



MEO's Founder

Joann "Jo" Ayuso (she/ her) is a community collaborator who practices hands-on healing, poetry, love for food and the outdoors with emphasis on social justice, honoring ancestors and undoing negative perceptions of the outdoors and wellness. She has been working as a self-care educator for 21 years and holds an MS in Exercise Science and Physiology. Working in health care, fitness, education, and within prison systems has shaped her communication as well as her desire to work in community with Black and Brown farmers and youth. In addition to running Movement Education Outdoors, Jo spends her days supporting community-based organizations in understanding inclusion and equity, and uniting with educators and leaders of color to increase access to health and wellness in the education system for low-income, Black, and brown students in Rhode Island.



About Us


Based in Providence, Movement Education Outdoors (MEO) works throughout Rhode Island—occupied homelands of Narragansett, Wampanoag, Nipmuc, and Pokanoket peoples. We serve young people ages 10 to 24 from low-income and Black, Indigenous, and other communities of color. MEO is led by and for those of us who have historically been excluded from outdoor spaces and environmental movements, and our program design is centered around dismantling the barriers that have historically prevented youth of color from accessing outdoor spaces. Since our founding in 2018, we have provided outdoor experiences for over 500 Rhode Island youth of color.



Movement Education Outdoors



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Mission

Movement Education Outdoors empowers Black, brown, and low-income youth in Rhode Island to connect to the land they live on and the communities they live in. Through land and water based learning experiences that center the knowledge, joy, and liberation of people of color, we guide young people in developing the tools they need to become leaders in their communities for transformative change towards environmental and racial justice.

Vision

Youth participating in outdoor experiences with MEO will:

- Feel belonging in outdoor spaces
- Practice self-care and healing through movement and mindfulness
- Learn about the Native nations and tribes whose land we move on
- Find joy in the natural world and its living beings
- Connect to histories of Black & Indigenous ancestors on this land
- Build relationships, confidence, and community
- Be empowered as agents of positive environmental and social change in their communities

"This experience gave us a chance to present our own knowledge, research, and point of view independently. I feel like we learned things we never would've learned in school, like how slavery had such a big impact on Rhode Island. I enjoy learning about the history of the land because it shows me how our society today came to be."

- Environmental Justice cohort participant



"Camping with MEO is one of the best decisions I've ever made. It has provided me with knowledge, truth, and escape from the crazy world. When needed the most, MEO allowed me to place my mind in peace & tranquil. It has helped me recover my mental stability during hard times. It has also allowed me to do things I've never done before and I am so grateful for the experiences. The memories I've made are forever lasting."

- MOBILE participant



"Instead of the educators taking lead on things, we had students in charge of the compass, we had students who were our map holders, and they had to help us find our way through the woods... Educating them on hike etiquette, and making sure that we're taking care of each other. Take space make space—it's about making sure everyone has a chance to be a leader."

- Agua Day Camp youth leader

Programs

West End Raíces Urban Farm - paid after-school program where middle-school-aged interns learn to grow food and medicine from high-school-aged youth leaders



MOBILE Fellowship - paid summer leadership program which prepares a cohort of high-school-aged Fellows to educate their communities about environmental justice and connect to green career pathways in local forestry, fisheries, and aquaculture

Agua Day Camp - free two-week day camp for middle school youth focused on the relationship between local waterways and their communities' past, present, and future



Generations - Youth-led outdoor events open to community members of all ages and identities, designed to build community and exchange environmental knowledge across generations

Community Partnerships - guided sliding-scale outdoor experiences, educator trainings, and facilities rentals for other Rhode Island youth-serving organizations

