

# Programming Ideas for Recreation Professionals

Healthy  
*in nature*



## How to Use this Information

This is a list of ideas, suggestions and resources for promoting and incorporating the healthy in nature movement at your recreation centres and in your local parks. There are a variety of campaigns, events and theme days that you can use to help promote healthy in nature throughout your community.

### ► Promote the concept!

Use this information to help create new programs, enhance existing programs and get ideas for building new partnerships. Live the ideas yourself – we sell best what we know best.

### ► Spread the news!

- Give this information to your friends, colleagues, members of the public, fellow staff members, municipal leaders, community partners and others.
- Incorporate this information in your communication materials such as a recreation newsletter or programming guide or in correspondence with municipal council and community partners.



## Ideas and More Ideas



To nurture nature, we must maintain a connection with and have meaningful exposure to nature. Below you will find lots of suggestions as to how to encourage people to get outdoors into nature.

- Use existing parks, gardens and trails for outdoor activities such as trail hikes, walking clubs, guided nature walks led by a naturalist, outdoor boot camps, hiking groups, stretching classes, running groups, beach volleyball, swimming at a local lake and summer camps at a nature playground or local park.
- Host a special event from an outdoor area in your community such as a forest, grassland or water ecosystem. For example, on earth day organize an event at the local grassland or, on Move for Health Day, start a community walk in a local forest.
- Create or modify children's programs to support outdoor play. For example, instead of hosting summer sports camps in a gym include time outdoors on a basketball court exploring the edges of your park, playing in puddles or using nearby trails. For arts and crafts activities, have children find and use materials from nature. Train staff about types of outdoor play and how to creatively facilitate outdoor play. Click on the following for ideas: [Programming Parks PDF](#); [Nature Playgrounds PDF](#)
- Program part of your recreation activities to be outdoors and talk about nature during the activities. For example, during a fitness class include running outdoors or start a yoga class with a 5 minute breathing activity sitting outdoors. Encourage participants to turn off electronics and be fully engaged in their surroundings.
- Advocate for youth-friendly spaces where youth can hang out and direct their own activities such as at skateboard parks, BMX or mountain bike pump tracks and including youth graffiti art in urban parks. Encourage their engagement in planning trails and youth-friendly outdoor spaces.



- ▶ In your recreation program marketing and communications materials, provide examples showing the community how you are facilitating, sustaining and nurturing children's play in nature. Also provide ideas about how parents can encourage children's play in nature. For ideas click [here](#).
- ▶ Expand social marketing efforts to communicate the health benefits of getting outside for all ages. Click [here](#) for Healthy in Nature marketing resources and materials that you can use to communicate the benefits of Healthy in Nature.
- ▶ Create technology-friendly nature programs. Many people need a goal when entering the natural world such as taking pictures of nature. Play and recreation becomes participatory and fun and purposeful. Technology can connect people of all ages. Consider partnering with private business to design and implement a program. Plan a program to 'see the world with new eyes' using photography, art or music as the basis for engaging in nature.
- ▶ Consider partnerships or using resources from environmental education programs and organizations. Visit the Environmental Educators Provincial Specialist Association Resource list a listing of resources.



## Encourage the use of Nature Prescriptions

Partner with local physicians and other health care providers to encourage people to spend time outdoors. Have physicians write patients "nature prescriptions" that instructs them to spend time every day outdoors in nature as a way to prevent ill health and combat disease. Spending 30 minutes outside each day, without electronics, is a great way to build relationships, reduce stress and sleep well.

- ▶ Give physicians information on the health benefits of being in nature and the location of local green spaces, parks, nature centres or specific walking routes or trails. Include directions to parks and trails with maps and mileage. Walk BC is an excellent resource for physicians and other health care to discover walking locations in BC. Several communities have developed apps that show where parks are located in the particular community. Help them make the choice easy for their patients. Check your municipality's website to see what walking trails and paths are available in your area.
- ▶ Prescriptions could encourage patients to go on a nature walk, visit a park, watch birds, or observe trees. The prescription has an unlimited refill and never expires. Mock up 'prescription' bottles – vitamin "N" – time in nature, avoid taking with technology and share with local doctors and pharmacists.
- ▶ Encourage physicians to not only prescribe nature but to follow-up with the patients to see if they followed the advice. There is more involvement from participants when physicians follow up with them and when physicians walk the trails themselves.
- ▶ Contact your local hospital or long term care facility to see if you can provide volunteers who would help folks spend time outdoors in nature or take them for a walk.
- ▶ Contact your local physiotherapy clinic and ask them if they can provide modifications of exercises that can be done outdoors. Work with them to create information sheets for clients. Check out the MovNat movement which is a whole new way of looking at movement and exercise with emphasis on the whole body and where possible outside. Click [here](#) for the MovNat website.



## Help create family nature clubs

Nature clubs are programs for families, created by families that are designed to connect children with nature. These self-sustaining, self-organizing nature networks organize multi-family hikes and nature activities (e.g., gardening, stream restoration, visiting a park or garden).

- ▶ Blogs, social networking sites and other online organizing tools can facilitate the creation of virtual clubs.
- ▶ When these clubs grow in popularity and more people are using parks and recreation activities, use this movement to engage political support or solicit funding.
- ▶ Take a look at the Children and Nature Network Nature Clubs for Families Toolkit.
- ▶ Young Naturalists' Club of BC – There are over 40 clubs in communities and schools across the province; membership is made up of young people aged five to 12.

## Host a Move for Health Day or Nature Play Day

Here are a few ways you can get people outdoors in nature on Move for Health or Nature Play Day:

- ▶ Promote trail walking, hiking and running in areas with trees and grass or water.
- ▶ Encourage gardening and nature-reclamation work to improve parks and local landscapes.
- ▶ Encourage groups such as book clubs to meet at a local park, garden or nature trail on Move for Health or Nature Play Day.
- ▶ Organize a tree-planting event, lead a walk along a nature path or promote your community's parks as a place to have a picnic.
- ▶ Market and promote healthy in nature theme days, events, local parks, nature playgrounds and trail walking programs through your recreation guide.
- ▶ Use Move for Health Day and Nature Play Day as a launch toward change to physical environments. For example, announce improvement to trail usability with the addition of signs to existing trails. Signs could identify bathrooms, parking lots, scenic spaces and mileage markers
- ▶ Use theme days (such as Nature Play Day, Move for Health Day, Winter Solstice, Winter Walk Day) to lobby for policy and political support for your work or to showcase partnerships (e.g., art shows in parks, local community organizations help clean the site). You can also use one of these days to promote a new park or celebrate an occasion (e.g. Chinese New Year, BC Day, Family Day).



## Create or support walking programs and trail creation/maintenance

- ▶ A walk in nature or a nearby park can restore mental fatigue, reduce stress and improve mood.
- ▶ “Forest bathing” in Japan is popular and it is also known as “forest medicine.” Japan has designated forests as a Forest Therapy Base (a forest and walking path). People who visit therapy bases (forests) can participate in guided walks with forest medicine experts and take health classes in diet and medical checkups.

- ▶ Create a walking program that includes social support by fostering relationships and trust among the participants of the program.
- ▶ Work with the local Chamber of Commerce, Not for Profit groups and other agencies to give local trail maps to community members and workplace employees.
- ▶ Visit your municipality or the BCRPA Walk BC website for locations of walking trails in your community.



## Start a community garden or tree planting program

- ▶ Work with a conservation society such as the Nature Leaders Alliance, Young Naturalists, Boy Scouts, or local school or church to create a community garden.
- ▶ Create a policy to support the development of community gardens.  
Example: City of Vancouver Park Board Community Garden Policy
- ▶ Start a tree planting program or commemorative tree and bench program in local parks or work with community members and businesses to start a forest restoration project.



## Create nature murals on recreation and parks buildings or sides of businesses, or apartment buildings.

- ▶ Work with the local Chamber of Commerce or other community groups to create a mural of a nature scene, such as a forest, to set an example for what other community members and organizations can do to promote nature.
- ▶ Partner with a local art college or have children or existing recreation centre patrons assist in creating a mural.



## Reach ethnic and minority populations

- ▶ Find out what is relevant and interesting to multicultural, immigrant and minority populations in your community. Consider what engages or intrigues others regarding the outdoors?
- ▶ Introduce activities that have been identified as relevant (e.g., create a walking program that is socially supportive and involves families). It is as simple as picking a weekly walking time, going for a walk and meeting for coffee/tea after the walk.
- ▶ Include children in adult activities such as family walking clubs or have children's activities at an adult fitness class.
- ▶ Consider culture, language, social support (e.g., join a walking group to be active with friends), and motivate parents through family (e.g., take care of yourself so you can take care of your children). Partner with an ESL or other language group to host classes in the outdoors?
- ▶ Promote recreation programs, local parks and the health benefits of being active in nature through employers, religious organizations, civic organizations and other community groups.







## Work with other professionals and agencies to promote and facilitate being active outdoors

- ▶ Work with park interpreters to design and implement new programs (check out Parks Canada Website to find out how to access parks interpreters).
- ▶ Work with an environmental or health agency to build or renovate a nature playground. This could be through your regional health agency, BC Parks, or local groups such as rotary or boy scouts and girl guides.
- ▶ Partner with local public health organizations to design and implement programs and initiatives such as the BC Heart and Stroke Foundation of BC & Yukon or the local division of the Canadian Cancer Society.
- ▶ Promote one of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society BC Chapter events.
- ▶ Collaborate with partners to deliver communications messages that support spending time outdoors and the health benefits associated with that.
- ▶ Host an event that focuses on being healthy in nature or getting outdoors into the Canadian Parks and Recreation Association “June is Recreation and Parks Month” celebrations. This CPRA initiative raises awareness about the importance of recreation and the role it plays in the quality of life for all Canadians.
- ▶ Encourage people to get out, be active, participate in local events and appreciate the outdoors. Use the marketing materials available on this site or visit your local BC Tourism office materials that profile beautiful BC.



## Work with urban planners and architects

- ▶ Work together to improve green space accessibility and availability and street design that promotes getting outdoors and being active (known as “green design”). [Click here for ideas on ways to do this.](#)
- ▶ Create or enhance neighbourhood environments to support outdoor play opportunities for children (e.g., sidewalks, trails, playgrounds, green spaces. Neighbourhoods that have grass and trees in common outdoor spaces have increased use of outdoor spaces and more social activities take place there. [Click on the following for ideas on ways to do this: Nature Playgrounds PDF; User Friendly Parks PDF](#)





## For new ideas on nature programs or activities, consider the following resources:

- ▶ **Get To Know Educational Resources** – This website has Grab N' Go Activities that include an overview, materials, ages, time and procedure.
  - **Find The Colours Game** uses paint chip cards and teaches children ages 4-10 different colours and where they can be found in nature and takes 25-45 min.
  - **Art in the Park** activity guide has engaging and fun activities that encourage healthy attitudes towards the outdoors and environment. It includes activities that list materials, time frame, preparation and procedures.
  - Create **Natural Portraits** at a beach, forest or park,
  - **Meet A Tree** for 30 min. and connect with the environment and more!
- ▶ **Outdoor Nature Child** – This website has fun **Outdoor Games for Kids** and **Nature Games and Activities** for ages five through adults.
- ▶ **Ten Outdoor Education Activities for Teenagers** – This document includes activity objectives, description and evaluation.
- ▶ **Let's G.O.! (Get Outside)** – This Children and Nature Network initiative is youth inspired, youth led and focused on getting people of all ages to Play, Serve and Celebrate Getting Outside during the month of April.
- ▶ **Nature Play** – This Forestry Commission of England website offers a practical guide on nature play with fun, simple and cost effective examples of play ideas from easily sourced materials.
- ▶ **Nature Play Day in June** – Every year in the middle of June the Child and Nature Alliance of Canada invites Canadians to celebrate outdoor play and highlight the importance of nature play.
- ▶ **Promoting Unstructured Free Play in Your Community: A Resource Manual** – This manual was designed as a tool to implement an unstructured free play program in your community. It was created by the Community Heath and the Build Environment Project Team with the University of Alberta.
- ▶ Reuse and reinvent program ideas from other communities.  
For examples of what other communities are doing see the National Recreation and Park Association's **Parks Build Healthy Communities: Success Stories**.
- ▶ **NRPA: Prescribing Parks for Better Health SUCCESS STORIES**
- ▶ This new educator's guide supports teachers in getting their students outside and engaged in experiencing the outdoor classroom. Activities include hands-on mapping, cultural explorations of special places, values exploration and secondary level projects."



## Here is a list of organizations that support outdoor play and resources with outdoor play information:

- ▶ **Child and Nature Alliance of Canada** – This website is a registered Canadian charity working to ensure that all Canadian children and families are connected with nature and the outdoors to enhance their health and well-being. The Alliance is a network of organizations and individuals who are working to connect children to nature through education, advocacy, programming, policy, research and the built environment.
- ▶ **Children and Nature Network** – The Children and Nature Network has a vision to create a world where every child can play, learn and grow with nature in their everyday lives. This website provides ideas, evidence-based resources, tools and initiatives to connect children, families and communities to nature.
- ▶ **Green Hearts** – The Green Hearts Institute for Nature in Childhood is a non-profit conservation organization that provides information and resources focused on ensuring active nature play and exploration remains a cherished part of childhood.
- ▶ **ParticipACTION** – This organization encourages all Canadians to get moving. Their website includes resources, communication tools, research and programs. The **Bring Back Play** initiative encourages parents to bring back fun games and unstructured active play. The **Longest Day of Play** – this initiative encourages all Canadians to get active during the first day of summer and the longest day of the year.
- ▶ **Play England** – Play England's vision is to be a country where everybody can fully enjoy their right to play. It lists numerous projects, resources and events.
- ▶ **Bateman Foundation** – The Bateman Foundation works to promote conservation, education about nature, and awareness of global issues surrounding nature and wildlife.

