



As we celebrate Earth Day 2019 and National Park Week, we want to recognize the amazing work of our partners at the Shenandoah National Park Trust in Charlottesville! For almost five years, our organizations have collaborated to help provide opportunities for BBBS matches to explore the outdoors together, and to develop connections with their community that include the natural systems that support it.

As the official philanthropic partner of the Shenandoah National Park, part of the mission of the SNP Trust *is to break down barriers of access for underserved kids and adults in this community so that they can visit, appreciate and take ownership of their national parks.* With this goal in mind, SNP Trust and Big Brothers Big Sisters partnered to allow Bigs and Littles to experience the Step Up program: an initiative that introduce kids of all ages (and comfort levels) to the ecosystems that make up this area. Matches that take part in Step Up get to learn more about the people and processes that maintain our public lands, and even enjoy an overnight camping trip at the end of the program!

The benefit of having community members participate in these types of opportunities for experiential learning is easy to see... in addition to creating the unique moments that our matches can share inside the park, *this partnership helps SNP Trust and the park to educate and empower the next generation of national park stewards.* Many of these kids will either stay in Charlottesville or return here at some point; and the more influence we have on how they connect to the natural world around them, the better off we will be as a community.

This week, be sure to check out the schedule of great events happening at Shenandoah during National Park Week (April 20-28th), or find out more about SNP Trust by going to <https://snptrust.org/>. Whether you are a BBBS participant or a Charlottesville/Albemarle community member, the national parks in our area have something to offer everyone so long as we protect them now and in the future!

This piece was co-written by staff from Big Brothers Big Sisters Central Blue Ridge and Shenandoah National Park Trust.

