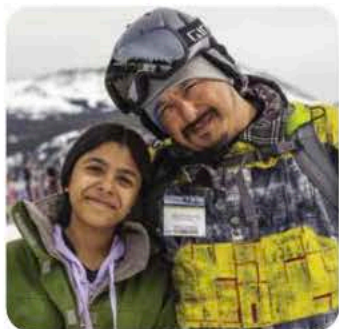


SOS Outreach

30 Years of Empowering Youth + Building Community

BY LEXI REICH



For three decades, SOS Outreach has been a guiding light for thousands of young people across the United States.

Founded in 1993 by Arn Menconi, a snowboard instructor at Vail Mountain, and Ray Sforzo, founder of Vail's snowboard school, SOS Outreach began as a mission to change lives through snowboarding while supporting local charities. Over the years, its impact has

evolved into a comprehensive youth development program that transcends snow sports, reaching over 3,100 kids and teens annually in 15 communities across 10 states.

Initially known as Snowboard Outreach Society, the acronym SOS was aptly chosen to signal a call for help and support, reflecting its mission to provide opportunities for underserved youth. As SOS Outreach, the organization expanded its reach beyond snowboarding to include skiing and diversified its programs to encompass year-round outdoor activities.

In Eagle County, where the organization is headquartered, SOS Outreach plays a vital role in fostering a sense of community among young people. Despite residing in a mountainous region renowned for its ski resorts, many local youth face barriers to participating in outdoor sports.

"These activities in many ways are the backbone of the community's culture, and exclusion from these sports leads to a sense of exclusion from the

community," says Seth Ehrlich, SOS Outreach executive director. "Providing access to the mountain for these young people gives them an opportunity to relate and connect with their peers and feel a sense of belonging to the community in which they live."

Each year, over 500 Eagle County youth engage with adult mentors, forming lasting connections while developing leadership skills. Through a blend of on-hill experiences, off-hill workshops and service-learning activities, such as volunteering at the library or community market, participants not only learn outdoor skills but also explore community issues and collaborate on solutions.

Looking ahead to the upcoming seasons, SOS Outreach is excited to highlight its summer and fall programs, including backpacking, climbing and rafting adventures. A recent addition, the Career Development Program, offers participants age 15 and above paid apprenticeships in the outdoor industry. This initiative bridges passion with profession, providing hands-on experience and opening doors to future career opportunities.

Fernanda Landeros, a program graduate turned junior mentor, exemplifies the organization's influence; through SOS, Landeros says she not only developed essential skills for college and her career, but also found a sense of purpose in giving back to the community.

"It is so great to see how many alumni want to stay engaged in the organization in any way they can, and I know it's inspiring for our current participants to connect with alumni," Landeros shares. "It's amazing to see these stories come full circle."

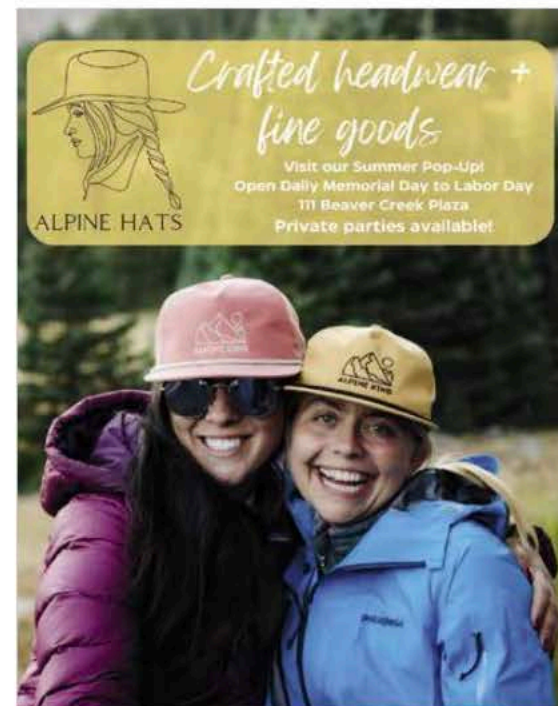
With hometown roots in Eagle, Travis Tafoya credits his first introduction to snowboarding at Beaver Creek and

Vail to SOS Outreach. Today, Tafoya is the senior manager of inclusive access for Vail Resorts and volunteers on the Board of Directors for SOS to further his goal of creating a more inclusive space on the mountain.

The longstanding partnership between Vail Resorts and SOS Outreach spans three decades, during which 11 of Vail's resorts across North America have served over 2,200 youth participants with free lift tickets, lessons and gear rentals.

"Together, we have worked to create meaningful change within our local communities providing access to snowsports, connection to positive adult role models and connection to long term career opportunities for youth and alumni of the organization," Tafoya emphasizes. +

To get involved, visit sosoutreach.org to learn more about volunteer opportunities and donation options.



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