



# ALPINE ACHIEVERS INITIATIVE

## Impact Report 2023-2024




Connecting, Inspiring, and Nurturing youth  
& families with one act of service at a time.



EMPOWERING YOUTH  
INSPIRING EDUCATORS  
TRANSFORMING LIVES





The background features a dark green triangle on the left with a pattern of small white dots. A large, light green triangle points upwards from the bottom left. On the right, there are stylized mountain outlines in white and light green. The text is placed within these geometric shapes.

Alpine Achievers Initiative (AAI)  
inspires, connects, and nurtures  
youth, families, and communities  
in rural Colorado.

## MISSION

## VISION

Our vision is to offer  
relationship-based and clearly  
defined organizational structure  
and services that support  
accessible, transformative  
experiences for all involved with  
AAI. We aim to be responsive to  
partner and community needs  
through a culture of service  
quality, expertise, and  
inclusivity.

# WHY & COMMUNITY NEED

6 of the 8 counties we serve are among the top 20 in Colorado with the highest rates of individuals living below the poverty line

Educational inequities perpetuate in under-resourced communities

Systemic underfunding exacerbates inequities in rural education

Teacher burnout is fueled by scarce resources and limited capacity

High teacher turnover disrupts continuity and stability for students

Teacher shortages hinder academic & emotional connections

Rural schools face compounded challenges with staffing and resources

Under-resourced schools struggle to support behavioral and emotional needs

5 students are on waiting lists for every 1 student enrolled in Out-of-School-Time programs

Youth services are urgently needed in underserved communities



# SOLUTIONS



- AAI AmeriCorps Program & Pathways
  - Traditional -support 18+ schools in 8 counties to provide academic interventions in and out of the classroom.
  - Capacity - building capacity within the community at AAI and other organizations.
  - CATALYST (Colorado Alternative Teaching and Learning for Youth Success and Transformation) - pathway to careers in public education with teaching licensure.
  - ERR (Educator Recruitment & Retention) - Pathway to careers in public education with a focus on a Behavioral Health Plus Certificate.
  - Youth Mental Health Corps - Pathway to careers in public education and behavioral health.
- V2V Homeschool Program- delivers social and extracurricular opportunities to homeschool students.
- Alpine Adventurers Program - 10-month program tailored for youths aged 12 to 15 aiming to cultivate enduring relationships and a profound sense of belonging in natural environments.

## CURRENT INITIATIVES

- Backyard to Back Country (B2B)
- Equity & Belonging
- SHINE (Supporting Health Initiatives for Next-generation Educators)





# Our TEAM

## LEADERSHIP

Megan Strauss | Executive Director

Julia Makowski | Operations Director

Nichelle Lyle | Development & Marketing Director

Advancing AAI's Mission:  
Driving Innovation,  
Securing Funding, and  
Optimizing Operations

## PROGRAM STAFF

April Edwards, AC Program Manager, North & ARK Coordinator

Renee Mackey, AC Program Manager, South

Sara Novicki, Youth Program Manager

Hannah Pietsch, Program Coordinator

Annika Horning, Program Coordinator

Darcy Harris, CATALYST Coordinator

The face of AAI,  
driving programs for  
AAI's Mission

## HUMAN RESOURCES

Ashley Witherspoon, Human Resource Manager

Jamie Morgan, Director of Equity and Belonging

Brittni Addison, Recruitment Coordinator

Fostering a  
supportive,  
inclusive culture  
while expanding  
our AAI team.

## ADMINISTRATION

April Kelher, HR and Admin Specialist

Lauren DesRosiers, Admin & Finance Coordinator

Strengthening the  
AAI Mission:  
Behind-the-Scenes  
vital Support



# Our BOARD

**Providing Direction to AAI's Leaders to  
Create a Long-Lasting Impact on the  
San Luis Valley & Beyond!**



Aaron Conrad – Board Chair

Madison Gurley – Vice Chair

Lauren DesRosiers – Board Secretary

Pip Conrad– Board Treasurer

Aimee Leifer- Board Member

Chuck McKenna- Board Member

Connor Kelly- Board Member



# Areas We Serve

Each year, our reach grows stronger, bringing impactful programs to more communities. Alpine Achievers Initiative proudly served nearly 3,000 youth across 8 counties in the San Luis and Arkansas Valleys and beyond, expanding our service map to create lasting change in rural Colorado.

## AAI Program Service Map

### Map Legend

- County Line
- Arkansas River Valley
- San Luis Valley

**2900+**

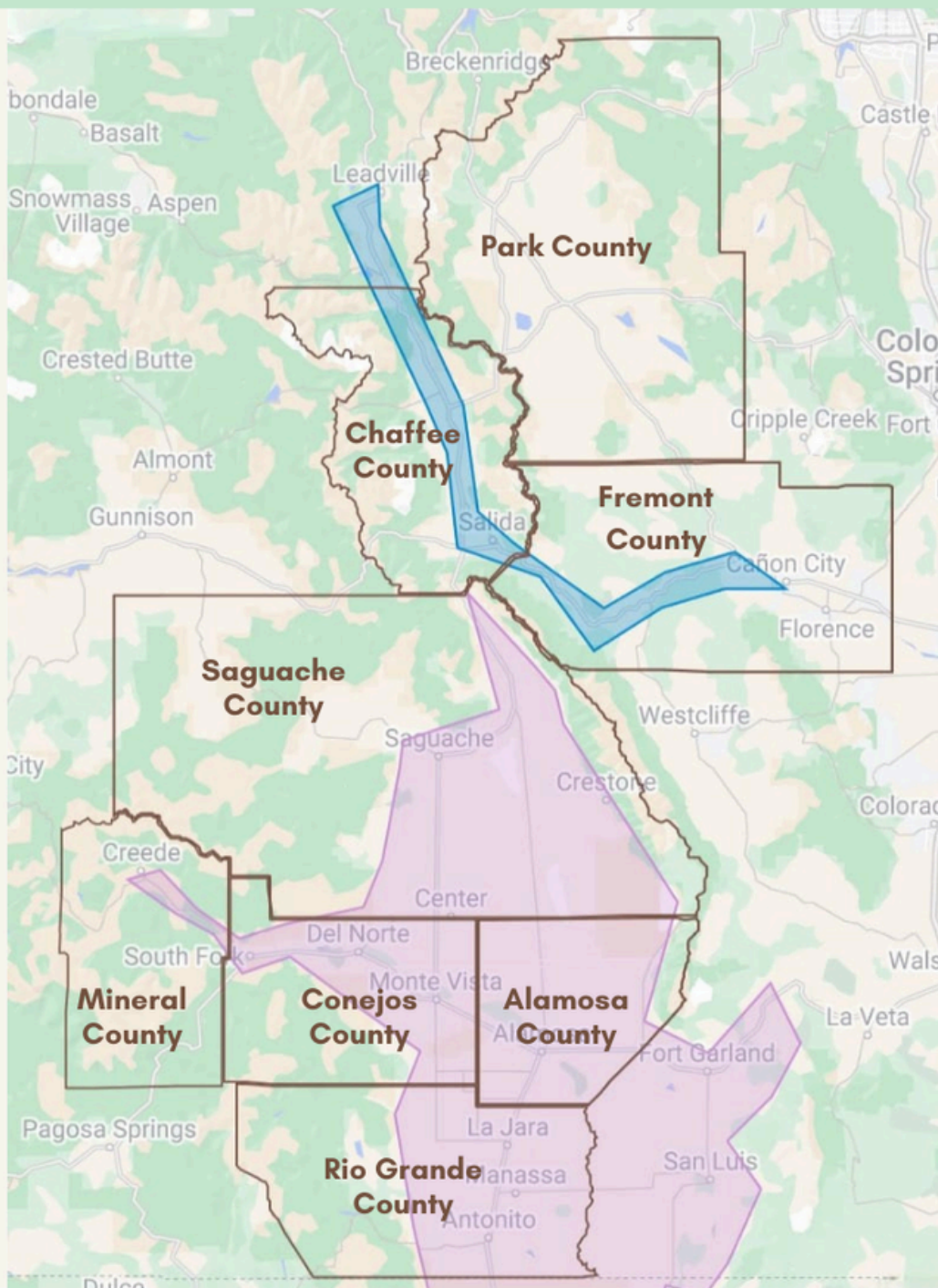
Youth Served

**55**

Regional Partners

**8**

Counties Served







# \$1.3M

Local Wages Strengthen Economy

# \$168K

Investment in professional development for AAI staff, AmeriCorps Members & local youth serving professionals

# \$720k

Investment in youth serving professionals

# \$1.4M

Grant Funding

# \$2k

Donations

# \$130K

Equity Initiatives

# \$34k

Community Support





**Our service members gain vital life skills, foster a growth mindset, and make a real impact—and the results speak for themselves!**



**AmeriCorps**  
Colorado



**56k**

Service Hours

**30**

Service Members

**18**

School Partners

### Key Service Member Outcomes:

- 100% felt impactful in their service sites
- 100% developed a growth mindset
- 92% experienced transformative service
- 87% felt they gained life skills
- Favorite Part of Service: Connections with Youth
- Most helpful training: De-escalation training
- Favorite perks:
  - Monarch Ski pass
  - Sponsored Outdoor Adventures (B2B)
  - AAI gear library







V2V is on the rise! AAI's Valley to Valley Homeschool program has broken enrollment records for the second year in a row. To meet the increasing demand for older youth programs, AAI introduced Alpine Adventurers, a 10-month adventure for ages 12-15. Six V2V graduates have already signed up for this exciting new program.

**6**

Graduates

**19**

Field Trips

**35**

Program Topics

**43**

Facilitators

**64**

Program Partners

**46**

B2B Activities

**106**

Youth Enrolled

**197**

Activities

**1000**

Program Hours

**ARTS**

**ADVENTURE**

**NATURE**

**MOVEMENT**

**SOCIALIZATION**

## V2V Cohorts

Conejos County: Manassa

Alamosa County: Alamosa

Chaffee County: Salida

Park County: Fairplay

Saguache County: Crestone

# AAI Staff Highlight

At Alpine Achievers Initiative (AAI), we're fortunate to have leaders like Julia Makowski, our Operations Director, who embody our mission to connect, inspire, and nurture. Julia's dedication to fostering growth in individuals and communities has made a lasting impact on AAI's programs and people.

Drawn to AAI for its focus on professional development, Julia thrives on helping AmeriCorps members and staff grow while learning and evolving herself. "I love working with the people here—the members, our staff. They inspire me every day," she shares.

Julia's latest accomplishments include refining professional development outcomes, and supporting program development for programs like Alpine Adventurers, which connects middle schoolers to adventure and community and collaborating with the program managers to launch the member support fund.

She describes AAI's biggest impact as "putting caring humans out into the world to interact with youth," and sees programs like V2V and AmeriCorps fostering meaningful connections between adults and kids.



Looking ahead, Julia is excited to expand local AmeriCorps opportunities, strengthen pathways for members to become licensed educators, and grow Alpine Adventurers into a multi-year initiative inspiring independence and collaboration.

Outside of work, Julia enjoys traveling, skiing, sailing, and spending time with friends, pets, and audiobooks, activities that fuel her energy and creativity. Her leadership and vision continue to ensure AAI's programs leave a lasting mark on youth and communities alike.



# Our Funders

At AAI, we understand that creating a meaningful impact in the San Luis and Arkansas Valley requires a collaborative and community-driven approach. Our community partners and funders play an integral role in shaping the success and sustainability of AAI's initiatives and mission.

## THANK YOU FOR YOUR CONTINUED SUPPORT!

**\$100K+**



Corporation for  
**NATIONAL &  
COMMUNITY  
SERVICE** ★★ ★



COMMUNITY FOUNDATION OF THE  
**SAN LUIS VALLEY**



**COLORADO**  
Behavioral Health  
Administration



**THE  
COLORADO  
TRUST**

*A Health Equity Foundation*

**\$50K+**



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education



**\$25K+**



Saguache County  
Government

**\$10K+**



**UP TO  
\$10K**



# 2023-2024

## AmeriCorps Service Sites

### Saguache County

- Mountain Valley School
- Boys & Girls Clubs of the SLV (Saguache)
- Crestone Charter School
- Crestone Boys & Girls Club (summer)

### Mineral County

- Creede Parks & Rec
- Silver Thread Public Health

### Chaffee County

- Ark Valley Preschool
- Boys & Girls Clubs of Chaffee County
- City of Salida Parks & Rec
- Longfellow Elementary School
- Salida Middle School
- Salida Montessori Charter School
- Crest Academy
- Greater Arkansas River Nature Association
- Guidestone Colorado

### Alamosa County

- Alamosa Elementary School K-2
- Alamosa Elementary School 3-5
- Alamosa High School
- Alamosa Parks & Rec
- Boys & Girls Clubs of the SLV (Alamosa)
- GOAL Academy
- Ortega Middle School

### Rio Grande County

- Marsh Elementary School
- Bill Metz Elementary School
- Monte Vista Middle School
- Monte Vista Kids Connection

### Fremont County

- Canon City High School
- Harrison K-8 School
- McKinley Elementary School
- Washington Elementary School



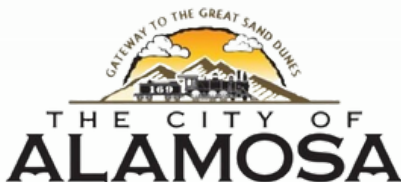
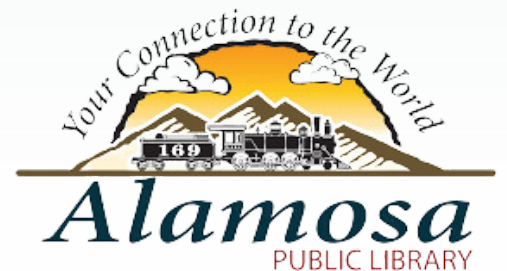
# Regional Partners



MONARCH  
MOUNTAIN



HEART  
of Saguache/KV



# BECOME A SUPPORTER

Scan this QR code to  
donate today!



## WAYS TO GIVE

- **Our Website:**  
[alpineachievers.org/support](http://alpineachievers.org/support)
- **Colorado Gives**
- **QR Code**
- **Colorado Community Shares**
- **By mail**
- **Set up reoccurring donations**
- **Sponsorship**
- **Grant Opportunities**

Fuel the future of rural Colorado with your support for AAI! Your donation ignites opportunities for local youth, championing diversity, equity, and inclusion while inspiring personal growth and connection. Together, we're driving better academic outcomes and sparking positive change that echoes through the San Luis and Arkansas River Valleys and beyond. Every contribution helps build a powerful culture of service, creating ripple effects that strengthen our communities for generations to come. Be a part of this transformation—join us in shaping brighter tomorrows and empowering a legacy of progress!

[www.alpineachievers.org](http://www.alpineachievers.org)

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