

# 2025 BACKPACK PROJECT

Your generosity helped Brushwood Center and our community partners create and distribute 1,400 Nature Explorer Backpacks/Mochilas de Explorador to youth and families in Gurnee, Highwood, North Chicago, Round Lake, and Waukegan this summer.

Since its start during the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Nature Explorer Backpack Project has grown into an annual tool for connecting youth and families to the many benefits of art and nature, while breaking down barriers to accessing Lake County's green and blue spaces. Our community partners distribute the Backpacks at locally-organized events where families can engage in hands-on activities and nature walks.



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For more information on Brushwood Center and to support the 2026 Nature Explorer Backpack Project, please contact:

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BRUSHWOODCENTER.ORG

## VISION

We work toward a future of resilient and connected communities, both human and ecological, where all lead healthy and thriving lives.

## MISSION

Brushwood Center works collaboratively with artists, health care providers, and scientists to improve health equity and access to nature in Lake County, Illinois, and the Chicago region. We engage people with the outdoors through the arts, environmental education, and community action. Brushwood Center's programs focus on youth, families, Military Veterans, and those facing racial and economic injustices.

# 2025 NATURE EXPLORER BACKPACK PROJECT



BRUSHWOOD



Over **2,000** students received bilingual art and nature activity books.

**1,400** backpacks distributed to families in Waukegan, Round Lake, North Chicago, Gurnee, and Highwood.



**11** distribution events with **12** community partners.



**100+** volunteers from BCU, Discovery Day Camp, and Grainger packed backpacks.



# Why "Nature Explorer" Backpacks?

While Nature Explorer Backpacks include school supplies, their greatest benefit is helping youth and families get outside and spend time in nature. Not only is time outside fun and refreshing, research has shown it has many lifelong benefits for children's mental and physical health, including:

- Promoting bone health
- Improving motor development
- Reducing anger and aggression
- Increasing focus
- Reducing stress and depression
- Supporting healthy eyesight development
- Improving learning

"The economy is difficult right now. Families saved about 70 dollars with each backpack, families are money conscious and could use that money for bills. Families really enjoyed the coloring book, it helps with kids' mental health in relaxing and de-stressing. After the bilingual hike, families were happy. Birds on the hike migrated over hundreds of miles and it reminded the families of their journeys. Brushwood helped build community close to their home and remind them that there are green spaces that are accessible and close to them."

**Maria Colunga**  
Round Lake Bilingual Parents Advisory Council



**2025 BACKPACK SPONSORS**

BCU  
The Buchanan Family Foundation  
Grainger  
Grainger Foundation  
Jonathan Huisel  
Northwestern Medicine  
Jessica P. Sarowitz  
Wintrust Community Banks

## 2025 DISTRIBUTION PARTNERS

- Round Lake Public Library
- North Chicago Public Library
- Cool Learning Experiences
- Skokie Arts
- Lake County CABS
- Highwood Public Library and Community Center
- Warren Newport Public Library
- HACES
- Mano a Mano
- Heart of the City
- Lake County Juneteenth
- Lake County Nature Network

