Throughout the pandemic, The Fresh Air Fund never lost sight of its mission of over 145 years: providing life-changing and transformative experiences outdoors for New York City children from low-income communities. In many ways, children have been the pandemic’s unseen victims, with their loved ones struck by illness and their lives suddenly revolving around quarantining and remote learning. As we looked towards summer 2021, we knew that children would need the opportunity to be outside in fresh air, to play and enjoy the magic of summer. Through creativity, commitment, a network of incredible partners and the generosity of supporters, we once again reimagined what summer could look like and redefined fresh air.

As we made the difficult decision not to run our traditional Friendly Towns or Camp programs for a second year in a row, we were guided by available public health guidance and regulations. We were focused on how we could safely connect New York City children to the outdoors and provide opportunities for them to learn, grow and thrive in the summer and beyond.
THE POWER OF SUMMER

The Fresh Air team started with a clear goal: we would stand by NYC children and our Fresh Air families, many of whom live in the communities most affected by the pandemic and the subsequent economic crises. We understand the power of summer. It can support healthy childhood development, address summer learning loss and provide children with opportunities to strengthen social-emotional skills. We applied what we learned from summer 2020, our year-round engagement with children and families, and surveys and conversations with our families to design a new road map for a combination of virtual and in-person summer 2021 programs.

We committed to finding the resources and partnerships needed to provide children with the experiences they deserve and need. We knew children needed to feel safe, connect with other children and caring adults, have new experiences, learn new things, gain confidence, make friends and experience the joy and magic of summer.

Throughout the planning process, our guiding principle to put children first informed how we would invest in the lives of our young people and ensure their safety and security while providing enriching summer experiences. All programming would connect to The Fresh Air Fund’s positive youth development framework to develop inner strength; build relationships and support networks; expand perspectives and set goals; and take on challenges and learn life skills.

Informed by this strategic thinking, we built on and expanded virtual programs and our programming outdoors in NYC and at The Fund’s camps in New York’s Mid-Hudson Valley. We launched six programs: Fresh Air Summer Spaces, Fresh Air Open Spaces and Fresh Air Family Wellness were outdoors, and Fresh Air Everywhere and the new Friendly Towns Connect program were virtual. In addition, we expanded the hybrid Summer Teen Academy.

Throughout the summer, youth experienced the fresh air and green spaces across NYC in parks as part of Open Spaces in partnership with the City Parks Foundation, in neighborhoods at Summer Spaces sites across NYC and on kayaking trips in the Bronx as part of our expanded Camp Junior year-round programming. The Family Wellness program shifted from day trips in 2020 to two-night, three-day trips in 2021. All credentialing partners returned to the Teen Academy, and we introduced new Level 2 advanced courses for returning students. All six programs demonstrated how youth thrive when resources are invested in their communities. And partnerships and program models that create safe ways for children to explore, learn and grow proved again why summer matters and how enriching summer programs can help bridge the opportunity gap.

As The Fresh Air Fund looks forward, the strength and conviction of our mission continues to demonstrate how we can redefine and expand our commitment and programming for NYC children and families. While summer 2021 is full of memories and experiences that will last a lifetime, it is also just the beginning of all that we need to do - and can do - for NYC children and families.

99%
Of parents/guardians would recommend The Fresh Air Fund to family and friends

84%
Of youth said they got better at meeting people and making friends

90%
Of youth said The Fresh Air Fund helped them feel more active and healthy

1,340
Camp-in-a-box activity kits were sent to participants

85%
Of youth reported feeling more confident

86%
Of parents/guardians said their child is more open to trying new things
FRESH AIR IN NYC: Creating Community and Exploring the Outdoors

FRESH AIR SUMMER SPACES

For the second year, The Fund brought fresh air to NYC streets and provided safe and structured neighborhood play spaces at 11 program sites in Brooklyn, the Bronx, Manhattan and Queens. This summer, the program sessions were extended, offering the opportunity for children, ages 5 – 12, to spend more time connecting with peers and counselors and engaging in activities ranging from hula hoop contests, jumping rope and soccer to arts and crafts like creating kites and kaleidoscopes. There was an increased focus on STEM, art and literacy, which was supported through incredible partnerships.

BioBus brought the excitement of hands-on science activities to many of our sites, turning Summer Spaces into an outdoor laboratory where, guided by educators, children looked into telescopes, made observations and hypotheses, and had the chance to discover new interests and learn about the environment. A favorite STEM activity was building go-carts in small groups with Infento modular kits, which were then used for fun obstacle course races!

Teaching artists from the American Ballet Theatre returned for a second summer offering children at several of our sites the opportunity to experience the joy of dance. Instructors from The ASCAP Foundation led interactive music workshops focusing on rhythm, melody and songwriting. The Queens Public Library Mobile Library program visited our sites in Jackson Heights and the Brooklyn Public Library Kidsmobile visited our Brooklyn sites, providing children and families the chance to sign up for library cards and check out books.

In addition, the USTA provided tennis clinics for children, Brighter Bites provided families with boxes of fresh produce and long-time partner OneSight provided free vision screenings and access to free glasses for children and adults who needed them.

Supporting The Fund’s strong commitment to investing in job training and employment opportunities for young people, we hired over 100 18–24-year-olds who served as counselors, coaches and mentors.

There are so many fun things to do here - like when I play soccer or do an art project. I've also learned a lot of cool games!

– Ugyen, 7

I tell all my friends to join Summer Spaces because it's super fun. We do activities, play games, and if they want to do arts and crafts with me, we can do that here too!

– Marilyn, 7

95% Of children said their time at Summer Spaces helped them feel more active and healthy

92% Of children said the program helped them get better at meeting people and making friends
FRESH AIR OPEN SPACES

For the second summer, The Fund partnered with the City Parks Foundation on Fresh Air Open Spaces. This year, the program expanded and provided more specialized opportunities for youth to focus on environmental education, STEM or sports activities through three programs: Coastal Classroom, Learning Gardens and Everyday Play. The program was operated at several city parks including Pelham Bay Park, Forest Park and Socrates Sculpture Park.

YOUTH EMPLOYMENT

The Fresh Air Fund has a long history of providing leadership and professional development opportunities for young people. This summer we employed over 200 youth, ages 18-24, as counselors across all our programs, including more than 50 alumni of Fresh Air programs.

“I’ve been with The Fresh Air Fund for a really long time – this is my tenth year! Every year, I try something new and I always like to challenge myself as an individual, and I have always been open to doing different things. I joined this program specifically to get a new perspective – I had never done coding before so I wanted to learn just as the kids are learning. We learn together.”

– Brianna, 20

A critical staffing priority was ensuring we had robust social work support across all our programs and increased technology support for all virtual programs. The social work team was able to connect children and families to resources and provided vital encouragement as children started to reacclimate to in-person activities at Summer Spaces after many children had recently completed a full year of remote learning.

“Working at The Fresh Air Fund was motivating and inspiring for me. The students I worked with really motivated me to be more than just a teacher for them – I became a mentor too. They also inspired me through this experience and even pushed me to want to do more things for myself like expand my education and get a Master’s degree so I can continue to work with youth.”

– Zoe, 22

97% Of participants found new things they were good at – that they didn’t know they were good at

97% Of participants felt more active and healthy

200+ 18-24 year-olds were employed as staff

54 Of the youth employed were alumni of Fresh Air programs
SUMMER TEEN ACADEMY: A Commitment to Investing in our Teens

The Fund's history of investing in career awareness programs – coupled with our commitment to supporting teens as they navigate educational and professional opportunities during the pandemic – led to the creation of our Summer Teen Academy. Building on the innovative model from 2020, the program provided opportunities for youth to explore future careers, earn credentials, gain job training and professional development experience, and connect with a support system of peers and counselors. All programs offered stipends ranging from $500 – $1,000 depending on the time commitment required.

CREDENTIALING PROGRAM

Four partners worked with The Fund in 2020 on programs that gave teens basic industry-level skills, exposure to new career paths and a certificate of completion for their resumes and portfolios. All four partners returned in summer 2021: PennPraxis at the University of Pennsylvania’s Weitzman School of Design, Urban Arts Partnership, NOLS and Youthful Savings.

The Design Studio program in partnership with PennPraxis at the University of Pennsylvania's Weitzman School of Design taught Fresh Air teens about urban design through a hybrid curriculum that weaved together multiple disciplines including art, design, activism, architecture and landscape architecture. On Governors Island, teens completed hands-on projects that combined learning about design and art with a focus on social impact. They collaborated on creating physical models of Governors Island and, working with a new partner, the Beam Center, contributed to the constellation project by artist Ye Qin Zhu, which illustrates the idea that even when there is distance between us, we are all connected. Students cast ceramic bells, welded a steel frame, and built the base and anchoring units for the project.

The Coding/Game Design program in partnership with the Urban Arts Partnership School of Interactive Arts added a Level 2 program for returning students to advance their skills. Level 1 introduced new participants to game design principles as well as programming, illustrations and sound design. Level 2 students further developed coding skills and created their own video game. Each Friday, teens met with guest speakers to learn more about the game design and creative technology industries.

The Teen Academy Environmental Leadership program in partnership with NOLS focused on Environmental Justice. NOLS field instructors from around the world helped participants explore a deeper understanding of self, team and community, and develop leadership and wilderness skills. A summer highlight was visiting Brooklyn Bridge Park, where teens learned about seining, participated in a park clean-up service project and explored the ecology and biodiversity of the Hudson River.

The Entrepreneurship Program in partnership with Youthful Savings taught students financial literacy skills and how to create and market their own business, with a chance to win a cash prize to invest in their business. Teens also enjoyed a guest speaker series and an in-person visit to the Union Square Farmers Market hosted by the Union Square Partnership.

Youthful Savings really helped me in starting my own business and to learn the skills I needed to become a successful business owner. The guest speakers were my favorite part of the whole program!

– Ralph, 15, Youthful Savings
JOB READINESS
The virtual Job-Readiness Training Program for 13–15-year-olds focused on career exploration and building leadership skills. Workshops included an introduction to post-secondary education options and pre-employment skills such as conflict resolution, effective communication, resume writing and financial literacy. Students had the opportunity to learn about career fields from our corporate partners including the TJX Companies, NYU Langone Hospital, Simpson Gumpertz & Heger, Proskauer Rose LLP and more. For their final project, students presented a career exploration project researching a specific career path.

“In Job Readiness, you learn so much more about the real world and how to adapt to a work space. It’s a lot of information on creating a resume, internships, financial literacy and so much more that you don’t learn at school. These are the skills you need in the real world.”

– Nia, 15, Job Readiness

INTERNSHIP PROGRAM
This summer the Youth Internship Program had virtual, hybrid and in-person internship offerings. Teens were placed with our virtual camp or with Summer Spaces, or participated in a new journalism cohort in partnership with the organization Sweet Blackberry, culminating in a final project called Voices of Summer and a newsletter highlighting the stories of their fellow teens. Each Friday, interns participated in virtual professional development and team building workshops.

YOUTH ENRICHMENT PROGRAMS
Teens across all of our programs participated in our Youth Enrichment Programs, which created safe spaces for teens to connect with peers and mentors.

The Girls’ Empowerment Program included a Friday night virtual series, creating a community space to share with and support their peers and learn from special guest speakers who spoke about their professional and personal journeys. The series culminated in a day trip to Camp ABC which included team-building workshops as well as traditional camp activities like archery and boating.

Circle of Brotherhood launched this summer with a focus on community-building, social-emotional learning and discussing views on healthy manhood and current events. Students are helping plan an upcoming Young Men’s Fall Virtual Symposium.

“I now have a community of ladies who will uplift me 100% of the time. I love the sisterhood.”

– Marielis, 16, Girls’ Empowerment Program

| 595 | $360,000 | 84% | 86% |
| Youth served | Funds distributed to support stipends | Of teens got better at working as a team | Felt more confident after participating in the Teen Academy |
Fresh Air Everywhere provided NYC children, ages seven to 12, the opportunity to have a fun and interactive virtual experience while learning about nature, developing social and emotional skills, and participating in hands-on STEM and art activities. Children received a “Camp in a Box” kit filled with all program materials. Each camper participated in a final project of their choosing. Projects included building a biome, delivering a Tiny TED Talk on the meaning of community or designing a brochure for their own national park. A broad range of volunteers from the arts joined campers for the new “Choose Your Expression Day.” Campers learned about creative writing with Penguin Random House, music with Warner Music Group, voice improv with Discovery & Transformation, art with New York Cares, dance with the American Ballet Theatre and acting with The Pit.

“Supply boxes” were sent to participants
84% Of participants shared their experience made them want to visit new places

Friendly Towns Connect

Our newest program, Friendly Towns Connect, was launched this year and was designed to build community by providing opportunities for NYC children and volunteer host families to connect and engage in virtual programming together. Aimed at children ages 7-12, programming focused on art and STEM, with interactive activities ranging from building star projectors and building bird feeders to scavenger hunts. Participants received supply boxes with art supplies, materials needed for STEM experiments and a book.

Partner organizations in NYC and throughout Friendly Towns hosted Friday virtual field trips, including Brooklyn Bridge Park, Karate Do Ken Wa Kan, Friends of the Upper East Side Historic Districts, the Intrepid Museum, the Brandt Foundation Art Study Center, CS Equine Therapy and Therapeutic Horses of Saratoga, Flying Deer Nature Center in East Chatham, NY and Living Classrooms in Baltimore, MD. Through Friendly Towns Connect, children had new experiences, made new friends and gained new perspectives.

533 "Supply boxes" were sent to participants
800+ Books were sent to Fresh Air Everywhere campers
92% Of participants want to take better care of the environment

“Friendly Towns Connect is something fun for everyone to do during the summer. It helped me grow my art skills and meet so many new people!”

– Ryan, 12

My favorite part of Fresh Air Everywhere is book club – it’s so fun to read together! I want to do this next summer too!

– Matthew, 7
FRESH AIR FAMILY WELLNESS: Supporting NYC Families

At The Fund's camps in New York's Mid-Hudson Valley, Fresh Air Family Wellness expanded this summer to overnight trips, providing more time for Fresh Air children and families to spend together enjoying the outdoors, exploring nature, trying new activities and relaxing as a family.

Families visited The Fund's Sharpe Reservation and The Fund's Camp Junior in Harriman State Park. Activities, all ranked as favorites last year, included boating, swimming, hiking, archery, fishing and visiting the camp Model Farm.

Every year, my son, Nicholas, wants to be at camp to enjoy the scenery, activities and friends. Painting by the lake at the campfire was a wonderful moment for me as a mother – no wonder he is always looking forward to being here and spending time with friends and counselors.

- Shandra Woworuntu

The program ensured all safety guidelines were followed, allowing families to focus on connecting with each other and to appreciate time in the outdoors surrounded by beautiful nature trails, lakes and fresh air. Families shared that after spending so much time on screens over the past year, they found it rejuvenating to spend time as a family away from electronic devices. 100% of families said that after their Family Wellness trip they felt more connected to nature, and 100% said that they felt more active and healthy.

When they arrived at camp, families were provided with welcome bags containing necessities such as sunscreen and extra masks and games, like Uno, Frisbee and jump rope, to play together. They also chose from a selection of donated books, received a box of fresh produce from local farms as they left and returned home with special memories that will last a lifetime.

Going to camp was truly an amazing experience and being able to experience it with my family was so grounding! I think it’s so amazing for parents specially to attend and see where they are sending their children. It is a gem right in your very own backyard. See your children be children!

- Serene Stevens

1,163 Adults and children participated in the program 99% Of families said they felt more connected as a family after their Family Wellness trip

Family Wellness was really fun. I loved it. Everyone was really kind and I loved the activities – I tried archery for the first time and learned how to use a bow. It was a wonderful trip!

- Anderlis, 13
Thank you

Fresh Air Summer 2021 could not have happened without the support of all our generous donors, but we give special thanks to the following donors who provided financial support specifically for our programs.

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We are grateful to the many partner organizations and individuals who helped us – by donating items, giving of their time, helping launch new programs and providing additional encouragement and support. They made the magic of summer happen!