

Pathways

notes from the field

FALL/WINTER 2014



MUDDY SNEAKERS®
the joy of learning outside



STUDENT PERSPECTIVES

Dear Ms. Katie,

Thank you for all the good memories we have from Muddy Sneakers. You made Muddy Sneakers an awesome learning experience for our school. Next year our 4th graders will hopefully have just as much fun as we did. One Muddy Sneaker day I really enjoyed was the forces of motion one, where we learned all about the forces. From that lesson I really enjoyed the boat building even though my boat came last. I learned all about wildlife throughout including what you can eat, what to stay away from and what to do in a certain situation. Without you where would I be?

Your friend,

Ava

Hillandale Elementary

Dear Muddy Sneakers,

I have enjoyed being in Muddy Sneakers so much. During a Muddy Sneakers day we get to learn outdoors. You can experience so much more outside than inside. I have gone to Carl Sandburg and Holmes State Forest but I had never been to Dupont. Before Muddy Sneakers I didn't know anything about the woods. I also hated the woods now I enjoy being outdoors a lot more. I learned a lot of trees too. Like the white pine, the hemlock, and the oak tree were. I also learned a lot of flower names too. For example the pink lady slipper. During an on campus Muddy Sneakers we went on a nature walk. Then we made a physical and chemical change to an object we picked up. That really helped me understand that a rip in a leaf doesn't make a difference in the actual leaf. We have done so many fun things during Muddy Sneakers and the helped me understand science.

Love,

Emma

Hillandale Elementary



Instructor Spotlight: Katie Lawn



What is your background?

I grew up outside of Chicago spending family vacations camping, biking, and skiing in the north woods of the upper mid-west. After spending some time in the Rockies, I eventually made my way south attending college at Appalachian State University.

How long have you been a MS instructor?

I have been a Muddy Sneakers instructor for 3 years.

Why do you like being a MS instructor?

It is the pure joy of watching someone else, whether a child or an adult, find a connection between themselves and the natural world. I also value working with such a passionate, team-orientated group of people.

What is one of your most memorable moments on a MS learning expedition?

One of my most memorable moments happened just recently in Jackson Park in Hendersonville. While making cloud observations a student spotted a dozen or so hawks in the sky. Within minutes the group was able to count 106 beautiful broad winged hawks migrating south!

What is your favorite expedition site?

I love our days in Gorges State Park for it's remote feel and diverse terrain. The days at the Pink Beds in Pisgah National Forest are refreshing, with the meadows and mountain bogs being a rare treat for our students to experience.

What do you spend your time doing when not teaching for MS?

I spend time exploring the beautiful woods out my back door and getting on the water in a canoe or kayak. As winter comes I am settling into my new yurt, working on home projects, and traveling to visit friends and family.

Director's Report

It's hard to sit still when you work in the field of environmental education. This work involves movement, engagement and discovery. The staff of Muddy Sneakers has always embraced the dynamic nature of our work, from field instructors to administration. It is this shared passion that continues to grow the organization stronger while attracting ever-increasing attention from those that want to see it replicated.

One of the things I've enjoyed most about my first three years with Muddy Sneakers is the feeling of being a part of something that cannot help but evolve and expand to serve and impact more students and communities. That said, we are quickly approaching carrying capacity for our one program office and must now give serious consideration to how we can continue

to serve more students while ensuring that growth is sustainable. Recognizing the process ahead, staff and board have worked diligently to seek outside expertise and financial support to assist with this critical planning effort. With an exceptional new class of board members bringing with them diverse professional expertise, we eagerly await the planning process that lies ahead and look forward to the next stage in our evolution.

Meanwhile, Muddy Sneakers continues to set precedent as a deeply integrated, non-formal education partner serving the needs of students across western North Carolina and soon upstate South Carolina. Participating students receive access to an increasingly unique, hands-on educational experience that prioritizes a deep understanding of the science curriculum. Delivering this educational experience is an increasingly talented staff of field



instructors. The organization has always set high expectations for its instructors and continues to pride itself on maintaining those standards through field shadowing, routine evaluations, teacher feedback and environmental educator certification. To be a successful Muddy Sneakers field instructor, we believe you must be an educator first and foremost, capable of presenting the curriculum efficiently in order to allow for opportunities to naturalize, explore and reflect. Field instructors are asked to balance the needs of the school, its students, the state curriculum, and of



course, the ever-changing natural conditions. We are proud to say that Muddy Sneakers instructors have a command of the material that in turn allows for more 'teachable moments,' those times when the natural world puts

on a display worthy of a group's full attention. It is pure magic to watch a gifted educator apply their skills in a hands-on, experiential setting. If you have not already, we hope you will consider reaching out and allowing us to schedule a day when you can go witness the Muddy Sneakers experience firsthand. Until then, please accept our deepest gratitude for all that you do as Community Sponsors and Major Donors to make this work possible.



Muddy Sneakers welcomes some new faces...

Muddy Sneakers is grateful to have three new Board members and an Administrative Assistant join the team.

Kristen Aquino currently leads funding efforts for Mission Health's Heart and Vascular Programs, and has 9 years of experience in philanthropy and resource development. Prior to moving to Asheville to work for Mission Health, Kristen worked for The Nature Conservancy's Mid-Atlantic region residing in Charlottesville, VA.

Dr. David Joyce became the 13th President of Brevard College in 2012. Dr. Joyce has 30 years of experience in higher education, formerly the president of Ripon College (WI) and Union College (KY). In his spare time, Dr. Joyce enjoys whitewater canoeing, fly fishing, and mountain biking

David Watkins was born and raised in the suburbs of Detroit. In 1983, David moved to Brevard to begin Keir Manufacturing, a business that produces industrial parts made of advanced materials. David and his family enjoy spending time exploring the many hiking trails around western NC.

Taylor Ladd is our newest addition to the Muddy Sneakers administrative team. She comes to us with a diverse and extraordinary skill set, including database management, marketing and graphic design. Most recently, Taylor was the Director of Research and Education at the Southern Highlands Reserve in Lake Toxaway, NC. She has extensive experience designing and creating community gardens, greenspace planning, and teaching. She enjoys spending time outdoors paddle boarding and hiking.

For more information on the Muddy Sneakers staff and Board of Directors, visit the website at www.muddysneakers.org



CAMP MUDDY SNEAKERS

the joy of being outside



Camp Muddy Sneakers celebrates a successful second season!

This past summer, campers from western North Carolina and beyond – even as far away as Ohio and Michigan! – spent week-long sessions immersed in the firsthand study of the natural world with Camp Muddy Sneakers. Traversing local landmarks ranging from the 6,000-foot peak of Sam Knob to the waterfalls of the Green River Gamelands, campers deepened their relationship with the natural world through days dedicated to animal tracking, Appalachian geology, aquatic ecosystems, and much more. Reflecting on his Camp Muddy Sneakers week, one camper said, "This is so fun. I mean, things like video games are fun, but that's more like ready-made fun. This is actual fun." Another wrote, "Thank you for teaching us so much important stuff about nature. I wish I could stay all year. But I have to go back to school!"

-Ben Nelson, Assistant Program Director

To learn more, please visit www.campmuddysneakers.org.

A warm welcome to Muddy Sneakers from Saluda, NC

Muddy Sneakers delights in connecting with children, educators, and landscapes in new communities throughout our region. This year, we have received an especially warm welcome from the small town of Saluda, NC. In early August, intrepid Saluda students explored local forests, streams, and trails during a special week of Camp Muddy Sneakers. The following month, 22 5th graders from Saluda Elementary School became the first Polk County students to participate in Muddy Sneakers learning expeditions. Our first steps in Saluda would not have been possible without the support of many generous partners within the local community. In addition to the teachers and administrators of Saluda Elementary, we are especially grateful to Sarah and Tim Bell of Green River Adventures / The Gorge, who helped raise awareness and Community Sponsor funding for their school; and to the Saluda Community Land Trust, who has provided us with access to a wealth of conserved lands. All of us at Muddy Sneakers look forward to strengthening these new connections throughout our first Saluda season.

-Ben Nelson, Assistant Program Director





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JOIN THE MOVEMENT!

Become A Community Sponsor

With ever-increasing school interest, Muddy Sneakers relies on the support of its Community Sponsors to grow this incredible program and **we need your help!** 'Sponsors' serve as the organization's annual members, a group of donors committed to ensuring their financial contributions directly translate into more children connecting with the natural world. Visit www.muddysneakers.org to learn how you too can join the movement!



Benefits of Sponsorship

- Providing the opportunity for children to connect with nature
- Creating the next generation of environmental and conservation stewards
- Access to sponsor hikes lead by Muddy Sneakers naturalists
- Sponsor-only enrollment discount in Camp Muddy Sneakers
- Periodic newsletter/e-newsletter *Pathways*
- Invitations to Muddy Sneakers events

