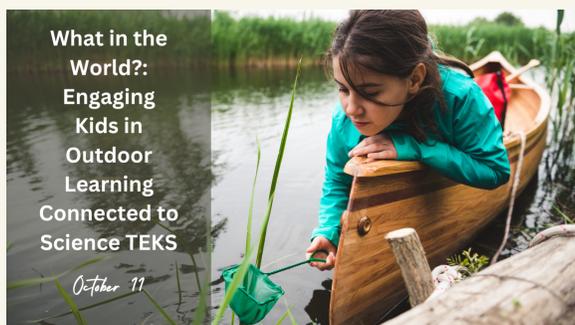
## CITIES CONNECTING CHILDREN TO NATURE/NATURE EVERYWHERE

This initiative is led by the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network. CCCN helps city leaders and their partners ensure all children have access to nature. This year CCCN rebranded to Nature Everywhere. TCiNN continues to work with the existing CCCN cities as well as encourage other Texas cities to apply for future rounds of funding through our Technical Support work.

Staff from TCiNN also attended national all-site meetings for our Nature Everywhere work with Early Childhood Education and Nature Smart Libraries.

## OUTDOOR LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS - OLE! TEXAS

OLE! Texas transforms early childhood spaces through research inspired landscape designs to increase physical activity and connection with the natural world. TCiNN works with OLE! Texas to convene stakeholders and facilitate professional developments for teachers. This year TCiNN worked with state partners to support the initiative during a contract transition at the Texas Department of State Health Services, and looks forward to working with our state partners to expand the number of OLE! Texas sites across the state.



## WORKSHOPS AND WEBINARS

TCiNN is sharing best practices and resources with partners and teachers through our series of webinars and workshops. Monthly webinars cover topics such as equity in the outdoors and public health with experts in the field. Teacher workshops are offered throughout the year to help teachers teach more in the nature spaces on their campuses. This year we launched our health specific webinar series for health professionals and those looking to promote nature as a public health strategy. In 2023 TCiNN hosted 25 webinars with a total of 3134 viewers.

# MAJOR PROJECTS

## NATURE SMART LIBRARIES

A Nature Smart Library is a community library where communities can engage with the outdoors through the outdoor space at the library, materials at the library, and with nature programming at the library sites.

This spring TCiNN launched its first program within our new Nature Smart Libraries initiative: the Library Explorer Adventure Packs (LEAP). Piloted in the Rio Grande Valley ten libraries featured backpacks full of nature exploration gear through the generous support of DSHS and Driscoll Health Plan. These packs can be checked out for 2-3 weeks for free exploration, and even come with free admission to our Texas State Parks for two adults. The program was so successful TCiNN is working with DSHS to expand the project in our Gulf Coast and North Texas regions.

In addition TCiNN staff has been working with library staff across the state to increase nature programming at libraries, and working with individual library systems to improve the greenspace around libraries to offer locations for nature play.



## ANNUAL SUMMIT

Every year TCiNN hosts a gathering of leaders across the state. During this three-day Summit, TCiNN brings together health, education, built environment, faith and conservation community leaders to shape an even brighter future for the children of Texas. TCiNN convenes thought leaders to strengthen the network and develop opportunities and policies that will connect more children and families with nature. Our Summit in 2023 engaged 298 partners and raised \$10,000. We also honored six amazing Children and Nature Champions

- H-E-B: Our Texas Our Future
- Kiki Corry
- Fernanda Marrero Hi
- Michelle Medina, OTD
- City of Pearland Delores Fenwick Nature Center
- Ready to Grow Gardens

# MAJOR PROJECTS

## UT PLANET 2050 PHOTOVOICE

This summer and fall TCiNN partnered with the University of Texas at Austin Planet Texas 2050 Research Team, Pharr-San Juan-Alamo (PSJA) ISD and the City of Pharr to gather students for an innovative Photovoice project. Students documented their community, specifically in relation to nature access and climate change. Thanks to a grant from the University of Texas we were able to gather the students for trainings and advisory meetings, including a stipend for their time.

In November, a Photovoice Exhibit was held at the Pharr Memorial Library, showcasing the research and work of 25 local PSJA students. This project was led by Marisa as a part of youth engagement in nature in the Rio Grande Valley. The students' exhibition was attended by city officials, and in the spring the students will be working to create a project to address the concerns the students highlighted during the fall exhibition.

The exhibit will also have a showcase in Austin this spring.



## PRESENTATIONS FOR TEXAS CHILDREN IN NATURE NETWORK

This year staff from Texas Children in Nature Network presented at multiple statewide and national conferences. Including plenary presentations at the [Texas Department of State Health Services Grand Rounds](#), the AgriLife Health Summit, and the [Texas Chapter of the Wildlife Society](#).

Overall the staff presented for 1600 people this year.

# HEALTH AND NATURE LIASONS



This program is part of a grant from the Texas Department of State Health Services and Texas Parks and Wildlife Department to address health disparities in Texas. Through the grant TCiNN collaborates with local health agencies and nature entities to address health inequities in Texas communities by increasing their access to nature.

They are working in three areas of Texas to work towards making nature a health strategy - big audacious goal is to have parents think of nature as one of the top things they can engage with for healthy kids.

## NATURE AS A HEALTH INITIATIVE IN SCHOOLS

This year the three Health and Nature Liaisons partnered with an ad-hoc health committee of TCiNN partners to create a Nature as a Health Initiative in Schools document. This document was created in conjunction with a webinar TCiNN hosted on how to engage School Health Advisory Committees (SHACs) in encouraging outdoor time for students for their mental and physical health. This document is now available for schools, SHACs, parents and more to engage schools in the discussion about the importance of time outdoors for students.

**TEXAS Children's Nature** *Healthy. Happier. Stronger.*

### Nature as a Health Initiative in Schools

#### STUDENT HEALTH

**WHAT ARE THE ISSUES**

- Depression, anxiety, and other mental health disorders have increased over the last 20 years in children ages 6-17 years old.<sup>1</sup>
- 2 in 5 students suffer from a chronic health condition, which can last from a year to a lifetime if left untreated.<sup>2</sup>
- Childhood obesity has increased at an alarming rate in the US, with nearly 20% of children, ages 2 to 19, being obese. The rate of obesity is even greater in Hispanic and African American children, ages 2-19, with 28% obese.<sup>3</sup>
- Less than one-quarter (24%) of children 6 to 17 years of age participate in 60 minutes of physical activity every day.<sup>4</sup>
- There is a need for increased awareness about the connection between free play and overall physical and mental health.

**FACTORS IMPACTING STUDENT HEALTH**

- Overall childhood health is impacted by their environment, genetics, and sociological learning.<sup>5</sup>
- Schools play a critical role in shaping mental, physical, and social growth of students, with 95% of children and adolescents in the U.S. spending much of their daily lives in school<sup>6</sup> and consuming half their daily calories while in school.<sup>7</sup>
- Safety concerns, increased violence and online bullying.
- Recess policies and time outdoors in free play.
- Equitable access to safe outdoors spaces.
- Increased screen time during school and at home.

#### WHY TIME OUTDOORS IS KEY FOR CHILDRENS HEALTH

Abundant research shows that children and teens who regularly play and learn outdoors:

- Are healthier physically and mentally**
  - Improves mental health
  - Helps reduce and prevent the onset of childhood obesity and diabetes
  - Important for healthy development of bones, muscles, and balance
  - Higher self-esteem
  - Feel more capable and confident
  - Reduced stress
- Are more successful in school**
  - Better attention span
  - Higher test scores
  - Have good self-discipline
  - Are effective problem solvers
  - Are more cooperative with others
- Are more creative**
- Better connected to nature, and positioned to become the conservation leaders of tomorrow**

(1) CDC Children's Mental Health, 2022. (2) CDC Promoting Health for Children and Adolescents, 2022. (3) CDC Childhood Obesity Facts, 2022. (4) CDC Physical Activity Facts, 2022. (5) Jackson childhood obesity in the Houston area, 2023. (6) CDC Youth Risk Behavior Study, 2021.

# HEALTH AND NATURE LIASONS

## NORTH TEXAS

Our Health and Nature Liaison in North Texas, Jenny Larios, has made the following accomplishments:

- Established and expanded over 50 partnerships in the region
- Reached 310 families at outreaches in the region
- Presented at two conferences
- Promoted LEAP backpack program to public library systems, health officials, and the larger community



## GULF COAST

Our Health and Nature Liaison in the Gulf Coast, Alicia Fontenot, has made the following accomplishments:

- Organized 3 HEB Our Texas, Our Future film series Screening Events
- Promoted OLE! Texas in the region
- Updated the Houston Regional Collaborative Website with professional resources, community events, and pictures.
- Fostered about 30 new relationships
- Reached about 500 community partners and environmental educators/ professionals

## LOWER RIO GRANDE VALLEY

Our Health and Nature Liaison in the Lower Rio Grande Valley, Marisa Oliva, has made the following accomplishments:

- Launched the LEAP backpack program in the Rio Grande Valley with 48 backpacks currently in libraries in the region
- Worked with 25 highschool students during the UT Photovoice project
- Reached over 350 families at the Rio Grande Valley Birding Festival kid zone programmed by TCiNN
- Built up existing relationships with approximately 40 organizations across the RGV, including library partners, nature organizations, health organizations, and school districts





# THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

## 2023 SUMMIT

**Presenting Sponsor:**



### **OTHER SPONSORS:**

Texas Parks and Wildlife Department  
Children & Nature Network  
Hayden and Lynn Brooks  
Lyda Hill Philanthropies  
Harte Research Institute of Gulf of Mexico Studies  
National Wildlife Federation  
Student Conservation Association  
Buffalo Bayou Partnership  
Driscoll Health Plan  
The Fay School  
PBK  
Garden Club of Houston

Blackland Collective  
St. Arnolds  
Fox & Seeker  
Center for Health and Nature  
Texas A&M Forest Service  
The Nature Conservancy - Texas  
Houston Audubon  
Rambler  
Bienenstock Natural Playgrounds  
PEA Group  
Shield Ranch  
Sustainable Forestry Initiative

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### **Founder's Circle Members:**

Annette Renaud  
Asakura Robinson  
Bob and Margy Ayers  
Buddy and Maggie Steele  
Darcy and Steve Bontempo  
Fossil Rim Wildlife Center  
Hayden and Lynn Brooks  
Heather Kuhlken  
Huyler Brooks  
Jaime Gonzalez

Laura Agnew  
Linda Welsh  
Marty Leonard  
Molly Stevens  
Nancy Herron  
Rolando Balli  
Ryan Spencer  
San Antonio River Authority  
The Winkler Family Foundation