



2025

Annual Report
**SUNSET HILL
EDUCATIONAL
INSTITUTE**

Sunset Hill Educational Institute

P.O. Box 435, South Sutton, NH 03273

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Carol Conforti-Adams Executive Director's Message

SHEI: 20 Years of Purpose, Connection, and Growth

As SHEI celebrates 20 years, we honor a journey rooted in purpose. What began as one person offering education, has grown into a vibrant center for hands-on, barrier-free experiences that nurture resilience, community, and well-being. After 44 years on this homestead - and 24 as a wheelchair user - I've learned from nature's lessons in adaptation and balance. Creating SHEI has been my way of sharing that gift.

"Barrier-free" means more than accessible paths—it means programs offered without fees, open to all, regardless of ability or circumstance. This year we expanded on-site events, welcomed new partners, and hosted over 50 opportunities for nature-based engagement.

I'm deeply grateful to our Board, staff, partners, educators, and community. Together, we've built a space where connection and healing thrive. As Brené Brown reminds us: *"Connection is why we're here."*

With gratitude and a growth mindset, we continue to evolve. SHEI - born from personal challenge and a desire to live with purpose - has become a movement, a sanctuary, and a community.



(My child) loved working with Linden to catch tadpoles. He wants to catch frogs next time!" -Program Participant

"I could physically see parents relax as they enjoyed sitting in the chairs that overlook Carol's beautiful view. The kids had a blast catching and holding frogs and tadpoles, and it was joyful chaos around the frog pond." - Presenter

Frog pond exploration is often a highlight of children's time at SHEI. We are in the process of increasing the size of our frog pond to welcome a greater variety of amphibious friends. Your financial support can bring this to fruition! <https://www.sheinh.org/donate>



From the President of the Board -Liesl Hasenfuss

We have had a busy summer here at SHEI exploring a myriad of new ways to meet the needs of our community at this beautiful outdoor campus. SHEI offered many opportunities to promote wellness through deep connection to the sounds and rhythms of nature, and to inspire creativity in thought, expression, and movement. Multiple programs engaged people of a wide variety of ages, abilities, and areas of interest.

Partnerships with knowledgeable and captivating presenters allowed SHEI to fulfill its 2025 educational mission by bringing new ideas and clear wisdom to participants.

Children and families were given time and space to experience nature's gifts, which is more necessary than ever. We deepened our commitment to that this summer with excellent results.

Sunset Hill Educational Institute Board of Directors

Liesl Hasenfuss, President
William Turner, Treasurer
Susan Ireland, Secretary
Patricia Vaicaitis, Director
Chris Adams, Director
Dorothy Jeffrey, Director
Kathy Lowe-Bloch, Director

Donate Today – DOUBLE Your Impact!

We are thrilled to announce that an anonymous donor has generously pledged to match every donation up to **\$10,000!** This means your contribution will go twice as far in supporting our vital mission.

Donations allow SHEI to create inclusive, hands-on experiences that inspire connection to the natural world, in turn nurturing curiosity, resilience, and well-being for all ages and abilities. Please consider a charitable gift to help us meet this matching challenge. Together, we can make an even greater difference!

Donation Information

Your generous tax-deductible donation can be made by mailing a check to *Sunset Hill Educational Institute, P.O. Box 435 South Sutton, NH 03273* or by submitting an online gift at <https://www.sheinh.org/donate>. We extend our sincere gratitude for your continued support of SHEI's mission!

"I learned about how to put together a better menu for my gut biome and also how helpful Qigong can be in calming my (mind)" -Program Participant

"Many thanks to Carol and everyone involved in arranging these wonderful programs. What a gift it has been to me to find SHEI!" -Program Participant

"There was much laughter & creativity" -Presenter



2025 Treasurer's Report: Reflecting on a Successful Season

SHEI sustained barrier-free nature-based education and wellness through generous donations, grants, in-kind support, and volunteerism. Our funding covered operational needs, facility upkeep, and expansion of inclusive outdoor spaces—each dollar reinforcing our mission of accessibility for all.

As we celebrate two decades of purpose, SHEI remains financially strong and mission-driven. Our Board leads with transparency and gratitude, and we're excited to deepen partnerships and remove barriers to wellness and connection.

Our financial health reflects our clear purpose and the steadfast support of our community. Your donation will allow us to continue our work.

William S. Turner,
SHEI Treasurer

Navigating Life's Obstacles with Growth

In the garden of life, among all the weeds and pests of challenge, SHEI has been a flower in continuous bloom on which the caterpillar of my traumatic experience could hang its cocoon. After injury and a subsequent life-changing disability upended the goals and dreams of my young adulthood, my garden felt drained of nutrients and overrun by the blight of self-doubt.

When Carol invited me into the SHEI organization, rich fertilizer was laid as steady hands helped me plant seeds of knowledge and self-efficacy. SHEI provided the ingredients of support that, to this day, feed the continual cultivation of the skills I've obtained in my cocoon. Today, the garden of my life feels full of self-driven purpose as I move toward new goals and dreams with a transformed body and mind. I feel my cocoon beginning to crack as the butterfly of my potential emerges.

SHEI found me lost and hopeless. An invitation into this community offered compassion and resources to rebuild confidence in myself and my changed abilities. Currently, I'm one year away from a degree in psychological counseling—a goal and a dream once undiscovered but now found through experience and skill development with SHEI.

If you or someone you know could benefit from a cocoon of transformation, no matter how small or large it may be, please reach out to us. SHEI harnesses the principles of nature and its examples of resilience and growth to provide programs and services that unlock your own potential. You'll increase your circle of support as you navigate life's inevitable obstacles—and have fun along the way!

Laura Clark, SHEI Communications Specialist



During our June-October 2025 in-person program season, SHEI planned 63 events and welcomed an astounding 685 participants, volunteers, and presenters!

Accessible programs included:

- Kayaking & Hiking
- Full-moon Drumming
- Homeopathic Tincture-Making
- Watercolor Painting
- Youth Orienteering
- Nature Journaling for Youth & Adults
- Yoga, Tai Chi, Forest Bathing, Sound Healing, & Qigong Flow
- Seminars on Digestive Health and Nervous System Regulation
- Medicinal Plant Identification
- Family Nature Days

The year was record-breaking by all metrics, and made possible through generous financial contributions.

Please visit:

**<https://www.sheinh.org/donate>
to support our future programs!**

SHEI Awarded Craig H. Neilsen Foundation Grant to Advance Accessible Waterfront Recreation

This transformative funding will help us address long-standing inequities in access to nature-based wellness by expanding inclusive outdoor opportunities for individuals living with spinal cord injuries (SCI), others with disabilities, and their loved ones.

This project builds on the momentum of SHEI's WHIM (Wheelchair Health In Motion) program, which inspired the design of our ADA-accessible hilltop campus, including pathways, restrooms, and a pavilion. WHIM reflects our commitment to improving quality of life through barrier-free environments that foster healing, connection, and joy.

We will implement ADA-compliant infrastructure, including specialized equipment, a lift system, and safe water programming to build a lasting recreational asset that welcomes everybody to the water. Your support helped secure the grant - now donor matching will bring it to life!

Wildwood Foresters at SHEI: Where Nature Nurtures the Whole Child

Each Tuesday, the SHEI campus comes alive with the joyful energy of the Wildwood Foresters—a nature-based, child-led program designed to empower young learners. SHEI is honored to host this vibrant program, where the outdoors becomes a classroom and every moment is a chance to grow.

Watching little ones engage with real-life learning—digging, building, wondering—is a weekly reminder of the power of nature to support the whole child: socially, emotionally, and physically. Through hands-on exploration and creative play in nature, children develop resilience, curiosity, and a strong sense of community.

“We see nature as more than a backdrop, it's a living partner in renewal, learning, & transformation. Through immersive experiences, our programs help people restore balance, rediscover purpose, & draw strength from the natural world's quiet resilience.”

SHEI's 2026 Initiative: STEAM into Nature

SHEI's 2026 initiative centers on transforming traditional education through nature- based field trips that align with existing curricular standards. By embedding science, technology, engineering, art, and mathematics (STEAM) into outdoor settings, we create dynamic, hands-on experiences that nurture academic growth and support students' social-emotional well-being.

We invite educators to collaborate with us in designing seamless, interdisciplinary programming rooted in evidence-based outdoor learning practices. Nature becomes a living classroom—an inclusive, accessible space where youth build knowledge, skills, and confidence through active engagement.

Why Outdoor STEAM Matters:

- Collaborative & Experiential: Learning becomes interactive and deeply connected to real-world contexts.
- Curiosity & Creativity: Students explore, question, and innovate in environments that spark imagination.
- Well-being & Engagement: Outdoor activity supports mental and physical health while reducing stress and isolation.
- Equity & Access: SHEI's natural campus offers a barrier-free alternative to sedentary classroom models, welcoming diverse learners.

By integrating STEAM into nature, we offer a holistic approach to education—one that prepares youth to thrive in a rapidly changing world.

Consider donating to help foster lifelong curiosity alongside today's educators!

In celebrating our 20th year, we gladly welcome like-minded mission partners to jointly cultivate new nature, wellness and education programs.


Your generous contribution will help make this possible! Donate at <https://www.sheinh.org/donate>

SHEI program participants gleaned....

"A reminder to be still, listen, quiet the mind and be grateful."

"so much about caring for the body with herbs, tea blends, gut friendly foods."

"the importance of taking the time to sit in nature and hear the sounds"



"Learned so much about caring for the body with herbs, tea blends, gut friendly foods."
-Program Participant





Nature's Way at SHEI

Nature's Way at SHEI is a program that breathes action into the terms, "connect", "nourish", and "grow". Together we discover nature's way of optimal growth for nourishing our personal growth, enhancing our practices of resilience and adaptation for a quality of life defined by our internal strengths.

This year we enjoyed 25+ participant encounters over six Nature's Way days! We focused on methods of: stress-reduction through breathing patterns, staying present, self-reflection, creating a fulfilling daily routine, developing inspiring beliefs, tracking self-growth, and finding our rhythm. These methods aim to open mind and energetic spirit for a dance that recognizes personal value and invites vitality.

Inclusion has been key to program success. Originally piloted to those with spinal cord injuries, this year we drew a broader audience, understanding that anyone with a mind and spirit can learn this beneficial dance. The experience wasn't just about practicing mindfulness skills though, it was also about just having fun! We sang, drummed, learned seated Tai Chi, made eclectic clipboards, and painted rocks.

It has been an honor and privilege to watch Nature's Way participants experience personal growth and become valuable members of a supportive community!

Through Nature's Way..."I learned more about what brings ME joy - I made new friends who I feel safe and accepted with."
-Program Participant



Andy Jeffrey

Certified Holistic Health Coach &
Nature's Way Director

"After (Expand in the Summer Light) I set up a "sit spot" that the presenter mentioned. It has become a very important part of my day. I love my sit spot!" -Program Participant

"One family with mushroom-obsessed kids was so committed to coming to this free program that they traded cars for the weekend with a friend, just so they would have the larger vehicle to drive all their kids to the program. Everyone left with smiles..." -Presenter

"This group/program/concept came into my life at the perfect time. I am grateful!"
-Program Participant



New Participant Spotlights

"Before my accident I was an athlete and a hiker. The day my life started in a wheelchair was a hard change, but I eventually found SHEI. SHEI helped me be more social and reminded me there are a lot of skills I have besides just being active. Before SHEI it was hard for me to go out in my wheelchair because I was afraid people would judge me. Through SHEI I relearned that a wheelchair is just a tool and doesn't define the person." – Marissa J.

"I was in search of a place in the community that held events in nature, about nature, or any health-related topics. I found all of those at Sunset Hill. I enjoyed others who attended and the welcoming atmosphere. My hope is that SHEI continues to be supported in 2026, so current programs can expand. I know the community will benefit." – Barb R.

"I really loved Wendy's qigong class. Perfect outdoor setting to be calling up qi from earth and sky! I will definitely be looking to delve more into this practice. Also enjoyed (making) journals with Libby."
–Program Participant

New Presenter Spotlights

"I had the pleasure of teaching a new craft at a SHEI event, sitting on top of a mountain surrounded by smiling faces and magnificent scenery. It was such a wonderful experience. The activity and company of incredible people have taught me much about the joys found in everyday life, how to move forward, and most importantly how to immerse myself in nature and love. I encourage everyone, if you see an event being offered by SHEI, come up the mountain and experience the joy!" – Patti Mullin



Heidi Colburn

Deeply passionate about the natural world, biologist and educator Heidi Colburn enjoys helping others connect with nature through nature journaling.

Her classes introduce students to investigative and mindful practices to experience the outdoors more deeply. Heidi looks forward to offering adult and children's nature journaling classes at SHEI again in 2026!



"This is a wonderful space to be. Thank you for opening Sunset Hill to the public and offering these program(s) that assist me in opening my mind to the interconnections in life."
–Program Participant



Help us continue making a difference in our community!
<https://www.sheinh.org/donate>