

# Benefits of Being in Nature

## FACT SHEET

Greenspaces such as parks, natural areas and community gardens, promote physical, mental, and social health and well-being for all communities.

Approved in 2018, the municipality's **Green Network Plan** informs best practices for protecting and managing open space as an interconnected system across the Halifax Region. One of the objectives of the plan is to promote parks and open spaces for health, well-being, sense of community and overall quality of life. The municipality partnered with Public-Health Central Zone of Nova Scotia Health Authority (NSHA) to review health and science research and produce this information to highlight the health benefits of being in nature.



## Physical

- Greenspace, including parks, natural areas, and community gardens promotes physical activity and decreases the risk of obesity and stress.
- Spending time in nature helps expectant mothers grow healthy babies.
- While the risks associated with outdoor play are minor, children are becoming less active as a result of increased technology use and safety concerns from parents.



## Mental

- Exposure to greenspaces has a restorative effect and can improve your mood.
- Children who are active in nature show resilience, self-control, critical thinking, and are less likely to develop psychiatric disorders such as mood and sleeping disorders.
- Access to greenspace can be an effective part of therapeutic treatment for people with chronic and mental illnesses (including anxiety disorder, depression, ADHD).



## Social

- Greenspaces such as parks and community gardens bring people together and offer social opportunities to prevent loneliness.
- Youth who spend time in greenspaces are exposed to neighbours from all walks of life and have an enhanced sense of empowerment, empathy, social skills, and confidence.
- Greenspaces promote a sense of community which is important for health and well-being. In contrast, lack of greenspace can cause feelings of loneliness and low social support.



## Equity

- Parks and outdoor recreation opportunities are an important physical activity resource for low-income residents.
- Equitable access to and use of greenspace and outdoor recreation can minimize health disparities.

## References

**Dadvand et al.** 2014. Inequality, green spaces, and pregnant women: Roles of ethnicity and individual and neighbourhood socioeconomic status. *Environment International*. 71. 101-108. • **Engemann et al.** 2019. Residential green space in childhood is associated with lower risk of psychiatric disorders from adolescence into adulthood. *PNAS*. 116(11). 5188-5193. • **Jennings et al.** 2016. Advancing sustainability through urban green space: Cultural ecosystem services, equity, and social determinants of health. *International Journal of Environmental Research & Public Health*. 13(2). 196. • **Mitchell et al.** 2015. Neighbourhood environments and socioeconomic inequalities in mental well-being. *American Journal of Preventative Medicine*. 49(1). 80-4. • **Participation et al.** 2017. *Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play*. Retrieved from [Position Statement on Active Outdoor Play](#). • **Rugel, E.** 2015. Green Space and Mental Health: Pathways, Impacts, and Gaps. *National Collaborating Centre for Environmental Health at British Columbia Centre for Disease Control*. • **Townsend et al.** 2015. Healthy Parks Healthy People: the state of the evidence 2015. Prepared for Parks Victoria. • **Wolch et al.** (2011). Childhood obesity and proximity to urban parks and recreational resources: A longitudinal cohort study. *Health Place*. 17 (1), 207-14.

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## RESOURCE SHEET

Being outdoors and connecting with nature fosters a love and respect for our natural world.

### Exploring Nature Throughout the Municipality

#### **Adventure Earth Centre (AEC)**

The AEC is part of the Halifax Regional Municipality's recreation program and through numerous organized groups, events, and workshops, provides opportunities for all ages to connect to the natural world. The AEC travels to schools in the Spring delivering programming and has home-base locations at Sir Sanford Fleming Park and Shubie Park.

#### **Young Naturalist Club**

A nature club for Nova Scotia kids and families. The local chapters offer monthly field trips for all ages, and some have special programs geared toward youth.

#### **Nova Scotia Outdoor Network**

A resource for finding outdoor spaces, events, and skill building opportunities.

#### **Hike Nova Scotia**

A non-profit group that promotes hiking, walking and snowshoeing in NS. They offer guided hikes and re-connecting with nature workshops.

#### **Canoe Kayak Nova Scotia**

A non-profit society that fosters safe recreational stand up paddle boarding, canoeing and kayaking through training, promotion, advocacy and stewardship.

#### **AdventureSmart**

An organization dedicated to provide Canadians and visitors to Canada consistent and relevant safety information about outdoor recreation. AdventureSmart delivers its adaptable information in-person and online.

#### **Parks Canada**

This site provides details on Historic Sites within Halifax, such as Fort McNab and York Redoubt. There is also a great section on Nature which discusses science, conservation and Indigenous ecological knowledge.

#### **Paddle Canada**

Promotes recreational paddling instruction, safety and environmental awareness to all Canadians. Their website is a great resource for finding skills courses.

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### Reading Resources

**A is for Adventure** by Jan LaPierre and Christopher Hoyt is an all ages alphabet book meant to inspire families to get outside and play together (available in Halifax Public Libraries).

**The Last Child In The Woods** by Richard Louv, a national bestseller, and other titles such as *Vitamin N: The Essential Guide to a Nature-rich Life*, helped launch an international movement to connect families and communities to nature (available in Halifax Public Libraries).

**The Nature Fix** by Florence Williams, a contributing editor to Outside Magazine, is a lively account of what modern science tells us about the numerous health benefits of the great outdoors (available in Halifax Public Libraries).

**Hiking Trails of Nova Scotia** by Michael Haynes, a leading authority on trail development in Canada, has authored seven outdoor guides (available in Halifax Public Libraries).

**Sea Kayaking in Nova Scotia** was written by Scott Cunningham. Scott circumnavigated Nova Scotia in a canoe and wrote this detailed guide to help others explore our spectacular coastline. He was also instrumental in developing sea kayaking standards for Paddle Canada (available in Halifax Public Libraries).

**The Children & Nature Network** is a non-profit organization that promotes equitable access to nature so children and natural places can thrive. The [Learn](#) section of their website has great information on tools, resources, and research.



Underlined text in this document are hyperlinks.