Happy 25th Anniversary!

This year marks 25 years of Eagle Eye. It is hard to believe the organization is well into its third decade of engaging urban youth in nature; the time has flown by! For those who have been involved at any point from the early 90’s to today, the “Eagle Eye Alumni,” this year is an opportunity not only to pause and reflect on the past, but also to look forward to the future and the possibilities and challenges it holds.

First Annual Alumni Gathering

In early August, fifteen members of the Eagle Eye community gathered at MountainStar Forest in Peru to reconnect, celebrate, and rejoice in the spirit of the land. The attendees included former and current staff, interns, youth, instructors, youth workers, partners, and board members from the 90’s to today, from the Boston area, Vermont and Western Mass.

The event was the first convening of Eagle Eye’s Alumni Association, a group for those who continue to be inspired by their experience with Eagle Eye and wish to support the organization’s work going forward.

The weekend retreat highlighted Eagle Eye’s strengths over the years. As the group watched a slideshow of Eagle Eye history photos, each person recalled a specific program, natural site or staff person, smiling and laughing at memories they had almost forgotten. A simple and delicious lunch of vegetable soup, the famous “hummbouli” (hummus and tabouli), and MaJa’s Mountain Cookies was served.

Like Eagle Eye’s youth programs, the agenda incorporated games such as My Motion and The Winds Are Blowing, to break the ice and build group cohesion. Ken Gooch, Learn About Forests (LAF) instructor and board member, taught the group about tree health while they hiked silently and mindfully through the forest. He emphasized discernment when viewing the forest, explaining how to assess if a tree is healthy and, if not, how to determine what happened.

The group worked hard to clear a new section of trail, completing much in a short period of time with sweat, teamwork, handsaws and loppers. Like every group since the beginning of Eagle Eye, the alumni offered their work in gratitude to the site and hosts, affirming their membership in the ever-growing family of MountainStar Forest stewards.

That evening at the fire circle, a summer cookout of fresh local food was shared, including sweet corn, veggie burgers, Rosa’s rice and watermelon. Around the fire, some alums shared their memories of meeting Anthony and MaJa way back when; others, how they got involved with the organization as a youth or student intern, and how the meaningful work and close-knit community kept them coming back.

After sleeping under a brilliant clear and starry sky, the early risers meditated in the tipi. In the breakfast Chow Circle, a long-standing Eagle Eye tradition, the group talked about their favorite parts of the weekend and chose a word to encapsulate the moment: family.
One of the goals of the 25th year was to initiate an Alumni Association, a social and professional networking group that would be involved in the organization’s development going forward. In remembering and celebrating the past 25 years, it is impossible not to consider the next 25, from the standpoint of sustainability, and envision what a future Eagle Eye might look like.

In order to tap into and bolster our most valuable resource, the lives that have been touched by the organization’s work, we began reaching out to folks who have been involved across the decades. The first annual Alumni Gathering was one way to reengage them in the spirit of the work, to connect a part of their past to what is alive and present, and to start imagining what the alumni relationship to the organization will be. We plan to expand the Gathering next year to incorporate more folks with diverse perspectives.

The alumni Facebook group is another way to engage those who want to stay present with an organization whose mission and work they support. In many ways, it is easier than ever to stay in touch these days. Recent technological leaps have allowed us to see what our friends are up to in a single click. The ease of staying connected, however, goes hand in hand with the challenge of becoming overburdened by the sheer amount of information available at all times.

EEI Alumni, our public Facebook group, was created not to overload its members with constant posts (the reality of an organization staying relevant on social media these days), but rather to extend an open invitation: here is what we’re up to; we would love to hear from you. In the group, you will find old friends as well as upcoming events, such as youth programs and stewardship days.

Regardless of your level of engagement with technology (we know better than anyone the need to “disconnect” and get back in touch with the real world), we offer some real benefits of staying connected: volunteer opportunities, connecting with like-minded people, invitations to MountainStar Forest, which has been stewarded to be shared with others, and the chance to have input in an organization you care about.

To join the public group, search “EEI Alumni” on Facebook; don’t forget to add friends who have been involved, too, and help us expand our network!

**Stay Connected:**
Join Our Alumni Facebook Group, EEI Alumni

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**Our Alumni Say:**

“Eagle Eye’s impact on me is a thoughtfulness, attention to the little things you can do each day to reduce your footprint.”
- Mike Remy, Former Youth Worker

“Eagle Eye helped me bridge the gap between critical environmental issues and social justice, and what I realized was the importance of people above all else.”
- Nelson Dow, Former Intern

“Eagle Eye has so much given me a really concrete way to stay connected to nature and urban youth and urban youth of color. I get to do the things I believe in and want to be doing.”
- Kira Jewett, Former Intern, Staff, Board Member, Volunteer

“What makes [Eagle Eye] so special is, it’s an extension of my family; it’s like a second home to me.”
- Melinda Duffy, Former Youth Participant, Intern, Volunteer
New Partnership with Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School

In May, Eagle Eye hosted graduating seniors from the Paulo Freire Social Justice Charter School (PFSJ) in Holyoke for an overnight Learn More About Forests™ (LMAF) program in Peru. Kira Jewett, former Eagle Eye staff and board member and current Science Department Director at the school, helped facilitate the connection.

Eagle Eye is working to create a long-term partnership with PFSJ, with plans to offer day and overnight programs to more students next year and in the future. The school values alternative approaches to education, integrating a social justice curriculum and travel opportunities for students.

Cass Pastorelle, Eagle Eye staff, provided hands-on, science-based instruction for the program. The students learned about four functions of fungi: symbiotic relationships with plants, decomposition, food and medicine, and mycoremediation. The group modeled a fungal network, explored the relationship of decay to forest health, and practiced finding likely spots for mushrooms.

I learned that…

“I love nature and love myself and who I'm becoming (being away from technology helped).

I enjoy camping.

I like nature.

We are all very loving and caring of each other.

The biggest organism in the world is a fungus.

One hundred years ago [the forest] didn’t look how it looks now.

Fire is healing, better than TV.

Nature is very peaceful and connecting to everything.

Beautiful waterfalls are not just in Hawaii.

Nature works like a system - the forest communicates.”

“[I will take home] the need to spread the word about Eagle Eye and the value this experience can have on our students and staff.”

-Ljuba Marshall, Principal, PFSJ Charter School
Fall Stewardship Day with Groundwork Lawrence

The Groundwork Lawrence Green Team joined Eagle Eye Institute for a stewardship day on Saturday, November 5th. The Green Team is a service learning and leadership program for high school students, in which Team members tackle projects to preserve and improve the environment in their community. The youth ranged in age from 16 to 18 and they brought first-hand experience in trail work, carpentry, farming, and more.

Scott Beach, MountainStar site manager, led the beautification and construction project in an area of the forest where a giant hemlock tree was broken in half and lying across a brook. The group cleared the area and utilized the hemlock branches and boughs to build a primitive shelter and bench. The two teams brainstormed design and method and, with Scott’s guidance, used only handsaws, loppers, an axe, a shovel, and rope to complete the projects. Eagle Eye staff and volunteers joined in to provide a fun, interactive and hands-on experience in nature.

“I learned that you can make anything with the resources given by nature.”

“I actually enjoy building stuff and putting things together as a team.”

“I enjoy the hard work more than the end product. I don’t work for the product. I work to expand my knowledge and skill set.”

“I like to work hard and I love to see the finished products.”
The 14th Annual Hike-a-thon took place at the Middlesex Fells in Medford and the Seven Sisters in Hadley on Sunday, October 16th. It was a gorgeous fall day and over forty people had fun in nature while building community and raising money for Eagle Eye programs. The 1:1 match up to $15,000 is in effect thru the end of the year, so there is still time to give to support Eagle Eye’s youth programs in 2017. Melinda Stockmann will host the 4th Annual San Francisco Bay Area Hike for Eagle Eye on Sunday, December 4th at Mount Tam.

Many thanks to all hikers and supporters!

Hike-a-thon Raised $12,500 Towards $15,000 Goal (as of Nov. 15)

A clear view south towards Boston and the Blue Hills.

Medford hikers, including the Healey Boys and Girls Club.

Seven Sisters hikers begin their hike in the early morning fog.
I am grateful for my continued involvement in and growth within Eagle Eye. When I started working with them as a shy and inexperienced college student, they were the first to tell me, you can do it. There is no shame in trying and failing. That’s how you learn and do better the next time around. My supervisors set a high bar, and I learned a lesson I will not soon forget: when you set high expectations for people, they will rise to meet them. It seems there were larger forces at work in our initial meeting, and in my coming back to work for them five years later; I found a group of individuals and an organization whose mission and spirit align seamlessly with my core values – though back then I wasn’t able to name or express them as fully as I am today. Now that I am coordinating programs and other aspects of the organization, I am discovering there is still more to learn. I am thankful for this great work and for Eagle Eye’s support.

I began working with Eagle Eye on community outreach projects through a class assignment over two years ago and knew right away that I was part of something special. Speaking with Anthony and MaJa, looking through old photos, and reading interviews with youth participants, it was clear to me that Eagle Eye had an incredible capacity to inspire a sense of awe and wonder of the natural world for youth of all backgrounds. As I met more members of the Eagle Eye community, I realized how deeply supportive and passionate every person is for each other and the work they are doing. And beyond that, they welcomed me into their circle with open arms, always encouraging me to do my best work. Because of my time working with Eagle Eye, I have not only gained technical skills, but also been empowered to put those skills to work for a cause I believe in.

Sabiha joined us for a week this summer, living, working, and learning on the land in Peru. Mentored by Eagle Eye founders Anthony Sanchez and MaJa Kietzke, Sabiha completed trail work, garden-related tasks such as harvesting and preparing healthy meals from fresh vegetables, and land management projects. She learned how to build campfires. Over the course of the week, she dug into the rhythms of life in Peru, going to sleep with the dark and rising early for meditation and stretching. Sabiha reflected that since she started with Eagle Eye (as a youth participant, seven years ago), she gets out more; she likes taking hikes; she’s learned how nature can be fun and how she can explore. We look forward to Sabiha’s continued growth and participation with Eagle Eye as a bright, dynamic and engaged young leader.
Please help us reach our annual campaign goal of $50,000!

We have already raised $40,000

Help us raise another $10,000 by year’s end!

Your donations are critical in supporting our work of engaging urban youth in hands-on learning in nature that builds awareness, develops responsibility, and cultivates leadership.

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Support Eagle Eye’s Earth Advocates: Green Leaders for the Environment

Contribution Levels

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