



Pine
Project

Gratitude Report 2023 Year in Review



The Pine Project operates on the land we now call Toronto, which has been a site of human activity for thousands of years. One origin of 'Toronto' is the Mohawk word 'Tkaronto', meaning "where the trees stand in the water."* Tkaronto is part of the traditional territory of many Nations, including the Wendat and Tionontati (Petun) First Nations, the Haudenosaunee, and most recently the Mississaugas of the Credit (of the Anishnabeg Peoples).

We are so fortunate to learn and play in two historically significant Valleys of the city:

- The Lower Don, also known as 'Wonscotonach', translating to "burning bright point" or "black burnt country", may refer to the practice of torchlight salmon spearing on the river, or to the impact of fire on the landscape.* The Mississaugas of the Credit had a seasonal settlement here and fished and hunted the marshlands for muskrat, duck, and deer.
- The Humber, also known as 'Niwa'ah Onega'gaih'ih' or "little thundering waters."* For at least 12,000, years an Indigenous trail followed the edge of the bluffs along this section of the Humber River Valley. Just up river from where we gather weekly is Baby's Point, a neighbourhood built on the same spot as 'Teiaigon,' once a village of the Seneca and later the Mississaugas of the Credit.

We extend our deep gratitude to the generations of People – past and present – who have tended this land, the Dish with One Spoon Territory. We acknowledge the abiding wisdom of the Dish with One Spoon treaty between the Anishnabeg and Haudenosaunee that bound them to share the territory and protect the land. The 'Dish' represents what is now known as southern Ontario; we all eat out of the dish with only one spoon, ensuring that our dish is never empty. This symbolizes our ongoing roles and responsibilities of sustaining the land and treating each other and all living things with equity and respect.

Today, Toronto is home to many First Nations, Métis and Inuit peoples from across Turtle Island. We acknowledge the history and ongoing process of colonization, and recognize that in order to realize the promise and challenge of reconciliation, acknowledgement must be coupled with action. At the Pine Project, we are embarking on a journey of understanding and realizing our responsibility to reconciliation, including the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Principles of Reconciliation and Calls to Action. We seek to move forward with humility, respect, gratitude and meaningful relationship building.

*We respectfully acknowledge the many histories and several translations associated with the history of this land.

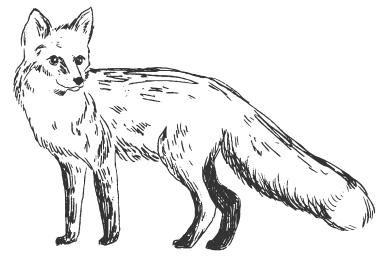


"My daughter's experience from the moment she arrived till the moment she left was magical and inspiring."

- Proud parent of a 9 year old Red Wolf Participant

A Letter from our Executive Director

ANDREW McMARTIN



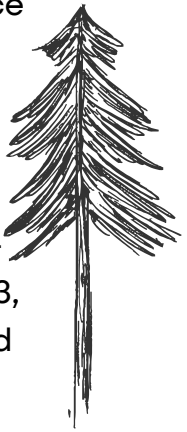
As I look back on 2023, I am overcome with gratitude. Gratitude for nature, the transformative experience it can provide for people of all ages and assumptions that are often forgotten... it provides the air we breathe, the water we drink, the food we eat. Beyond that, I continue to see that nature provides something that seems to be missing from many experiences of childhood today:

- It could be the Coyote Pup (a Pine Outdoor School Program) who comes to programs every week in all seasons, navigating weather from -20C to 30+C, and building resilience and adaptability along the way.
- Or the Red Wolf camper who challenges themselves to build and sleep in a shelter that they made with only natural materials, cook their own food, and clean up after themselves. Their sense of pride and self-confidence, fostered by the opportunity to be independent and overcoming challenges, is evident to all.
- Or the Parent and Tot building simple family practices such as going outside together and enjoying the mental and physical health benefits of nature. Building nature connection can start with something as simple as enjoying a nature walk, listening to the birds, and noticing the variety of plants in your local park.

Since our founding in 2008, with our supporters by our side, Pine has grown to become Ontario's leading nature connection organization. Over the past 15 years, we have connected over 18,000 people with nature. Each journey is filled with all that nature has to offer, the beauty, the challenges, the inspiration and the connection.



Pine culture is child centered, curiosity driven adventure, full of laughter, learning and fun. These are some of the key pieces needed to address the growing mental health epidemic and screen time issues that drive it. When kids are given the space to connect with nature, that's when we see confidence, creativity, resilience, and deep relationships grow.



At Pine, we truly believe that all people need nature. Research has consistently shown that nature connection is essential for people's health, happiness and well-being. All people have a fundamental right to experience nature's benefits. In 2023, we continued on our journey to center equity within our organization in a clear and strategic way. We have so much appreciation and gratitude for the Innoweave program that supported this work.

In 2023, we grew partnerships providing free programs to equity-deserving students and significantly increasing our bursaries available to families, addressing many barriers to accessing outdoor programs such as Pine. We continued to provide training on all manner of equity and inclusion topics with our staff, addressing social barriers. Our vision moving forward is to broaden the scope of this work and connect more people with nature; having Pine participants and staff mirror the City we operate within to a greater degree each year.

Thank you for your generous support in 2023! We are so grateful for this community as we continue to grow in 2024. Thank you for sharing our vision of a world where healthy people are deeply connected to and care for themselves, others and their natural environment. By immersing children in Pine programs, together, we have found joy, nurtured curiosity, fostered resilience, and built confidence in the next generation.

With gratitude,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Andrew McMartin". The signature is fluid and cursive.

Andrew McMartin
Executive Director
The Pine Project





ABOUT US: WE INSPIRE A LOVE OF NATURE

The Pine Project provides 100% outdoor, experiential, inquiry-based, inclusive nature connection programming to thousands of kids each year. By designing our programs to meet the life stage and experience levels of our participants, we positively impact their personal growth and connection to nature. As their connection deepens, participants learn the wisdom of new perspectives from nature, the interconnectedness of all things, and learn to care for themselves, nature, and their communities.

Every day Pine kids experience joy and laughter, find confidence and resilience, and build deep relationships with nature.

Our Magic Ingredients

- 100% outdoors
- Place-based
- Inclusive
- Experiential & inquiry-based
- Child-led & play-based
- Long-term mentoring relationships with low participant-to-mentor ratios
- Consistent routines that foster a connection to nature



Your support helps us empower kids to be happier, healthier, more caring environmental stewards. By immersing children in Pine programs, together, we have nurtured curiosity, fostered resilience, and built confidence in the next generation.

Thank you for your generous support in 2023!

"The Pine Project is a critical tool to help raise resilient, curious, humans who care about the world around them and have the skills to ask good questions about it."

Pine Project sparked a new love for nature within all of us and we have grown as a family because of it."

- Proud parent of a 3 year old Oaks and Acorns Participant



Our Impact in 2023

Connection in Numbers

Countless bird
and wildlife sightings



134,336

* hours children experienced
the magic of nature *

95,724 hours of programming offered

245 days spent together in nature

2,591 people served

Snow, rain or shine!



99%

of participants experienced
increased connection to nature

> 93% of participants experienced
improvements in their mental and
physical health, & personal growth

Learning and growing
All thanks to you!



137 participants supported
with financial assistance \$

\$75,000 in bursaries to support
access to nature connection for
children from families in
financial need

Countless fires built
and songs sung



Other Highlights

We launched a new partnership program to provide free programs to 300 equity-deserving students.



Our summer day and overnight camps welcomed more campers than ever!



We increased support for families in financial need by 50%!



We increased our staff training on equity and inclusion-related themes, with staff participating in sessions run by external experts on gender, anti-racism, neurodiversity and mental health.



DEEPER THAN NUMBERS: REFLECTIONS FROM OUR COMMUNITY



“Support from the bursary program makes it possible for my son, who comes from extremely challenging circumstances, to get into the woods for a week of just being a kid. The Pine Project’s professional and caring staff help him heal in the best possible way. This summer’s overnight camp was a turning point for him. Thank you!” - Pine Parent of Red Wolf Camper

“Every day that my kids came home from March Break camp, they were wet, dirty, tuckered, happy, calm, focused, confident and informed. The counsellors are excellent, as is the program. Thank you, PINE, for this amazing experience for our girls.” - Parent of March Break Camper

“I have been sending my two sons to Pine camps for years. I have been nothing but impressed and inspired by the leaders, who have so expertly guided and engaged my children. The incredible quality of the programming and activities has developed so much love, care, respect and curiosity for nature in both my boys. PINE has played an important role in their development for which I am very grateful.” - Longtime Pine Parent

“He rated it 100/10 after his first day. Yes, one hundred out of ten.” - Parent of Fiery Fox



“We are deeply grateful for the financial support that has allowed our children to continue with Pine. There is nothing quite like Pine in their lives. Nowhere else do they get to so freely investigate their own boundaries and abilities under skillful care. Nowhere else do they have the chance to not only appreciate nature’s beauty or learn information, but actually understand and respect nature’s autonomy as well as our intimate relationship with it.

My children are more watchful, more observant, braver, and more open to otherness because of the Pine Project. And the bursary makes it possible”

- Pine Bursary Recipient

2023 HIGHLIGHTS

New Community Partnership with Rose Ave Public School

In 2023, we developed an exciting new partnership with Rose Avenue Public School to provide 300 students with experiential, and inquiry-based outdoor learning experiences to boost students' mental health, personal development and love for learning.



Students spend time in the beautiful east end ravine, learning about plants, animals, weather, and generally how to spend time outside safely. The focus is learning, experiencing local parks, and having fun outside! Students come away feeling comfortable being outside, and excited to learn together in the outdoor spaces close to where we live. As one elementary school teacher said: **“Once children are outside and engaged in learning, anxiety settles and awareness takes over. Pine staff are experts at engaging students’ curiosity.”**



Eastview Partnership

We also continued our programming partnership with Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre, bringing nature connection programming free of charge to kids in Toronto's Blake-Jones neighbourhood and surrounding area. Each week, experienced Pine Instructors join kids at Eastview's Boys & Girls Club to get outside, explore a local park, play nature-based games, and practice new outdoor skills.



REFLECTIONS FROM OUR COMMUNITY PARTNERSHIPS

“Eastview is so thrilled to partner with the Pine Project and integrate outdoor learning activities. We’ve received excellent feedback from Eastview children, parents and staff, with reports of families feeling more motivated and comfortable spending time outdoors and children experiencing increased confidence, resilience, and respect for nature.”

- Laurette Jack, BGC Eastview Program Coordinator
Eastview Neighbourhood Community Centre



“The kids are constantly looking at tracks and signs of animals as well as building with natural materials, learning about the lives of animals and making connections between plants. There is so much nature to enjoy in our own neighborhoods.

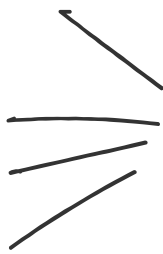
The students share memories that they connect to from previous weeks of the program - The students share memories that they connect to from previous weeks of the program – a real sign that the connected time in nature has an impact on the students' ideas of community”

- Lee, Rose Ave Pine Staff

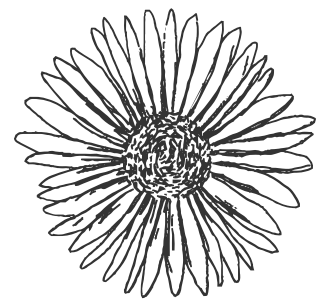
“The children at Eastview build relationships with each other, themselves and nature by practicing gratitude and reflection in every lesson. Playing & learning through songs, games and wildlife identification. It’s incredible to see the kids light up learning about wildlife migration while playing by moving like animals and making animal sounds. Each child’s sense of curiosity and connection to nature grows by engaging their senses; looking at fallen leaves, identifying colours and smells of the seasons. It’s remarkable to see their interest in nature develop”

- Eastview Pine Staff





Sophie's Story- Building resilient children at Red Wolf



“Something unique that I love about Red Wolf is the group overnight. What the overnight looks like varies strongly depending on the age and stage of each group. For our youngest campers, their overnight may look like collecting a ton of firewood, hiking a few hours into the woods, building shelters, and staying up a few hours later telling stories and singing songs.

What I love about the way we approach overnights at Red Wolf, is that we encourage the campers to step outside of their comfort zone, but we will never force anyone and will support whatever decision they make.

One week in 2023, I was working with a group of all boys ages ten and eleven. Various ideas surfaced, finally settling on walking to the next empty site over and building shelters to sleep in. Building a strong shelter was imperative since it was supposed to rain all night.

After dinner, I could hear the group singing a fire song to encourage the boy who was lighting the fire. A few hours later it began to rain, quickly turning into a strong thunderstorm. Once the storm settled I walked over to their site, and as I walked down the hill to their fire that they had managed to keep their fire going throughout the rain.

In this group, there was one boy who had had a really hard week. It was his first time at camp, and he had struggled with homesickness and learning how to live in the woods. While preparing for the overnight he told me that he planned to go to the fire for a few hours, and then would go back to his tent. Turns out that he had decided to stay and was happily playing cards with some of the other boys. In the morning, he was so proud of himself for staying out the entire night.

The level of perseverance and growth that I see from kids like that, who start the week homesick and end the week by doing the overnight is a huge reason why I love Red Wolf so much. Those kids inspire me and the other campers that it is possible to overcome challenges and be stronger on the other side.”

-Sophie Pine Participant 2010-2020
Pine Red Wolf Staff



Sophie as a Coyote Pup, 2012



Pine Red Wolf Staff, 2022

Advancing Our Commitment to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion

At the Pine Project, we believe that all people – regardless of age, culture, economic status, gender, gender identity, physical ability, race, or sexual orientation – have the right to equity in the outdoors and in the world. Yet, we know that not enough people are able to benefit from and access nature. In 2020, we acknowledged our commitment to creating opportunities for all children to access nature's benefits.

From 2020-2022, we made strides in addressing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion across the organization, focusing on areas such as professional development, our hiring practices, and programming. These efforts were largely opportunistic in nature and generated some notable results – visit our [website](#) for reports on our progress.

In 2023, we continued our commitment to DEI. We strengthened our training and processes for accommodating children with exceptionalities, including introducing a 1:1 support option for families at our summer day camps. We expanded our bursary program, increasing support for families in financial need by 50%, and formed a new partnership with Amici Children's Camp, a charity that sends children from low-income households to overnight summer camps across Ontario. We also launched a new partnership with a model school to support over 300 equity-deserving students. And we continued to invest in staff training, hosting sessions with external facilitators on gender inclusion, racism in the outdoors, age inclusion, and training on working with children with disabilities.

In addition, this year we initiated a process with Innoweave's Impact and Strategic Clarity Program to realize our ambitions to center equity within our organization in a clear and strategic way. Questions we hoped to answer included; how we can contribute most effectively to addressing equitable access to nature's benefits, what target audiences and strategies we should prioritize, and methods for measuring our impact. This process culminated in the development of a Theory of Change and an action plan outlining major milestones to 2028.

Highlights from the Pine Project Theory of Change

Our Theory of Change states: By 2028, we will address barriers and increase enablers of equity, diversity and inclusion, and make Pine a place where everyone feels like they can belong. Participants across our programs will more closely reflect the population of Toronto, with an increase in the proportion of BIPOC and low-income participants that take part in Pine's programs for two or more years.

Strategies:



Seed a connection to nature in children & youth

- Integrate our magic ingredients into program offerings designed to meet the age & life-stage and level of experience of participants
- Develop new programs tailored to the needs of specific communities that increase engagement in BIPOC and low income children and youth
- Assess barriers and create accessible opportunities to be involved



Nurture a supportive community where everyone feels a sense of belonging

- Recruit, train, and retain a team of staff & volunteers at all levels of the organization that includes and celebrates the many facets that contribute to human identities
- Meet families and caregivers where they are through new engagement activities that will support nature connection for all
- Find ways to uplift Black, Indigenous and People of Colour across all levels of the organization



Grow access to the benefits of nature connection with community partners

- Co-create tailored programs with partners working with equity-deserving communities
- Develop new partnerships with organizations that support equity-deserving individual children & families

Supporter Spotlight - Maia Somers



“I grew up playing and learning in nature. I was fortunate to have had so many opportunities to bask in the beauty of the forests, rivers and lakes in southern Ontario. Rain, shine, or snow I always savoured the scent of fresh forest air, the sounds of water trickling along a creek, or the feeling of clay between my toes. I grew up in nature and because of that, I feel those experiences make me who I am today.

In just my three years as a board member with Pine, I have begun to change the way I spend time in nature. After participating in Pine's Sit-A-Thon, I began to appreciate how wonderful it can be to simply sit in one place and observe nature flowing around me.

When I first became a board member with Pine, I found it refreshing that the leaders set aside time to discuss and revisit why Pine does what it does. The time and effort Pine takes to thoughtfully address barriers so that more people from all walks of life can access Pine is admirable. I am hopeful that the new strategic direction (via the Innoweave project) will be translated into actionable change to meaningfully connect and meet the needs of more children and youth from low-income and BIPOC families.

As a Black woman and a natural scientist, I support the steps Pine is taking to grow and commit an awareness to the oppressive capitalist systems. At present it is much more difficult for BIPOC individuals to not only have access to the outdoors, but to sense belonging there; dismantling these systems within Pine's realm of influence provides a huge opportunity for growth. By increasing bursaries, growing programs with community partners and recruiting more diverse staff and board, it warms my heart to see them continue to thread this work throughout all areas of Pine.

I am so proud to support the Pine Project. It is the unique way that Pine's participants can use their imagination and are free to develop a relationship with nature in their own way through the programs. Participants have the chance to make connections in nature that are meaningful to them, and through that, develop lasting connections with nature over time.”

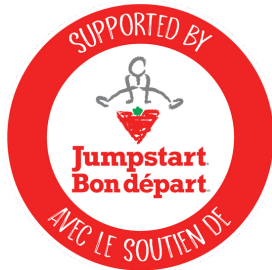
- Maia Somers, Pine Project Donor & Board Member

Your Support Matters

We are honoured and grateful to have the support and partnership of so many within our community. Thanks to every donor, supporter, participant, volunteer and staff who made it possible for more children to get outside and fall in love with nature. Your support helps us empower kids to be happier, healthier, more caring environmental stewards.

You made it possible for over 2,500 children to get outside with caring mentors this year, to be curious and connect with nature. And it's thanks to you that we can support more than 137 kids with bursaries, deliver free programming to underserved communities, and build our capacity to reach more people each year.

A special thanks to:



Rose Avenue Jr. Public School

Ontario Trillium Foundation



Fondation Trillium de l'Ontario

An agency of the Government of Ontario
Un organisme du gouvernement de l'Ontario



Johansen Larsen Foundation



TD Friends of the Environment Foundation



Funded by the Government of Canada



The Catherine and Maxwell MEIGHEN FOUNDATION



Tippet Foundation

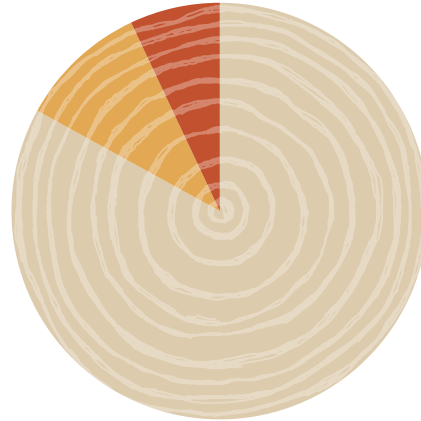
THE CHAWKERS FOUNDATION

Frederick & Douglas Dickson Foundation

Pine Project Financials - 2023*

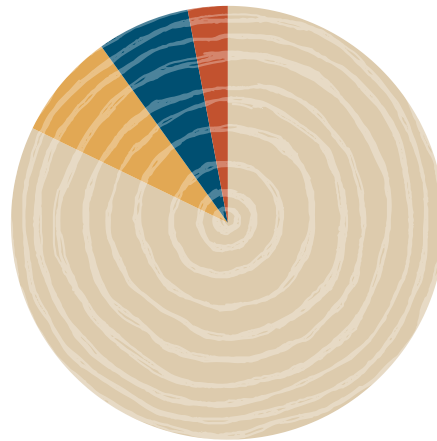
Expenses \$1,758,000

- Programs 83%
- General Management 10%
- Fundraising 7%



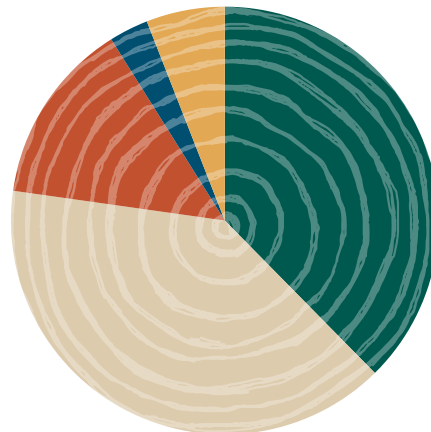
Revenues \$1,634,000

- Program Fees 83%
- Grants 8%
- Donations 7%
- Other 3%



Program Fee Revenue

- Day Camp 40%
- Outdoor School 38%
- Overnight Camp 14%
- Schools 6%
- Adult Programs 3%



Any excess revenue over expenses is invested for future use to help more kids access nature connection programs for years to come

*Unaudited, due to timing of publishing this report.

Celebrating 15 years of the Pine Project

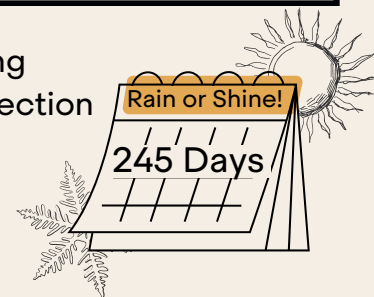
Inspiring a love of nature



Pine Project

Since our founding in 2008, Pine has grown to become Ontario's leading nature connection organization. Each journey is filled with nature connection and grounded in a thriving community.

Here are some of our accomplishments over the last 15 years!



18,771 people connected with the magic of nature

620 participants supported with financial assistance

99% of participants experienced increased connection to nature

93% of participants experienced improvements in their mental and physical health, & personal growth

Countless fires built, songs sung, gratitude moments, shelters built, games played!



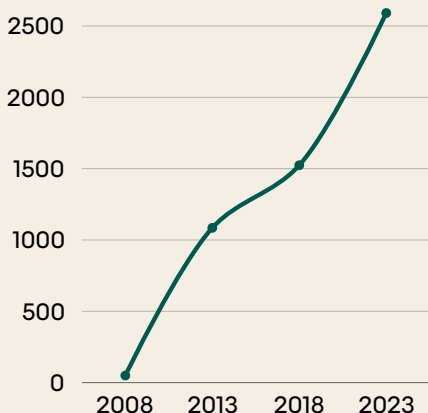
"All the leaves are falling down"

"Nature is always teaching"

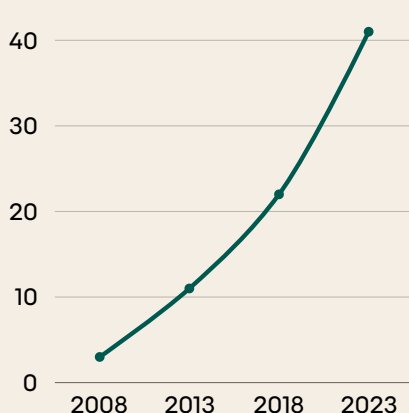
"Awake the fire, Awake the leaves
River is flowing, Give thanks & breathe"



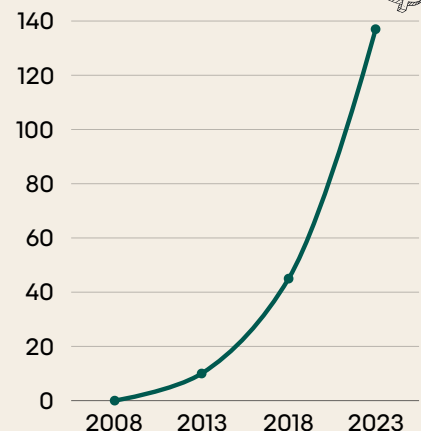
People Connected with Nature



Unique Pine Programs



Bursaries Supported





Pine Project

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