

Dear friend,

My name is Mia Munoz and I am the Assistant Coordinator for Youth Leadership Adventures and a former Instructor for Mountain School. In my time working for North Cascades Institute, I have seen the power that experiential learning has on individuals of all ages, backgrounds and lived experiences.



Having the opportunity to facilitate these transformative learning experiences has been life-changing for me. I invite you to make these opportunities available for young people by supporting Give BIG for Youth!

After working one summer for the Yellowstone Youth Conservation Corp, I knew I wanted to share my love for protecting the planet so I chose to major in environmental education with a minor in social justice at Western Washington University. Upon graduating, I got my first job in my chosen career field with North Cascades

Institute. In a time when environmental education jobs felt unrealistic due to the ongoing pandemic, joining the Institute in 2020 felt like a beacon of hope and proof that people still want to connect with the natural world.

I work here because of the Institute's **strong commitment to experiential learning and to creating moments that last with people for a lifetime.** North Cascades Institute nurtures a love for the natural world through education, which aligns with my goals as both an educator and an individual. I want to create an environment where learners feel safe and empowered to grow as individuals, as well as learning within a community.

My first-hand experiences with students show the true impact these programs have. High schoolers in Youth Leadership Adventures (YLA) grow as leaders, activists, and friends. **I have seen students challenge themselves beyond their comfort zone, gain new skills and knowledge, and connect to the land around them.** Most importantly, I have watched them build community together during a challenging time in the world to feel safe and comfortable.

Last summer, while driving YLA students home after their trips, I listened to their stories as laughter, joy and a sense of community filled the bus. During one particular bus ride, my smile grew wider and wider as I listened to two groups of students who had just finished 12 days in the backcountry talk about their different experiences. From inside jokes, to moments of challenge and growth, they spent the 2-hour drive home laughing and sharing how much their trips had



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connecting with the natural world

impacted them. In just 12 days they had transformed from complete strangers to friends, planning to stay in touch and continue their new friendships beyond their summer adventure.

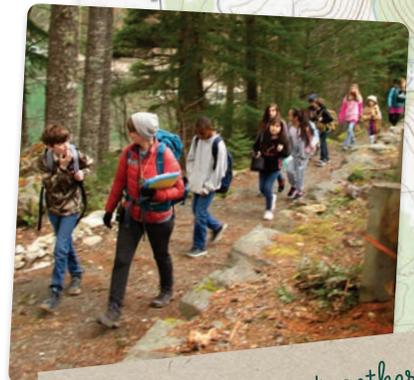
My experience of watching joy flow throughout a group is not limited to YLA backcountry trips. Even though the Institute had to adapt its overnight Mountain School program into a day program due to COVID, I still witnessed hundreds of **5th graders learning and exploring the world around them together while creating moments of joy with their peers.**

A favorite memory from last Fall was with students at a park in Mount Vernon. It was a windy and rainy morning and I was worried the students would be discouraged about learning outside. Upon meeting my group, I knew that my worries were for nothing. They could barely contain their excitement to be at Mountain School—even for the day! We spent the day exploring in nature, playing fun games, and looking for mushrooms in the rain. At the day's end, they expressed how happy they were to attend Mountain School after hearing older students talk about their experiences in previous years. This once again highlighted the enduring impact of the Institute's transformative programs.

Empowering learners of all ages to foster community with their peers and deepen their connection to the natural world is why I am here and why I do this kind of work. Outdoor education is extremely powerful and the connections to the land one builds can last forever. North Cascades Institute works hard every day to build those connections to the North Cascades and surrounding ecosystems. I hope you will join me in supporting these connections by making your gift in the enclosed envelope or online at ncascades.org/givebig.



moments of joy with peers



exploring nature together

I hear the water
The moss felt soft
I smell mint
The wood is wet
The rock with green hair
The water is cold

Thank you,

Mia Munoz, YLA Assistant Coordinator

P.S. From backpacking trips in the North Cascades for high schoolers, to day programs for 5th graders, my time at the Institute has shown me how impactful outdoor experiential education can be. **Your support makes that possible—please Give BIG today.**

NORTH CASCADES INSTITUTE



◀ Scan to learn more or visit ncascades.org/givebig

