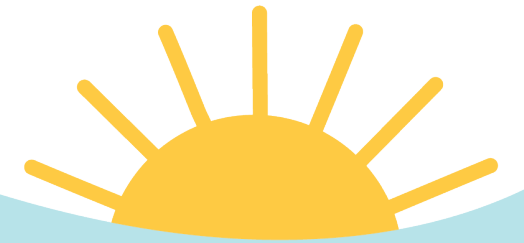


Front cover →

The San Luis Valley
Generation Wild Initiative



Kids grow better *outside.*



All in for the youth of Southern Colorado

The San Luis Valley contains some of Colorado's most important rangelands and agriculture, some of its most iconic vistas and natural treasures, and some of the most economically challenged communities in the state. These economic conditions have inspired a group of non-profit organizations and city governments across the Valley to collaborate in programs to support the youth in this region and to provide opportunities for outdoor experiences and personal support.



The San Luis Valley Generation Wild Initiative is a remarkable, inter-connected group of civic and private partners providing outdoor programs for youth. All nine of the Initiative partners share a common belief: Our youth need an opportunity to play outdoors, to learn about nature, to improve their skills and develop new ones, to be healthy, and to experience the social connections and inclusion that organized activities can provide.

Over the past six years, this commitment to youth development has encouraged shared services and linked programs. In a region where financial resources are limited, the benefits of coordinated programs to reduce redundancy assures every donor dollar goes further. The ability of the partners to share sports equipment, to collaborate on trainings, to collectively provide transportation, and to make decisions for the good of the whole is remarkable in what is often a highly competitive scramble for resources.

It is in this spirit of collaboration the San Luis Valley Generation Wild Initiative seeks investment to continue serving the youth of the Valley. By connecting youth to nature, developing inclusive youth development opportunities, creating outdoor recreational opportunities, and promoting healthy lifestyles, the programs within Generation Wild do so much more....they establish patterns of personal development and a network of supportive relationships that will last a lifetime.



Youth programs become even more essential in the San Luis Valley within the context of its geographic and demographic factors. It is simply much more difficult to provide services to youth in a region so vast, so sparsely populated, and with high poverty levels.



The San Luis Valley is the largest alpine desert valley in the world. The region is approximately 9,000 square miles with an average altitude of 7,764 feet. It is equal in size to the state of Connecticut. Politically, it is divided into six counties with a population of 48,435 or approximately 5.2 people per square mile. It is a remote region bordered to the east by the Sangre de Cristo Mountains, to the west by the San Juan's and to the north by the Sawatch Range. Agriculture, tourism, education, healthcare, forestry activities, and the service industry make up many jobs available here.

The Rio Grande River's headwaters originate near Creede and the river runs through the middle of the Valley. The Valley is home to the Great Sand Dunes National Park and Preserve. Half of the land in the region is owned by the Rio Grande National Forest and the Bureau of Land Management. In the 1850s, Hispanic families from New Mexico were the first to establish permanent settlements in the Valley. Today, the Valley has the largest native Hispanic population in Colorado. Many families descend from the original Spanish settlers.

The need for outdoor youth programs in the Valley is magnified by a poverty rate almost twice that of the state overall. Three of six counties that make up the San Luis Valley are regularly among the five poorest counties in the state, and within the top 20 in the nation. In 2010, 22% of residents lived below the poverty line, nearly double the state average of 12.6%. The median household income at that time was \$33,391 for the Valley, compared to \$55,735 for Colorado.

A half decade of partnership

The San Luis Valley Generation Wild Initiative builds on support from Great Outdoors Colorado (GOCO) which has provided Generation Wild funding in the San Luis Valley for the past five years. Over time, several Generation Wild programs have combined into a single, Valley-wide effort to better coordinate programs and share resources. Generation Wild funding provides about half of the outdoor youth programming for the nine partner entities.

Being associated with Generation Wild brings more benefits than financial investment. The program provides disciplined planning processes, outcome measures and metrics, research into effective programming, and a network of entities across the state in which to share best practices.

While we anticipate continued financial and programmatic support from GOCO, the San Luis Valley Generation Wild Initiative is focused on broadening its base of support to make the Initiative sustainable well into the future.

The programs of San Luis Valley Generation Wild fall into four thematic areas



Many of the programs bridge across several thematic areas and all themes are supported by more than one of the Initiative partners. On the following pages, we have provided one program example for each partner within a thematic area. Partners provide more programs than those listed and while we have focused on a lead partner in each theme, these programs often engage multiple Initiative partners.





Studies continue to point to outdoor activities as being vital to the health, well-being, and personality development of youth. Yet getting young people outside can be challenging in an increasingly digital world. Lack of organized programs and outdoor recreational facilities also contribute. A recent study by the Outdoor Foundation found that a third of youth and young adults across America regularly participate in outdoor activities. Unfortunately, that percent drops to 8% in our region primarily due to a deficit of organized opportunities in rural areas and equity issues for Hispanic and African-American communities. In fact, Caucasian youth are five times more likely to participate in outdoor activities than Hispanic youth. San Luis Valley is 47% Hispanic heritage compounding this challenge.

Yet Generation Wild is making headway. A study of the Generation Wild impact found that youth are beginning to spend more time outside as a result of the program. In fact, the number of young people who no time outside has dropped by 66%.



Connecting youth to nature takes many forms from informal play in natural areas to wilderness experiences, to environmental education. Here are just a few of the ways that the San Luis Valley Generation Wild Initiative helps this happen:

The Rio Grande Farm Park provides youth in Alamosa and surrounding communities with Environmental Education Programs taught onsite and include biodiversity, compost, food systems, water quality, and pollinator classes. At the Farm Park, young people can explore nursery bat boxes, wetlands and the Rio Grande, farmland, orchards, riparian habitat....all connected by trails. It is experiential learning at its best and a jewel of the Valley.

Partnership is the byword for many Valley non-profits. Perhaps there is no organization more attuned to partnerships than the **Rio Grande Watershed Conservation and Education Initiative**. RGWCEI partners with local Valley agencies and farmers, ranchers, and schools to encourage the next generation to be passionate about the environment. Students ages 8-12 years old can join RGWCEI's three-day Conservation Camps at Beaver Creek in the beautiful Rio Grande National Forest.

Whether it's close to home or in the wilderness, the **Alpine Achievers Initiative** makes direct connections between Valley youth and the outdoors. Its unique "Backyard to Backcountry" programming offers outdoor education in the classroom for elementary and middle schoolers and a backcountry program to high schoolers. Alpine Achievers and the Adams State Adventure Programs collaborate to teach outdoor skills and environmental education with hands-on experience in backpacking and climbing trips.



The challenges of providing outdoor programs for youth are formidable in the San Luis Valley. The relatively small population base of the region, about 50,000 people, limits the number of young people in each age bracket. The Valley is primarily rural making access to after school and weekend programs more difficult. Poverty levels are high. Nearly one-fourth of residents live below the poverty level. Distances are a barrier. The Valley is 125 miles long and 65 miles wide. The Valley has both high ethnic and high cultural diversity. While this is an asset, it requires greater sensitivity for inclusion and equity in program development.



Despite these formidable challenges, the San Luis Valley Generation Wild Initiative partners provide a wide-range of supportive outdoor programming for youth. Limited resources have encouraged remarkable collaboration and innovation. For example, one important commitment to the youth of the region is to offer an unbroken series of outdoor experiences from kindergarten through college.

This “laddering” of support helps build confidence as youth gain outdoor skills and environmental knowledge over years. In fact, one of the hallmarks of a “laddering” approach to youth development is the ability to manage “risk” with “adventure.” For many youth new to the outdoors, simply being near a river can be unnerving because this is not part of their family experience. Over time, and with a thoughtful laddering of opportunities, a youth in the Valley is likely to move from fear of the river to paddle-boarding on the Rio Grande.

Providing inclusive youth development and support happens in every Initiative program. Here are two examples to illustrate the value of this objective:

The Valley is fortunate to have Adams State University in Alamosa and even more fortunate that the University offers an academic track in Adventure Leadership and Programming. The **Adams State Adventure Program** provides outdoor instruction for many of the Initiative partners. Youth can participate in the Program’s indoor rock-climbing wall, challenge course, outdoor equipment rental center, and the outdoor trip leadership program. Across its offerings, the Adventure program works with more than 1,500 people per year (mostly youth). Many of the activities of the program are open to everyone in the community.

The terrain of San Luis Valley is a mountain biker’s paradise. The **Rio Grande Rattlers** seeks to get young riders on mountain bikes and onto the expanding trail networks in the Valley. Believing mountain biking to be a lifelong pursuit, this organization provides a meaningful opportunity to increase the health and wellness of high school students. Rattlers provide youth access to high-quality bikes and gear, instructive guidance in using them, and the opportunity to race in Colorado’s High School Cycling League.



Chase McGee, a member of the Rattler's team, participated in races despite the challenges of cerebral palsy.

Because of the access to the Rio Grande and mountains bordering the Valley, one might assume that outdoor recreation would be easy for the youth of the region. That is simply not the case. We know that it requires three elements to have community-wide youth engagement in outdoor recreation: Places, People, and Participation.

First of all, place is important. Where easy access to outdoor recreation facilities is possible, it dramatically increases the interest of youth in engaging in those activities.

Nearby hiking trails, bike paths, skateboard parks, and even open space will draw young people outside.

When not present, it creates a substantial barrier.

People are also essential to encouraging outdoor recreation. Having trusted peers and adult mentors who can “show you the ropes” of climbing, backpacking, mountain biking, cross-country skiing, or kayaking will

make the difference between youth who will try new adventures and youth who will be left out.

Finally, participation is critical. Offering activities that attract young people provides an important incentive for outdoor recreation. For example, across the country, paddle-boarding has had the highest growth rate in youth participation over the past three years. The Rio Grande offers ideal conditions for paddle-boarding and Initiative partners have been using that activity to engage more and more youth.

The Initiative partners work on all three of these elements. They provide safe places for youth to recreate outdoors from trails to camps to river outings to equipment. Perhaps most important of all, the Initiative partners provide the people needed to engage in outdoor recreation and to increase the level of outdoor competency among youth as they get older and seek out new activities and adventures.



Creating outdoor recreational opportunities is a priority for many of the Initiative partners. Here are just two of those programs:

Creede may be the most remote of the communities in the Valley because it is nestled in the mountains near the headwaters of the Rio Grande. Because of its distance, the **Creede Parks and Recreation Department** offers a program to “grow their own” outdoor leaders from the ranks of community youth and young adults. Through a series of outdoor clinics and trainings, and with the support of other Initiative partners, Creede is creating valuable outdoor experiences and skills now and setting some of their leadership participants on the path to careers in outdoor education and recreation.

While Colorado is famous for its hiking and mountain bike trails, these opportunities have not been as available in the Valley. **San Luis Valley Great Outdoors** (SLVGO!) was developed to provide a unified front for trails and outdoor recreation. Identified in its master plan was the opportunity to increase youth outdoor programming by increasing the number of trails, by adding community trails segments to help youth reach longer trails and open space, and to encourage other types of outdoor facilities for recreation. SLVGO employs youth and young adults in trail building and trail maintenance through its GOAT program. (Great Outdoors Action Teams).



We all understand that outdoor activity contributes to health, both physical and mental. What is often less understood are the barriers to outdoor activity among the most vulnerable youth in a community.

Often, without a supportive family structure, access to outdoor recreation is limited.

Many factors contribute to the access issue: inter-generational poverty, peer pressure, dysfunctional parenting, systemic racism, and even factors as simple as lack of transportation.

Generation Wild programming works to address these issues and all of the Initiative partners play a role in the work of opening access to diverse youth, promoting inclusion, providing caring adult support and building trust with peers. The Initiative places strong emphasis on protective factors for youth. Outdoor activities provide a supportive environment to build trust, to reduce fears of the unknown through adventure programming, and to provide role models.

Simply being outside is not a singular solution. Many social determinants of health affect individual health risk factors. Yet outdoor activities often begin a lifestyle change and mental outlook that provide lifelong benefits.



Promoting healthy lifestyles benefits by creating the conditions for outdoor experiences, for positive family interactions, and for youth to find acceptance and nurturing. Here are two important examples:

In Alamosa, the population center of the Valley, **Boys & Girls Clubs of the San Luis Valley** engages more than 100 youth every day in activities to use peer support and mentorship to support developing vital life skills. Often using the outdoors for these activities, Boys & Girls Clubs offers week-long summer Adventure Camps; summer camping and fishing trips in the Valley; Friday bike days during the 12 weeks of summer programming (with additional bike days in the spring and fall); expanded hiking opportunities along the Rio Grande trails; development of nature painting and photography workshops; and opportunities for winter recreation including snowshoeing, cross country skiing, and a ski bus to Wolf Creek Ski Area.

The **City of Alamosa Parks and Recreation Department** provide important programming for the youth and families in the community. "Weekends on the Rio" is a community-based collaborative coordinated by the city and includes all types of water activities from stand-up paddle-boarding to canoeing to fishing and riding a pump track in the park. Families enjoy outdoor concerts in the park activities including yoga, Zumba, and Walk2Connect programs that provide the opportunity for our community to come together.



The partners of the San Luis Valley Generation Wild Initiative

Adams State Adventure Program hosts a comprehensive outdoor leadership development program to more than 1,500 youth each year. Participants have access to an indoor rock-climbing wall, challenge course, outdoor equipment rental center, and the outdoor leadership program.

Alamosa Parks and Recreation is responsible for design, implementation, operations, management, and maintenance of a variety of recreation programs, facilities and events in the Alamosa area. The city department offers some of the most popular outdoor programs for youth and families in the Valley.

Alpine Achievers Initiative inspires, connects, and nurtures youth of Southern Colorado by providing rural focused positive youth development programs and support. With a dedication to equity and access, Alpine Achievers reaches deep into the Valley where outdoor opportunities are least available.

Boys & Girls Clubs of the San Luis Valley provides outdoor programming to more than 100 youth each day including opportunities to appreciate and understand their natural surroundings, which is fundamental to helping them grow into responsible, caring adults.

City of Creede Parks and Recreation brings a range of outdoor summer camps and programs to youth with a special focus on developing and training young leaders. A series of outdoor clinics can become a pathway to future jobs for those participants who develop these outdoor leadership skills.

Rio Grande Farm Park (SLV Local Foods Coalition) is dedicated to the preservation of the Valley's agricultural heritage, precious water resources, and public open space by providing youth a range of outdoor educational opportunities and camps.

Rio Grande Rattlers seeks to get young riders on mountain bikes and onto our expanding trail networks in the San Luis Valley. Believing mountain biking to be a lifelong pursuit, this organization provides a meaningful opportunity to increase the health and wellness of Valley high school students.

Rio Grande Watershed Conservation & Education Initiative (RGWCEI), offers youth of the Valley class presentations and field experiences focused on watershed health, water quality/conservation issues, agriculture, soil health, wildlife, and forestry.

San Luis Valley Great Outdoors (SLVGO!) is a non-profit organization focused on increasing outdoor recreation in the Valley. SLVGO has been a champion of trail development and in the creation and stewardship of outdoor recreation facilities and public open space.

An investment in the youth of the San Luis Valley

The San Luis Valley Generation Wild Initiative seeks funding both to maintain its programming for youth over the coming three years as well as to establish a Growth Fund to provide greater financial flexibility to the partners for unanticipated needs and new opportunities.

San Luis Valley Generation Wild Initiative Program Funding

\$1,900,000 for three years (2021, 2022, 2023)

This funding will be allocated to Initiative partners based upon an income-sharing agreement.

This funding amounts to \$633,333 per year or on average about \$70,000 per year per partner.

San Luis Valley Generation Wild Initiative Growth Fund

The Initiative also seek \$250,000 in a fund to be administered by the leadership of the Initiative and available for three uses:

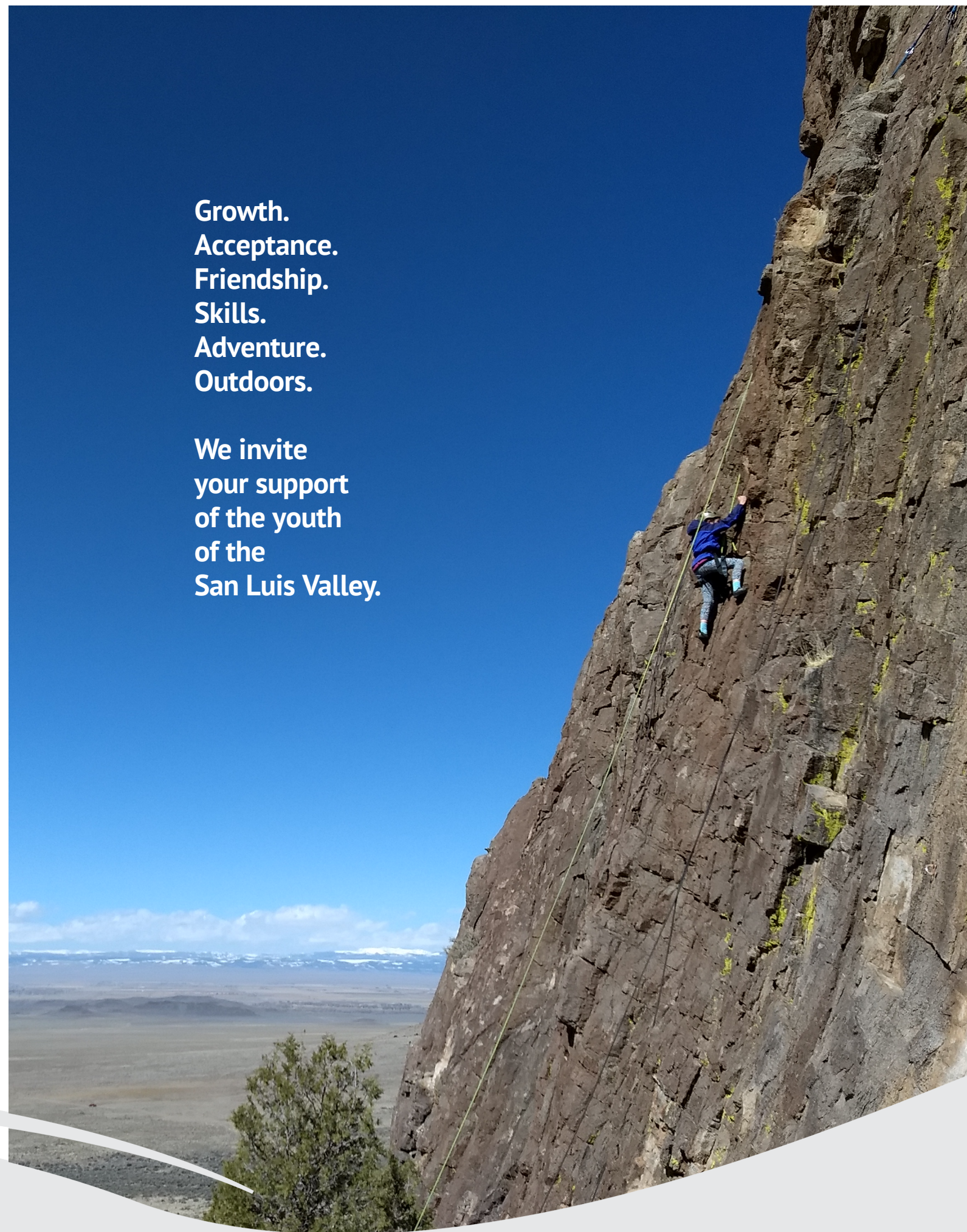
- ❖ Growth opportunities including expanded programming with emphasis on under-served youth
- ❖ Interim funding in a revolving loan to assist partners in delays of anticipated funding
- ❖ Shared services not currently managed by the partners as part of the program funding





Growth.
Acceptance.
Friendship.
Skills.
Adventure.
Outdoors.

We invite
your support
of the youth
of the
San Luis Valley.





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