



National Kindergarten Alliance

P.O. Box 309, Agua Dulce, Texas 78330

Connecting Children to Nature

April 15, 2008

Dear Members and Friends of the National Kindergarten Alliance,

As kindergarten teachers, we know that nature has always been one of our first teachers. Through a richness of diversity in patterns, textures, forms, and color, she graciously serves a feast for our senses, the faithful turning of seasons and the lawful cycle of life. On her beaches, under her canopies, even in her relentless and abiding presence in cities and sidewalk cracks, nature patiently invites us to participate. Powers of observation are honed, limbs exercised, senses nourished, feelings quickened and wonder awakened. What more could we want for the young child?

This letter is to inform you that April has been designated *Children and Nature Awareness Month* by the Children and Nature Network (C&NN), a national organization catapulted to the forefront following the overwhelming response to Richard Louv's timely book, *The Last Child in the Woods: Saving our Children from Nature Deficit Disorder*. Concerns for children's health have caused communities to organize and work collaboratively; there are currently 47 regional movements across the country dedicated to reconnecting children with nature.

In January 2008, I was privileged to represent the National Kindergarten Alliance at one of these collaborative meetings at the Silicon Valley Community Foundation in Mountain View, CA. My colleagues included the head of pediatrics at Kaiser Permanente, the director of the Alliance for Childhood, professors from Stanford's Department of Education, representatives from Hooked on Nature, Lucille Packard Children's Hospital, London's Adventure Playgrounds, The Health Trust and Healthy Silicon Valley, Children and Nature Network and Children in Nature. It was inspiring to hear the work in progress on behalf of the wellbeing of the young child through advocacy in play, health, education and nature.

How can our scripted lessons compare with watching hatching chicks, tasting the first falling snow, smelling the freshness of evergreen branches, and hearing the hoot of an owl in an old growth forest? The National Kindergarten Alliance encourages you to take the initiative to reconnect children with nature. As kindergarten teachers we can nurture children's relationship with nature through the joy of discovering the first sprout peeking through the soil, the crunching of dried leaves along trails, or the feeling of mud between our toes in creeks. We live in a time when such experiences must be intentional for the health of children and the future of the earth. On the back you will find a list of resources for reference and practical suggestions for the fortunate children in your care.

Sincerely,


Anna Rainville

for the Board of Directors of the National Kindergarten Alliance

National Kindergarten Alliance – Leading Kindergarten in the 21st Century
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The Children & Nature Network (C&NN) was created to encourage and support the people and organizations working to reconnect children with nature. C&NN provides access to the latest news and research in the field and a peer-to-peer network of researchers and individuals, educators and organizations dedicated to children's health and well-being.
Children and Nature 2008: A Report on the Movement to Reconnect Children to the Natural World
<http://www.cnaturenet.org/uploads/CNMovement.pdf>

A valuable C&NN resource includes an executive summary of two volumes and over forty research reports that include a full citation and a PDF if available, or a link to each study in its entirety, or contact information if the study is not available online. The first volume focuses on the benefits of nature and the second volume on evidence of changes in children's experience of nature.
<http://www.cnaturenet.org/research/volumes/C16/16>

April marks the release of the second edition of "Last Child in the Woods: Saving Our Children from Nature-Deficit Disorder," by Richard Louv. This revised edition includes a "Field Guide" with 100 practical actions we can take; 35 discussion points for book groups, classrooms, and communities; new and updated research from the U.S. and abroad; and a progress report on the movement

The web site for Richard Louv has compiled helpful resources for parents, teachers, and community leaders to help them encourage children's enjoyment of the great outdoors. These resources include [Nature Activities for Kids and Families](#), [Good Books for Kids and Families](#), and [Helpful Links](#).
<http://richardlouv.com/children-nature-resources>

National Wildlife Federation has created a wonderful website introducing the "Green Hour". By giving our children a "Green Hour" a day -- a bit of time for unstructured play and interaction with the natural world -- we can set them on the path toward physical, mental, and emotional well-being.
<http://www.greenhour.org/>

The Health Benefits of Parks - As the nation's leading conservation group creating parks in and around cities, The Trust for Public Land launched its Parks for People initiative in the belief that every American child should enjoy convenient access to a nearby park or playground. This new, fully footnoted white paper—*The Health Benefits of Parks: How Parks Help Keep Americans and Their Communities Fit and Healthy*—draws from the latest research and topics include:

- Parks, greenways, and trails enable and encourage people to exercise.
- Exposure to nature improves psychological and social health.
- Play is critical for child development.
- Parks help build healthy, stable communities.

http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cd.cfm?content_item_id=21053&folder_id=175

The Alliance for Childhood promotes policies and practices that support children's healthy development, love of learning, and joy in living. Their public education campaigns bring to light both the promise and the vulnerability of childhood. On the website is information about a new 55-minute PBS documentary, produced by Michigan Television, now available for public [screenings](#) by schools, universities, and community organizations. The brainchild of Elizabeth Goodenough, the film examines the social and technological trends that conspire to rob children of their birthright: time and opportunity for unstructured, spontaneous play, especially outdoors in nature.
<http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/>

Thanks to Mary Roscoe of Children in Nature Collaborative (info@cincbayarea.org) for compiling the list of resources.