



33 Terminal Way, Suite #537A
Pittsburgh, PA 15219

P: 412-255-0564 x.230
F: 412-431-3206
LO@ventureoutdoors.org

March 17, 2016

Subject: Letter of Support for Play.CLOH.org

Dear Sprout Fund,

On behalf of Venture Outdoors, I am writing to share my enthusiastic support for the Play.CLOH.org project as presented by the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation. Venture Outdoors shares similar values presented by the project, including engaging youth in recreational activities that enhance leadership skills and promote general well-being.

Venture Outdoors is a nonprofit organization dedicated to connecting everyone to the benefits of outdoor recreation throughout Southwestern Pennsylvania. We provide a variety of activities that inspire an active lifestyle, promote the region's unique natural amenities, highlight its excellent quality of life, and foster a greater appreciation for the environment.

Venture Outdoors was formed in 2001 as a project of the Tides Center and in 2006 became an independent nonprofit organization. By providing affordable and accessible outdoor recreation and education opportunities to everyone regardless of socio-economic status, ethnic heritage, skill level, or physical capability, the organization has helped transform the Pittsburgh region into a place where the outdoors is an integral part of the healthy lifestyle and culture.

Venture Outdoors programs and events are held in local and regional parks, on waterways, and in urban areas. The organization serves the public through a wide variety of programs and activities designed to reach every age group and facet of the community, aiming to "leave no Pittsburgher inside." We offer over 700 programs a year including hiking, biking, kayaking, canoeing, snowshoeing, cross country skiing, rock climbing, backpacking, geocaching, camping, specialty hikes and paddles, educational trips, fishing, and more.

The organization has experienced phenomenal growth and success throughout the years. Over 3,000 households are members of Venture Outdoors representing nearly 5,000 individuals. In 2015, over 8,600 people joined Venture Outdoors on public or custom programs. Additionally, nearly 49,600 people paddled at one of the Kayak Pittsburgh locations, many of which were youth. Community events including the annual Venture Outdoors Festival, a wide range of neighborhood festivals, and regular members' days drew approximately 2,500 people in 2015. More than 2,800 people attended the Banff Mountain Film Festival which has been hosted by the organization every year since 2003.



Previously, Venture Outdoors has partnered with Mark Rauterkus to provide kayaking experiences to his swimming and water polo athletes. Venture Outdoors hopes to continue the partnership by using Mr. Rauterkus's pool access to many of our 150 volunteer trip leaders who lead the numerous kayaking outings per year – many of which target our youth audience. His swimming and water polo athletes have also been invited to volunteer at this year's Venture Outdoors Festival, in which the students will lead youth on fun activities, such as bike rodeo and craft building.

Venture Outdoors shares the goals reflected in the Play.CLOH.org proposal and, through innovative outdoor programming, will prepare students for the next year, encourage their passion for learning and exploration, and motivate them to meet all new challenges head on. Our outdoor activities will require students to work together to build and explore a personal passion for outdoor adventure.

In each of our activities – kayaking, biking, climbing, hiking, and so on – our trip leaders strive to promote the theme of “playing well with others”. On these programs, youth are encouraged to work together, problem solve as a team, and collaborate in order to create the most meaningful, positive outdoor experience for the entire group. We strongly believe that outdoor recreation offers a number of benefits for the youth, including increased focus, enhanced creativity, improved leadership skills, and beyond. In collaboration with other members of the Play.CLOH.org cohort, Venture Outdoors will work to provide challenging, yet fulfilling outdoor activities for the athletes involved in the project.

We fully support this collaborative effort, led by the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, and hope that it will be well received. We look forward to working together to provide new learning paths for our Pittsburgh youth.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please feel free to contact me at LO@ventureoutdoors.org or by calling 412-255-0564 x230.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Lora Hutelmyer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Lora Hutelmyer

Youth Program Manager