For the last 23 years, Environmental Learning for Kids (ELK) has had the pleasure of exposing young people to the outdoors through hands-on experiential activities, and providing them with opportunities to explore careers in the STEM fields – and what better way to explore careers in the STEM fields than engaging in one? Since 2015, we’ve had the pleasure of not only serving young people, but hiring them. Known as our “Student Coordinators”, we continue to be wowed by our young leaders and the projects they create and share with other young people in these roles.

Since 2017, Chris Urias, ELK Student Coordinator, has stewarded and led a partnership between ELK and Denver Health’s MEND program (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition, Do it!). Because of his efforts, numerous families and young people have been introduced to healthy habits within the outdoors. Through this, Chris has had the opportunity to polish his skills in stewarding partnerships and networking.

ELK Student Coordinator Luz Ortega meanwhile, has been leaving her mark on the classroom. After noticing the lack of diversity within the realm of scientists and inventors we often celebrate, Luz, in partnership with ELK staff, created a Diversity Curriculum dedicated to highlighting people of color in the areas of STEM. Not only did Luz get to perfect her research skills through this project, but her efforts provide young people of color with heroes and heroines that look like them.

Then there’s Yesica Chavez, who is establishing her legacy in a most “extreme” way. This year, Yesica started ELK’s first Girls Climbing Club. In partnership with Brown Girls Climb, her leadership has coached 15 young girls to the mechanics of rock climbing – within their very own neighborhoods. Her leadership of this group has infinitely helped her hone both physical and project planning abilities that will help her in all aspects of life.
To explore and learn outdoors in nature has been at ELK’s core and is critical as we engage youth and community in developing and designing the Montbello Open Space. Restoring the 4.5-acre vacant land to a native prairie landscape will be a long-term process and commitment. We view the restoration as an educational opportunity. And it will require a lot of “weed management” pulling and eradicating noxious non-native plants. It will also allow us to learn more about plants native to our arid landscape. We will do seed collection, plantings and other volunteer activities to reclaim this important gem in the community. We are grateful to our partners, Denver Parks and Recreation and The Trust for Public Land for their commitment to promote conservation and restoration of this natural community.

There’s some fun too! We are very excited to finish construction of the natural play areas. These areas will provide opportunity for healthy physical activities and facilitate play activities and movements like slithering, climbing, crawling, running, jumping, squatting, and flying. ELK integrates physical activity into its science and nature interactions. In recent years the conservation field has come to understand that unstructured, nature-based exploration is a powerful influence on the development of life-long conservation values. We want our youth and community to form a deep appreciation and respect for the prairie landscape and the environment of far northeast Denver. We’ll be pulling weeds and hope that you’ll be pulling for us as we continue our fundraising efforts and vision for the Open Space and our Education and Community Center in Montbello.

For Our Youth,

—Loretta Pineda, Executive Director
Upcoming Programs

Wednesday, June 26th
Field Day at Aurora Reservoir
Ages: ELK Families
Time: TBD
Location: Meet at Aurora Reservoir
Sign-Up: RSVP with Amy Wright at awright@elkkids.org

Saturday, July 27th
Mt. Evans Field Trip
Ages: Middle School & High School Students
Time: TBD
Location: Meet at DCIS Montbello
Sign-Up: RSVP with Amy Wright at awright@elkkids.org

Saturday, August 17th
Go Wild in Your Park – Back 2 School Field Day!
Ages: ELK Families
Time: 9am-2pm
Location: Meet at Montbello Civic Center Park
Sign-Up: RSVP with Amy Wright at awright@elkkids.org

Quote
“The part of the trip I appreciated the most was the trip to the university, because we got to see what it would be like being college students; opening the door for more opportunities.”

Quote
“This trip changed how I felt about the outdoors because I was an introvert and now I feel like the outdoors is where I belong.”
We are so proud of our ELK Colfax Marathon runners! This year, we were thrilled to have 40 runners run in support of ELK (including one ELK youth team). We are very thankful to our partners who made this possible such as Kaspo, Inc. (who donated our spiffy custom running t-shirts), Illegal Pete’s (for providing our awesome athletes with post-race burritos), and YOU! Your support allowed us to reach our goal of raising $3,000 in support of our runners – all of which goes directly to ELK. Our team has already begun training for next year!