



# *Nature for Life*

**Report of Workshop  
September 30, 2014  
Smiths Falls, Ontario**



## Introduction

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The “**Nature for Life**” workshop hosted by the Lanark, Leeds and Grenville Healthy Community Partnership on Sept. 30, 2014 in Smiths Falls, Ontario focussed on the powerful impact nature has on health and well-being. The tag line for the event was “Nature can make us happier, smarter and feel better. Really, it’s that simple.” “Nature for Life!” celebrates both that we need connection to nature throughout our life, and that nature brings us life.

### **The workshop was designed to contribute to the following goals:**

- Families will recognize the value of time spent in nature, and will provide opportunities for children to experience nature in both structured and unstructured ways.
- Connecting children with nature will become part of the culture of the community - local school boards, service providers, community organizations, business etc.
- Municipalities will create, protect and provide natural environments for residents and visitors to enjoy.
- Parks and outdoor recreation sites will be well utilized by children and families.

The workshop specifically focussed on children and youth. Children and youth who spend time in nature are more likely to have healthier social behaviour, improved self-esteem, resilience, ability to learn and concentrate, as well as environmental awareness. Parents of children/ youth were included in the discussions as time in nature decreases stress, anxiety, depression, diabetes, hypertension and many other health problems. Families bond more in nature and all members benefit.

### **The objectives of the workshop were:**

1. To provide an opportunity to learn about the value of time spent in nature for children and families.
2. To connect with like-minded people and identify shared interest in nature initiatives for children and families.
3. To identify specific projects to develop further to enhance connection with nature for families and children.

***The workshop was ably facilitated by Jeff Kohl with the financial support of HC Link Ontario and coordinated by the following keen members of our community:***

Lois Dewey, Healthy Communities Coordinator

Paula Stewart, Bonnie Schmittker, Julie Ingleby,  
Cathy Millard, Lianne Arndt, LGL Public Health Unit

Elizabeth Goldman CEO/Chief Librarian Perth and  
District Library

Michelle Neville, Mental Health ASSIST Lead Catholic  
District School Board of Eastern Ontario

Jack Henry, FABR Frontenac Arch Biosphere Trails  
Council

Suzanne Rivard, Health Promotion Specialist,  
Upper Canada School Travel Planning

Tom Baumgartner, Citizen and Rural Recreation  
Association Executive Committee Member

Lorraine Allen, Councillor Town of Smiths Falls

Linda Chadwick, City of Brockville / Public Library CEO

## Message From Speakers

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**Dr. Paula Stewart**, Medical Officer of Health, Leeds, Grenville, Lanark Public Health Unit, and Chair of the Healthy Community Partnership, began the day with a personal reflection on the importance of nature as she was growing up, spending summers at a family cottage on Bob's Lake in Tay Valley. She encouraged everyone to bring their stories of nature connection as children and adults to the discussions during the day. Much is happening already in our community with families, school boards, municipalities, volunteers and community groups. "We will build on what we know and have experienced to enhance the connection for children and youth with nature in our community."

**Dr. Cheryl Charles**, the co-founder and President Emerita of the Children and Nature Network in the United States, described her vision that **"together we can create a world where every child can play, learn, and grow in nature"**. She outlined the strong research evidence that children who spend time in nature are more likely to have healthier social behaviour, improved self-esteem, resilience, ability to learn and concentrate, as well as environmental awareness and stewardship ethics. Her presentation described the many ways school boards, child care centres, and communities were making it a priority, and developing innovative ways to connect children with nature.

**Dr. Michael Cheng**, a child and family psychiatrist at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario (CHEO), and a passionate advocate of attachment to people and nature, spoke about the evidence we intuitively know - that a connection with nature is essential for healthy emotional and physical health. He further explored how modern society has disrupted our connection with nature, particularly the high use of technology that interferes with infant and children's essential need to connect with and attach to parents and others in their life as well as nature. Dr. Cheng's emphasized that "our society is out of balance". Mental health issues are on the rise with demands for children's mental health services facing unprecedented levels. Physical health issues are also on the rise with child obesity and diabetes such that today's kids predicted to have shorter lives than their parents. Evidence suggests that we are wired to require contact with nature, and fellow human beings. Our disconnection from nature and fellow human beings may be contributing to these problems we face.

The above presentations are available on the Healthy Community Partnership website at [www.healthyllg.org](http://www.healthyllg.org)



## Successes in our Community

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Participants were asked to identify activities they knew about in the community that currently support children to connect with nature. From the response it is clear that much is being done and many children are benefitting from these activities.

The activities mentioned were:

### Schools

- School gardens (butterfly /vegetable)
- Outdoor Classrooms for traditional and non-traditional subjects - example: math, science, art and poetry
- Curriculum connections to nature
- Grade 12 Earth and space course and grade 11 environmental science course brought to school – multiple field trips to do hands on exploration and learning
- Eco School Certification
- Eco schools project linking food growth to home and school – touch – taste – feel
- Direct tactile learning: Chick incubation, snow angel party
- College kids – outdoor rec program – to clean up garbage, kids had pride in nature on their clean up jobs

### Connections

- Connecting starting small 1+1+1= many
- Having a broad group of partners invested in initiatives
- School trips to outdoor education/ CA's, teachable moments and spontaneity, creativity

### Family

- After dinner family walks with or without dog(s)
- Home vegetable garden
- Making outdoor activities possible for a family with high-needs, special needs children
- Leadership camp, day camp, outdoor activity
- Rental – canoes, kayaks, etc.
- Baird Trail (Lanark Highlands on Heron Mills Road)

### Community Programs

- Summer Family Nature Program (inclusive, free with entry, drop in, accessible)
- Outdoor pony camps for children 6-18
- Local environment success like REAL and EcoPerth
- Youth Justice connected to community based nature programs
- Nature program at Petrie Island for pre-school kids
- Early learning nature workshop, Brock Trail development
- Geocaching for family connections
- Wilderness adventure
- Nature based day camp
- Charlie the caterpillar – creating wonder
- Cameras and kids – photographs of nature

## Promoting Greater Connection with Nature for Children and Youth

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Participants in the workshop were asked to identify what more could be done to promote and enhance children's connection with nature. Six strategies were identified along with specific activities:

### Promote Existing Opportunities for Nature Connections

- Step by Step Guide for the available resources and how to do projects – websites, aggressive government messaging, similar to tobacco – need to normalize benefits of nature
- Nature Watch billboards – in schools and community centres
- Establishing interpretive signage to promote nature and independent learning
- Identifying and being aware of resources in the community, shared resource source
- Using already existing services to support classrooms to get outside and do more of curriculum outside
- Idea sharing between educators re: successful tips

### Create New Opportunities for Nature Connections

- Be aware, seek and be open to new, unique and creative partnerships in our communities
- Simple activities/ideas that reinforce competency & curiosity in children, trust in adult-child relationship
- Create accessible spaces in each community
- Need (bike) trails in communities for families
- Build school based gardens, trail inventory (trail heads – boat access)
- Building partnerships between schools, Health Unit, municipalities, community partners
- Piggyback nature to existing programs



### Engage Parents/ Families

- Create opportunities for parents to be involved
- Projects – support back to nature, address social media and influences
- Help parents to balance fears with benefits
- Support workplace balance - family time, employee satisfaction
- Unstructured outdoor play "Park Parent" or afterschool nature programs
- Limit or redirect technology use (use it for good!!)
- Family Cycling Touring Club – overnight tours to natural destinations
- Family Outdoor Day with guidelines ex: no cell phones

### Raise Funds/Recruit Volunteers to Support Local Initiatives

- Recruit Champions to support fundraising initiatives
- Recruit volunteers to support initiatives commitment
- Find financial aid to support local initiatives

### Adopt Policies

- Advocate for change in school policy (address liability concerns)
- Eliminate barriers to participation – liability, \$ , transportation, top down decision making partnerships
- Educate policy makers
- Workplace Policies - Employees have flexibility to take time during the day to participate in nature activities
- Plan infrastructure to immerse people in nature (i.e., low impact storm water management)

### Build Supportive Culture

- Cultural attitudinal change with existing organizations, educators, service providers
- Address concerns related to liability
- Opportunities to share ideas, resources, research, etc.
- Take risks - remove the fear - remember our youth!!

## Specific Projects

The final task of the day was for participants to identify specific projects that they would like to propose to the group to see if there were other interested people who would like to work on it together. The individuals in each proposed project group then created a story board describing the current state and what would change if their project was successful. A brief description of the project along with the contact person is below. The pictures are in Appendix A.

Title	Brief Description
<b>1. Wildlife Sighting Board for School</b>	For each school to have a white board that allows the student to log in animal sightings. Board to be posted at entrance so all students or adults have opportunities to see or post daily sightings.
<b>2. School Outdoor Learning Area</b>	Create an initiative for every school to have an outdoor learning area.
<b>3. Create an Inventory of Hiking Trails/Trail Heads in Lanark County</b>	Develop an accessible inventory of trails that support teaching outdoors. Start in Lanark County and open to further expansion.
<b>4. Outdoor Education in Junior Grades</b>	Junior teachers, incorporate outdoor ed with ties to curriculum, everywhere, all year.
<b>5. Asphalt Removal and Tree Planting in a School</b>	Remove enough asphalt on our parking lot/school yard to plant 2 trees (Smiths Falls school)
<b>6. Re-invented 3 R's Schools JK – Grade 12</b>	3 R's Old idea – new approach incorporate waste audit, turn garbage into gardens; all strands – all grades
<b>7. Park Parent Program at Gemmill Park</b>	Create a park parent program, similar to block parent.
<b>8. Pre-School Nature Program at Petrie Island</b>	Expand non-profit nature program at Petrie Island.
<b>9. Professional Education</b>	Information/ Education for health & social service providers (physicians, nurse practitioners, therapists, nurses, social workers, youth workers, etc.) on the important health benefits of being in nature.
<b>10. Young Naturalists Club</b>	Young people 6 years and up gather bi-weekly at the Gallipeau Centre with the option of field outings to other locations for members and their parents. Modelled on Ottawa Field Naturalists Club's MACOUN Club and MVFN's Young Naturalists.
<b>11. Library Nature Packs</b>	Backpacks available in all Lanark, Leeds & Grenville libraries with themed books and activities to do with your family in nature.

## Thoughts on the Day

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The day spent focussing on how we can enhance the connection of families, children and youth to nature was challenging, enlivening, and inspirational. We left with a greater understanding of the power of nature to enrich lives, build community and make us “happier, smarter and feel better”. We also left with a collective sense that we were not alone, and that many people in our community shared our passion and commitment to make “Nature for Life” a reality in our community.

The Lanark, Leeds, Grenville Healthy Community Partnership will continue to promote, in our community and through our partnerships, greater connection to nature. The goals and strategies identify in the workshop will guide our work. For more information about this initiative, please contact Lois Dewey, Healthy Community Partnership Coordinator at [Lois.Dewey@healthunit.org](mailto:Lois.Dewey@healthunit.org). This report will be posted on the Partnership website so others can share in the excitement and opportunity of the day.

[www.healthyllg.org](http://www.healthyllg.org)

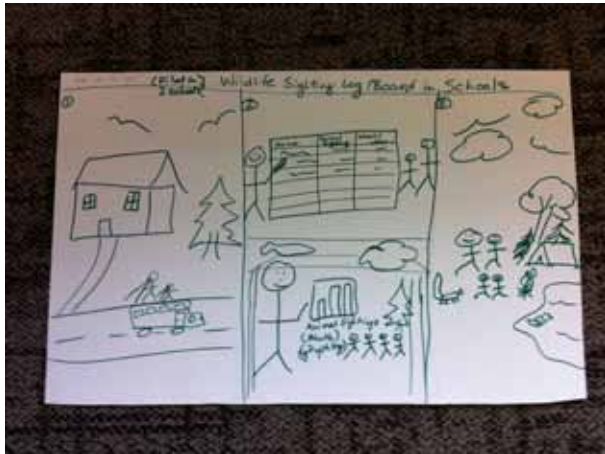
Together we can make a difference, let’s continue on the path clearly outlined by the participants at the workshop. Let’s make creativity, commitment and partnership guide our way!

Paula Stewart  
Medical Officer of Health  
Leeds, Grenville, Lanark District Health Unit  
and  
Chair, Healthy Community Partnership of Lanark, Leeds and Grenville



# Appendix A

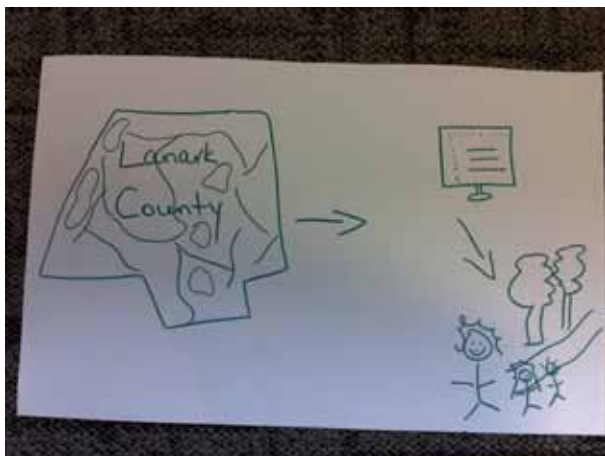
## 1. Wildlife Sighting Board for School



## 2. School Outdoor Learning Area



## 3. Create an Inventory of Hiking Trails/Trail Heads in Lanark County

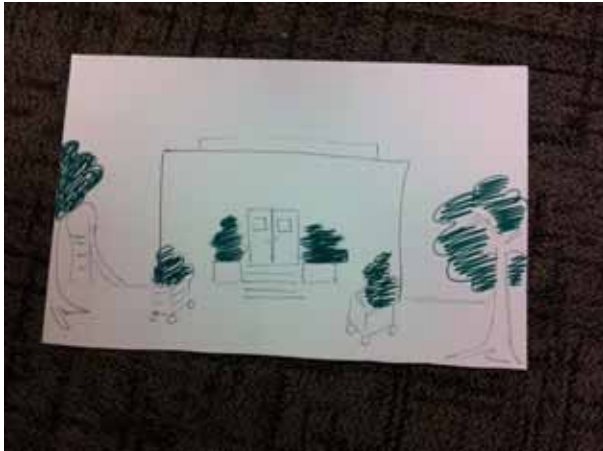


## 4. Outdoor education in junior grades

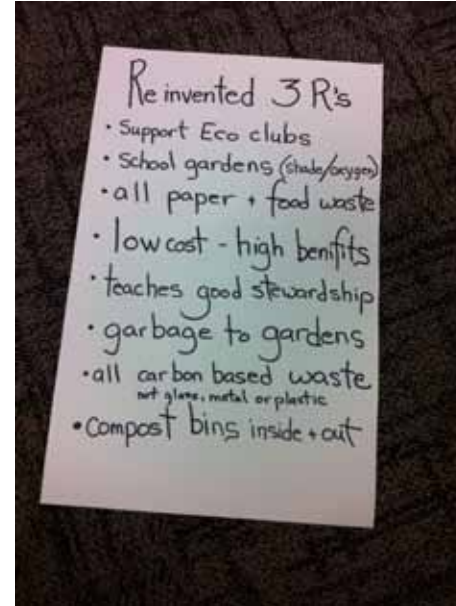




### 5. Asphalt Removal and Tree Planting in a School



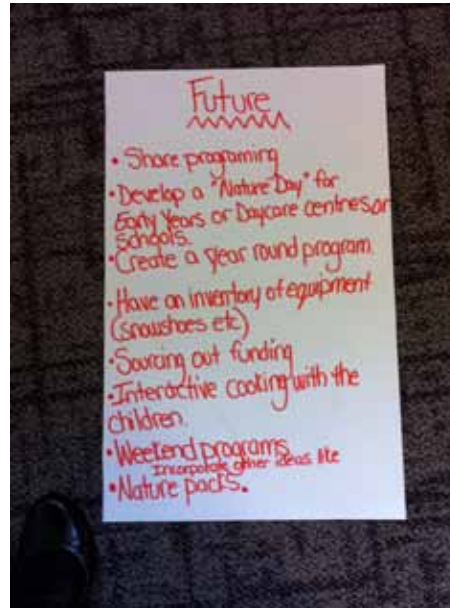
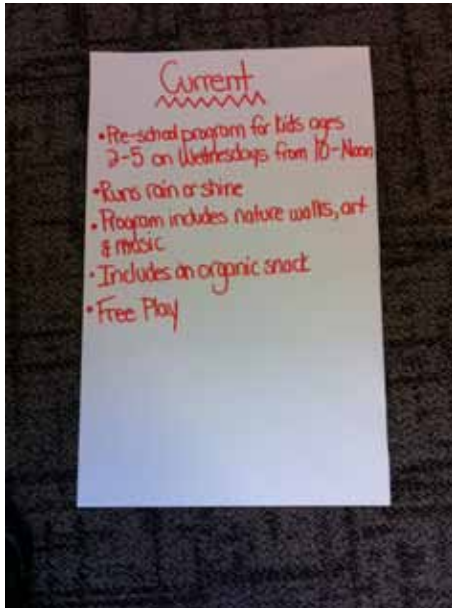
### 6. Re-invented 3 R's Schools JK – Grade 12



### 7. Park Parent Program at Gemmill Park



## 8. Pre-School Nature Program at Petrie Island



## 9. Professional Education



## 10. Young Naturalists Club

picture not available

## 11. Library Nature Packs

