



THORPEWOOD MID-YEAR IMPACT REPORT

Reconnecting Humans and Nature



Summer 2026 | www.thorpewood.org | [@thorpewoodmaryland](https://www.instagram.com/thorpewoodmaryland)

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

Dear Friends,

If there's one theme that has stood out to me this year, it's the power of connection.

Whether it's a child discovering confidence through Ecotherapy Adventures, a grieving hiker finding community on the trail through The Umbrella Project, or Healing Ourselves & Our Planet alumni coming together to create meaningful opportunities for others, I've been reminded that the relationships we build are often what sustain us.

As you read this report, I hope you'll take a few moments to read Kaitlyn's story. Her experience beautifully captures why this work matters and the profound impact that can happen when people feel safe enough to let down their guard, be seen, and realize they don't have to carry life's challenges alone.

It's been a full and rewarding first half of the year. Thank you for believing in our mission and making this work possible. Your support continues to create spaces where people can reconnect with nature, with one another, and with themselves.

With gratitude,

Kaili van Waveren
Executive Director



OUR MISSION & VALUES

Mission

To reconnect humans and nature to promote mental health, wellness, and environmental stewardship.

Values

Connection, Curiosity & Wonder, Stewardship, Community Care, Equity & Belonging, Integrity, Healing

Vision

We envision a world where humans and nature are inseparably connected, where time spent outdoors nurtures mental health, strengthens wellbeing, and inspires care for the environment.



IMPACT AT A GLANCE

January 1 - June 30, 2026

282

Total program participants

201

Youth served

37

Umbrella Project participants

82

Percent of participants receiving services at no cost to them

73

Days of programs

15

Collaborations with nonprofit and educational groups

11

Public events

16

Nonprofit organizations hosted

422

Volunteer hours contributed

PROGRAMS AND EVENTS

January 1 - June 30, 2026

- Ecotherapy Adventures programs with
 - West Frederick, Brunswick, and Thurmont Middle Schools
 - LYNX (Linking Youth to New Experience)
 - Oakdale Middle School Learning 4 Life
 - Tuscarora High School Pyramid Program
 - Monocacy Elementary School
- Special interest programs with
 - SWAG (Sisters Wholesome Aspiring towards Greatness)
 - Frederick Health Hospice's Camp Jamie
 - Living Through Loss
- Service Learning and Sports Xplore Camp with Hood College
- Weekly programs with SUCCESS and ClearView Communities
- Monthly Nature on Tap Speaker Series events at RAK Brewing
- Monthly programs with Frederick County Public Libraries and The Arc of Carroll County
- Wilderness First Aid training with The Trail House
- Nature-based workshops: Spring Nature Photography Workshop, Vernal Equinox Celebration, City Nature Challenge

Visit www.thorpewood.org/programs to learn more.



THE UMBRELLA PROJECT

January 1 - June 30, 2026

The Umbrella Project offers backpacking, hiking, and other outdoor adventure programs designed for adults who are grieving the death of a loved one. Participants journey together, supported by grief counselors, outdoor professionals, and peers who understand the challenges of loss.



5 Grief hikes

1 Multiday backpacking trip

2 Retreats

3 Volunteer trainings

37 People supported



KAITLYN'S STORY: FROM SURVIVING TO HEALING

The day after my mom passed away, while I was in the middle of planning her funeral and trying to keep putting one foot in front of the other after losing both of my parents just over two months apart, I found myself searching online for hiking and grief. I stumbled across The Umbrella Project and filled out the interest form that day.



Looking back, I honestly believe my mom led me there.

If someone had invited me to a grief support group, I would have politely declined. At that point, I wasn't ready to face my grief. I was surviving by staying busy, focusing on work, raising my two young children, and navigating two estates. I had convinced myself that if I just kept moving, I wouldn't have to stop long enough to feel what had happened.

But I also knew I should be doing something. I had read all of the grief books I could get my hands on. I understood grief intellectually. They all said to find community, surround yourself with people who understand, don't grieve alone. **I think I was signing up for the trail... hoping I could receive the healing without ever having to face the grief.** Then something shifted.

One evening, participants wrote letters to the people they had lost and offered them to the fire. I wrote letters to both of my parents, and as we offered them to the fire, I completely fell apart. **Through tears, I shared out loud what I had been carrying silently for months—that I felt broken without my parents.**

Later, I took a walk by myself to watch the sunset. Standing there alone, I felt closer to my parents than I had since they died. I can't fully explain it, but that evening was the first time my grief felt less like something I needed to outrun and more like a way of remaining connected to them.

Before The Umbrella Project, I thought I had been grieving for months. **Looking back, I realize I had mostly been surviving.**

Perhaps the greatest gift has been that I can now talk about my parents with joy alongside the sadness. My children were lucky enough to know their Nana and PopPop, but they're too young to carry those memories into adulthood. As those memories fade for them, mine become even more important. I get to tell them who their grandparents were, how fiercely they loved them, and make sure Nana and PopPop continue to be part of their lives. Before The Umbrella Project, those conversations felt almost impossible. Today, they feel like one of the greatest ways I can honor my parents and keep their love alive for my children.

Now [nature is] where I go to reconnect. When I'm outside, I feel closer to my parents than anywhere else. I talk to them, think about them, and allow myself to miss them without trying to push those feelings away.

The Umbrella Project didn't ask me to have the right words or the right emotions. It simply met me exactly where I was. It may not change what happened, but it just might change how you carry it. It certainly did for me.

What I was actually searching for, even if I couldn't put words to it at the time, was **permission to stop surviving and start grieving.** That's what I found.

Kaitlyn's story is a reminder that healing doesn't mean leaving grief behind. Sometimes it begins with giving yourself permission to stop surviving and start grieving, and discovering you don't have to walk that path alone.

Visit www.thorpewood.org/umbrella-project to learn more about upcoming hikes.

PARTNERSHIPS & COLLABORATIONS

Community wellness is a collective effort. ThorpeWood is proud to collaborate with organizations that share our commitment to service and healing.



Visit www.thorpewood.org/partnerships to learn more.

PUBLIC SERVICE AWARD RECIPIENT



The Arc of Carroll County Public Service Award is presented to individuals or groups with a high public profile who advance the public's understanding of people with intellectual and developmental disabilities or who advocate for change that improves services or the overall quality of life for people with disabilities.

“ ThorpeWood was thoughtfully chosen to receive the Public Service Award[...]for how they serve not only the Arc and its participants but the community as a whole.

[ThorpeWood provided] an enriching and safe environment for the individuals supported to engage in mindful therapeutic activities and engage safely with their animals.

This partnership has easily become one of the favorites amongst the participants of the Arc.”

– Kourtney Merriam, Program Coordinator



VOLUNTEER HIGHLIGHTS

January 1 - June 30, 2026

422 **Hours contributed** through staffing events, joining committees, and outreach.

26 **Active volunteers**

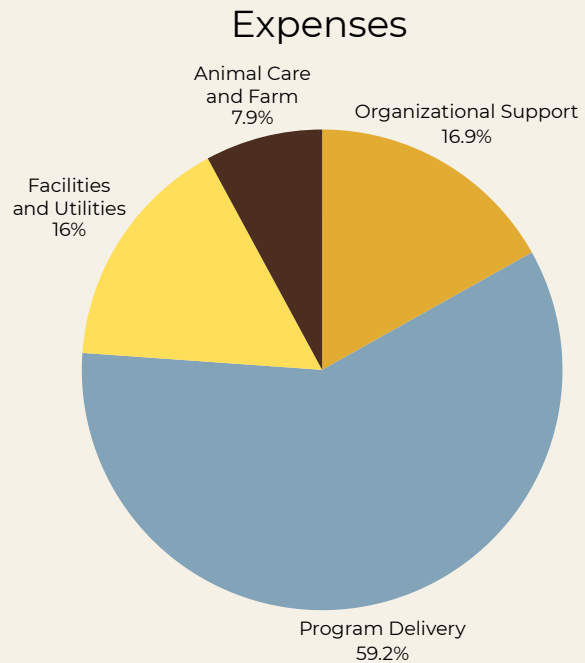
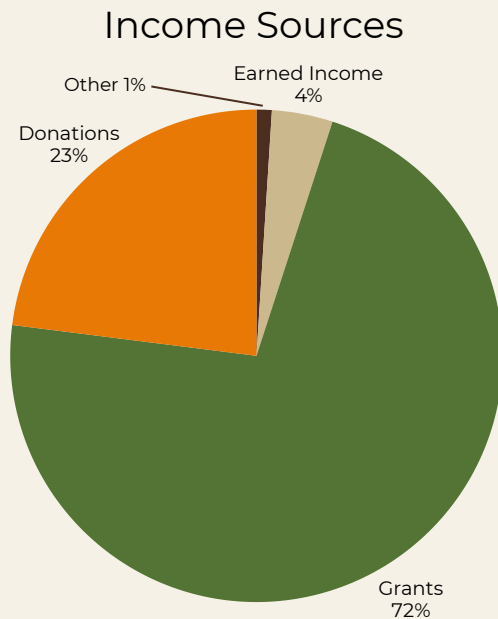
3 **Events hosted** by the Sustainability Committee: Vernal Equinox Celebration, City Nature Challenge at ThorpeWood, and Spring Photography Workshop

Visit www.thorpewood.org/volunteer to learn more.



FINANCIAL OVERVIEW

January 1 - June 30, 2026



ThorpeWood has earned Candid's Platinum Seal of Transparency - the highest level of recognition for nonprofit transparency and accountability.

This seal reflects our commitment to sharing not only how donations are used, but also the impact they're making. We believe our supporters deserve to know how their generosity is helping reconnect people with nature to promote mental health, wellness, and environmental stewardship.

Visit www.thorpewood.org/donate to learn more.



Be part of the **change.**

Your support transforms lives.
Join us in building brighter futures.



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www.thorpewood.org | @thorpewoodmaryland