

In Tandem | Youth Outside

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Ben Greené, co-host: Welcome to *In Tandem*, a podcast brought to you by Ben Greené and Keren Bitan.

Keren Bitan, co-host: *In Tandem* focuses on stories of changemakers in our communities who are building a more sustainable and equitable future. The team at Youth Outside advances racial justice and equity in the outdoor movement through capacity building and leadership development.

Ben Greené, co-host: In this episode, we hear from Youth Outside's CEO Kim Moore Bailey, and Senior Programs Manager Rena Payan.

Rena Payan: I'm Rena Payan, and I grew up in the Central Valley of California, and we're surrounded by agricultural lands, and so the outdoors were just something that we always did or were. I have a very, very large family, over thirty cousins on my mother's side. And so, we didn't all fit in anybody's house, so the outdoors were a necessity for us. In the fifth grade, I was fortunate enough to go to science camp at Camp Green Meadows. It was the first time I had experienced outdoors away from my family and I was shocked at how comfortable it felt because of all the time that I had spent in the outdoors with my family.

Kim Moore Bailey: I'm Kim Moore Bailey, I am the CEO with Youth Outside. I grew up on Long Island in New York, and we were always a family that had outdoor experiences. We are very much, my sister and I, very much the go outside and play kids. And I remember just being amazed at all of this activity and life that existed in our backyard. There's always been a personal passion for me. But I would say, you know, roughly eleven and a half years ago, it really crystallized, and that was when our youngest grandchildren were born, they're twin boys. And I think, you know, I had spent at that point, you know, years, running Parks and Recreation departments and working for YMCAs. And I, you know, knew the makings of the programs, but you know, I didn't have children myself, it was through marriage, so this was sort of my first time seeing it through a child's eyes, right? Seeing their joy, seeing their joy in things that didn't cost anything like the pine cones on the ground. And what also broke my heart was watching, you know, parents of white children usher their child away when we showed up. I was cognizant of it as an adult, and I wondered, can they sense this as a two year old? Do they feel this as a three year old? And, you know, we're trying to protect them from it. And the minute they would want to leave, you know, all of this is ringing through my head, and I'm like, no, we've got to stay. And I'm like, oh my God, calm down, you know, like, if they really just want to go, they want to go, and I thought wow, I am going to do this work so that the reason they want to leave is really

because they're just so exhausted, or they've had so much fun, they're just full or you know, we've run out of all the snacks in the world and it has nothing to do with being made to feel that they don't belong here, or being made to feel that it's unsafe here. And I'm gonna keep doing this work until like, seeing somebody in a uniform doesn't make them scared, but that makes them feel welcome and that they want to be in these places and they'd never question that they belong here and that gives me purpose, and that's why I do this work.

Rena Payan: For so long folks of color have found themselves on the receiving end of violence and, and brutalization or exclusion from the outdoors, and it's hard to own something, or feel ownership over something that has historically brought a great sense of pain, right? When we, when we think about the history, history of this country, and the removal of indigenous people from their ancestral lands, when we think about the history of this country, and the use of black bodies and labor to build up what we all enjoy at this point, to varying degrees, it's hard to envision an outdoors space that feels safe knowing that history. It requires us to take all of that into consideration and start from a place of building trust, right? If you can't trust the person that's taking you into the outdoors, and you're carrying the generations of trauma that's associated with the outdoors, you're just never going to make it out there. Right? And so there has to be a movement to build greater trust amongst those that do have access and ownership of outdoor spaces, and those that are deserving to be in those spaces and historically have not had that access. And trust, like we all know, is a hard thing to build. It takes a really long time. And it takes a deep knowledge and understanding of communities that you're looking to engage in. It requires time and intention and energy. Right? And it's hard to have and build trust within communities of color, if you're a person of color is being forced out of their job, because they're not being paid a livable wage. Right? And so that's why we say that there's no single issue issue. You have to have the foresight, and the understanding that you have to confront all of these things at the same time, and oftentimes, we don't build in the time and intention to think about the things outside of: What is this plant called? How do we provide the buses, right?

Kim Moore Bailey: Open spaces are environmental justice places as well, right? Like this idea that the water isn't safe, or the park isn't safe, right? That those are the places that there's an association with you, you got sick, right, if you went outside, and so it's safer to be inside. And that can be generational, right? And even if there's been activity to sort of clean it up, right? Like they took down the plant or they took out, you know, they turned off the smokestacks, there's still this association with it, and so therefore, it's still been passed down.

Rena Payan: What we're seeing more and more in the midst of COVID is that the way that we've structured nonprofits and the way that we've structured philanthropy is really highlighting that there is no single issue issue. Right? And so, previous philanthropic organizations that focus on the outdoors are now needing to consider in the world that we live in that focusing on conservation as it's traditionally thought in plants and places as opposed to people, is really doing a disservice to the health and well being of the world that we're living in right now. We as an organization had to take all of that into account and consider you know, are we doing the service that we say we're doing? Or are we replicating a system that is not actually serving all equitably? Right? I'll just brag on Kim's behalf to her brilliance, you know, she saw that early on,

and she comes from a long background of being a person of color in the outdoors as we heard right? And knows firsthand the inequity that happens when we try and box things into closely, and when we replicate the systems that we know are not serving folks of color because we've lived through those systems. It's really a matter of recognizing the power dynamics that exist and interrupting those power lines.

Kim Moore Bailey: At one point, there's something like 8% of all philanthropic dollars and that's like, across all sectors, you know, not even just the environmental sectors was going to organizations that were led by black, indigenous or people of color. And if you think about it, even in the environmental sector, right, that slice of that 8% is even smaller. And we were offered the opportunity to launch this new fund, with real intention to prioritize not only some grantmaking opportunity, but some capacity building opportunity to organizations that are being led by folks of color working within communities of color around conservation and outdoor programming. Perhaps we're opening up the network for other organizations that have philanthropic dollars to meet and celebrate in the genius that we are now also tapping into.

Rena Payan: Young people really inherited the short end of the stick right now. They are the inheritors of all the wrongdoings of the generations before them. Right? And still, we see that there is a level of care and intention and thoughtfulness beyond their years, I think because of it, right? I think of one of our outdoor educators that went through the program in 2017. I knew her when she was a freshman in high school. She participated in a backpacking program I ran for high schoolers, and she learned how to backpack using public transit with me for the summer. And then those high schoolers took out middle schoolers with me and acted as the leaders for those middle schoolers, and so they were developing their own leadership. And her younger brother was one of the middle schoolers that we went backpacking with, right? And so his experience was being informed by his sister's experience, right? And her experience was being informed by another Latina, myself, who had had an opportunity to learn how to backpack and was sharing that with the next generation, right? And consequently, she did the high school program and then when I put out an all call to join the Outdoor Educators Institute, she was on board. She put in her application, and she had a strong application, thank you very much. And she participated in the Outdoor Educators Institute. And since then, she has been an organizer for her family and her community to have outdoor experiences and exposures above and beyond what she learned as a young person and through the Outdoor Educators Institute. And her family has become more invested in the outdoors. They go snowboarding and skiing, they all learn together as a family, they go camping on a regular basis. The outdoors has become a more integral part of their lives because of her experience and they are all voting adults. So when measures come up, when opportunities to act on behalf of the planet that we've messed up for them come up, they take those opportunities very seriously because they have an intimate connection with what it means to be outdoors and what can come of being outdoors, and they take those opportunities to try and make right what may have been done wrong in the past.

Kim Moore Bailey: We want to believe that if they have these positive experiences, that when it is time to vote, that there will be these touch points that they will have this moment of like, "Oh,

yeah! This is a good thing.” Right? The community should have money for clean parks, right? Whether or not it's part of their reality already or not, right, that this is something that will be a muscle memory for them because they've had that experience and that they will carry that forward. Because in the absence of it, how will they know? Right? What is the flip side? And I look at my husband's family, generation after generation of black men and women, now children, who do not swim. And it is this fear. And I'm like, you all are just a case study, fear of the water. And I'm like, we have to flip this paradigm. And starting to just, you know, I step in and start to work with grandchildren around water, and swimming and the ocean and where the water is coming from. And they connected it to the fish and the health of the fish, right? So maybe we can start to break this cycle now.

Rena Payan: Not dissimilar to Kim, I am very, very fortunate to have a brilliant and hilarious thirteen year old nephew. And I, when I think about what drives me to do this work and what I strive for in my life, it's very informed by him. Right? And I, you know, he's, he's this, I love him so much, he's this like, weirdo little brown thirteen year old kid, right? And like, there's lessons to be learned in like everything he says and does in a way that I had never thought I could learn lessons, right? Like, there's an authentic connection to self, and his, his desire to just be who he is, and there's an authentic connection to the outdoors and the desire to be in a place where he could just be who he is, right? And there's a desire to have an authentic connection to other people who are going to embrace, you know, this weirdo little kid, right, and in all the complexities that he is and, and it's easy for me to project those feelings onto him because I think at the end of the day, they're the same feelings that we all have. We all want to feel like we belong somewhere. And we all want to feel like we belong in our own bodies. And we all want to feel like there are people around us who will take care of us and care for us, even if we're not exactly like them or exactly like they want us to be. Right? And when I think about doing this work, but also I think about living my life, I want to live more like that, I want to live a life that's more worthy of having him for a nephew, right, which means that I have to, I have to work to create the spaces that to Kim's point feel welcoming and safe for him, so that he never has to question whether he belongs, right, and I have to, I have to strive and work to be the kind of person that he knows he can come to and, and be seen and valued and loved just exactly as he is, and I have to work to ensure that the people that come into his lives are deserving of him. Right? And so when I think about what life is about, it's about authentic connection, and when I think about what drives me to do this work, it's to ensure that all young people, especially weirdo little brown kids like him, have an opportunity to have those connections. I think what I often find asking myself, but also other people when we have these conversations with our community is, what are you doing to make the world a more racially equitable place, right, in the times that we're living it's apparent now more than ever, that racial inequity exists, right, we can no longer turn a blind eye to the ways that anti-blackness and racism show up in our daily lives. And so more and more I find myself asking and oftentimes on behalf of Youth Outside, what are you doing to show that you're in this with us, that you're going to work to change, even if it means that you lose some of your power or you don't have the same comfort, but what are you doing to change the systems that mean that so many people in our community, so many people that we love ourselves will have an opportunity in the same way that, you know, our white allies have

had those opportunities, and so the question is, you know, what are you doing today to make the world a more just and fair place?

Kim Moore Bailey: What would it take to, to step back, to allow others to step up? What is a racially just outdoor movement look like? Is the table big enough? Can we make room for, for black, indigenous and people of color to not always be asked to come as the sub or to talk about what isn't happening, but to be there as an equal voice, as an equal thought partner, to bring the knowledge, what would that take?

Ben Greené, co-host: You can learn more about Kim and Rena's work at youthoutside.org.

Keren Bitan, co-host: Music for this episode is performed by Thayne Yazzie on guitar and Ben Greené on piano. *In Tandem* is created and produced by Keren Bitan and Ben Greené and published by Tandem impact.

Ben Greené, co-host: Thank you for listening.