Children in Nature: Happier, Healthier, Smarter
Workshop Agenda

I. Reflection Exercise

II. Presentation
• Nature Deficit Disorder defined
• Why our children don’t play outside anymore
• Happier, healthier, smarter
• A movement is born
• Case study: integrating nature into your program

III. Small Group Work: Building blocks for a nature program
Nature Deficit Disorder:

“The human costs of alienation from nature”
Why our children don’t play outside anymore
“I like to play indoors better ‘cause that’s where all the electrical outlets are.”

4th Grader in San Diego
Screen time

Children 8-18 years old average 6.5 hours a day looking at TV or computer monitor.
Nearly one-third of children from 6 months to 6 years old live in households where the TV was on all or most of the time.
The grinch who stole childhood?

- Overscheduled?
- College admissions, job stress at 4th grade
- Loss of discretionary time
The grinch who stole childhood?

Homework given to children aged 6-9 almost tripled in 26 years.

1981: 44 min/week
2007: 120 min/week
The grinch?

Activities between school and dinnertime

- Homework/Study: 44%
- Play Outside: 4%
- Talk on the Phone: 5%
- Read: 6%
- Work/Job: 8%
- On the computer: 11%
- Play video games: 12%
- Hang out (friends/family): 20%
- Watch TV: 20%
- Play sports: 21%
- Homework/Study: 44%

2005 Gallup Study
Community design & priorities

Only 30% of Los Angeles residents live within walking distance of a park.
Community design & priorities

adult-directed activity spaces
Community design & priorities

free play activity spaces
Keeping our kids safe
traffic concerns
Keeping our kids safe

- crime
- fear of strangers
- GPS tracking
Keeping our kids safe
shrinking home range
Keeping our kids safe
shrinking home range
Children in Nature: Happier, Healthier, Smarter
Health benefits

In the past 30 years, the occurrence of overweight children has doubled. An estimated one in five children are overweight.
Health benefits

How many pull-ups can he manage?
Health benefits

Free play in natural environments
Nature as stress reliever

“I go to nature to be soothed and healed, and to have my senses put in tune once more.”

– John Burroughs
Developmental benefits
unstructured play
Developmental benefits
creativity and imagination
Developmental benefits
using all five senses (or maybe four!)
The endangered environmentalist replacing real with virtual nature experiences
The endangered environmentalist
nature knowledge
The endangered environmentalist
aging of the environmental movement
A movement is born
A movement is born

“A back-to-nature movement to reconnect children with the outdoors is burgeoning nationwide.”

“unstructured, imaginative play is increasingly lacking in an indoor, scheduled world—to children's great detriment…”

“…a national movement to ‘leave no child inside” has been the focus of Capitol Hill meetings, state legislative action, grassroots projects…”
A movement is born

legislation

No Child Left Inside Act

- Environmental literacy
- Funding for outdoor learning
A movement is born
legislation

California No Child Left Inside Act
SB 207

Provides programs to increase the ability of underserved and at-risk populations to participate in outdoor recreation and educational experiences
A movement is born
A movement is born

Sierra Club

“It’s out there where trees don’t care what race you are, but they still share their shade; water doesn’t care what kind of income level you come from, but still it provides life; and believe me, mosquitoes really don’t care who you are, they still suck your blood.”

— Juan Martinez, Youth Coordinator, Building Bridges to the Outdoors
A movement is born

Get out there

Composting

In honor of Earth Day, we’re starting a family project where we all can make a difference for our planet. In a small corner of the yard, my husband and kids have set up a compost pile. In it, we’ll put food waste and organic yard debris -- things that, just last week, we would
A movement is born
A movement is born

Inspire communities to nurture, empower, and engage youth in cultivating their relationship with nature.
Integrating nature into after school programs: a case study
Building blocks for success
identify program partners

OutdoorExplore! Partners

harmonium

SAY San Diego

SAN DIEGO AUDUBON SOCIETY

the

YMCA

SAN DIEGO NATURAL HISTORY MUSEUM
Building blocks for success
alignment of program goals

• Fight obesity/promote fitness
• Hands on learning using all senses
• Learn about local ecosystems, animals
• Promote community stewardship and service
Building blocks for success
alignment of program goals

- Obesity and fitness
- Hands on/senses
- Ecosystems, animals
- Stewardship and service
- Hiking, walking, running
- Experiential learning
- Place-based learning
- “Leave no trace” stewards
Map community open space
Focus on experiential learning vs. curriculum
Building blocks for success
program elements

- Use extended hours of minimum days
- 15-20 students per session
- 3 adults, 6-1 student/instructor ratio
- 60-90 minute sessions
- Mixed age groups (K-6)
- Division of agency/partner roles
Building blocks for success
typical program day

- At school: introduction of theme
- Walk to open space area
- Free exploration / hiking
- Active nature-based game
- Walk back to school
- Gather & share observations
Building blocks for success
evaluation outcomes

- Physical activity/exercise
- Connection to natural world
- Stewardship ethics
- Observation of nature
- Satisfaction with program
Your turn: Building blocks for starting a nature program at your agency
Small group brainstorming questions

1. What partner organizations might want to supply or build a program for our agency?

2. What open space resources/habitats are available in my community?

3. What potential challenges or barriers exist for integrating a nature program into my after school setting?

4. Other issues or concerns?