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Kids in Parks: providing a network of trails that get kids and families active outdoors



In 2008, the Blue Ridge Parkway Foundation, the Blue Ridge Parkway and the Blue Cross and Blue Shield of North Carolina Foundation partnered to form the Kids in Parks TRACK Trails program, a program designed to get kids "unplugged" and outdoors for their health and the health of our parks. Today, Kids in Parks has established more than 25 TRACK Trails in three states, creating a network of self-guided, brochure-led hiking trails (and other types of trails) that encourage kids and families to become physically active in our parks.

Each TRACK Trail has a series of brochure-led adventures that kids and families can use to discover the natural, cultural and historic resources found along the trail. TRACK Trail locations are networked together through the program's website (kidsinparks.com), and kids who hike TRACK Trails and register their adventures through the website earn incentives (prizes) designed to encourage additional outdoor adventures. Program assessments are built into the delivery of those incentives through an online questionnaire that kids must complete, and that data is shared with the partnering site, allowing them to gain insight into their visitor preferences.

As part of the NPS's Call to Action's "Take a Hike and Call Me in the Morning" initiative, the Kids in Parks program has begun pilot testing pediatrician office trailheads that are placed in the lobbies of pediatrician offices where large networks of TRACK Trails are present locally. These pediatrician office trailheads provide information about local TRACK Trails, helping inform kids and parents about family friendly opportunities to get active outdoors near their home. This effort has been endorsed by the American Academy of Pediatrics and will become a focus of the program as the networks of trails expand into more regions.

To date, more than 600 individual kids have registered 800+ TRACK Trail adventures. Of the 600 kids registered, more than 10% visited more than one TRACK Trail location, proving that the "networks" of trails are encouraging kids and families to visit more than one location. Through an observational study conducted in partnership with a local university, the program has determined the registration rate (~3%) and can extrapolate certain health based outcomes about the program's success: more than 15,000 child miles have been hiked, approximately 2 million Calories burned, and more than 7,000 hours spent "un-plugged", outdoors and active in nature.

Kids in Parks has partnered with the National Park Service, three different State Park systems (NC, VA, and SD), the US Forest Service and the Army Corps of Engineers, multiple city and county parks departments and private property owners to install TRACK Trails on their sites. The Kids in Parks program has been able to partner with all of these organizations because TRACK Trail materials (trailhead sign and self-guided brochures) were designed to be template-able, making the materials extremely transferable from location to location, and aiding in the rapid expansion of the program into local, regional and national networks.

For more information about Kids in Parks, please visit their website at kidsinparks.com, or contact them via email @ jurroz@brpfoundation.org