



Wonder

NEWSLETTER OF THE NATURE ACTION COLLABORATIVE FOR CHILDREN

JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2012

Welcoming the Next Generation by Jim Wike

I'm traveling to visit my daughter. She is expecting her first child, a daughter, and my first grandchild. Her name will be Allison. Such a lovely name and I already glow when I hear it. I'm going to be a grandparent!

While getting the number of grandparents worldwide seems elusive, one indicator is that the number of people 65 or older worldwide was 500 million in 2006 and by the year 2030 is anticipated to exceed 1 billion. The number of grandparents in the United States is estimated at 70 million.

My generation grew up in pretty easy times and in an easy place by global standards. No famine, plague, depression, or war to compare to those of the recent past. A little unrest, some uneasy moments, true, but nothing like my parents, grandparents, or great-grandparents endured.

Some quick comparisons may be interesting. The first house I purchased, a modest starter, had three bedrooms, two full baths, and central air conditioning. All things my parents strived for, conveniences my grandparents would have envied, and probably not imagined by my great-grandparents. Almost immediately we were a two-car family. There was more time away from the house than in it. Now air travel is commonplace: the bus in the air. The Internet is replacing the library. Email replaces the letter. The grocery store

stocks freshly prepared meals to take home and are ready to eat in a matter of minutes. It seems like we are all obligated to be overscheduled. It feels very different to be a part of my generation than what I perceive my parents' generation was like. I don't believe this feeling is unique, but it begs the question: In what kind of environment will my granddaughter grow up?

Many of us have voiced a growing concern with children's lack of meaningful connection with nature. It is an issue that is worthy of serious consideration and one that drives my vocation. My daughter and her husband recently moved from an apartment to a house with a yard. When I visited, she was anxious to point out the shade tree and plants that held potential for a small child's exploration. That allows hope for natural connections at the family level. My daughter is a nurse and she has talked to me about the efforts hospitals are taking to address the issue of staff absenteeism. One is on-site child care and another is the addition of sanctuary gardens. It seems an obvious connection can be made between the two. That allows hope for natural connections at the employment level. There are other promising changes also afoot:

- School systems are developing outdoor learning areas in ways not common even a few years ago. It is beginning to be understood that valuable learning can take place in well-designed outdoor spaces across the curricula.

- Libraries are interested in outdoor areas that promote literacy.
- Museums are looking at how outdoor areas aid understanding of culture and natural history.

These allow hope for natural connections at the community level. We have witnessed changes of approach for interpretative education at state parks and visitor centers at fish and wildlife refuges. The United States military understands the value of natural play at installation child development centers. That allows for hope at the state and federal levels.

I encourage you to consider what a similar look ahead may be like. Young parents, consider what your child's future may hold and how frequent interactions could provide a positive influence in their development. Grandparents (who are always looking for ways to increase the frequency of grandchild visits), what are ways to facilitate interactions with nature where you live?

My wife and I have reason to be optimistic. We sense a shift in attitudes toward nature, a desire to re-connect and perhaps bring a bit of balance to our technologically demanding world. We will still have the constantly fluxing pressures of life with us and events yet to be seen and understood. There is one thing, however, that Debbie and I know with certainty: we are thrilled to become two of the 70 million.

A Long Story Short: The Long and Winding Road for a Possible Park for Small Children

by Ivan Galindo

Coming from Nebraska after a meeting about children and nature, I decided to try to promote the creation of a neighborhood park for small children. The municipality of Queretaro, México, receives a percentage of land in donation from the real estate developers by law. In these plots services should be built for the neighborhood; nevertheless, many times these plots are sold for cash flow for the municipality. So I thought that if the communities in a particular neighborhood propose a project for a park for small children to the municipality, maybe then there will be a chance. Most parks are for older children and are a kind of metal/plastic fantasy.

While I was thinking about this, I met at a conference the Director of the master degree in Architecture and New Urbanism (TEC de Monterrey) Ramon Abonce PhD. I approached him and told him my story about children and nature, and he was very interested. We had a few meetings, and I came to know that they have a program with students from the master degree program to develop participatory design workshops in certain

communities in the city. The product of the workshop is a very detailed architectural proposal to recover several public spaces. The city is divided in delegations and the proposal is presented to the Chief of the Delegation; from there he has to get the budget and implement some of the proposals.

Stefania Biondi, PhD., is the coordinator of this program at the University and she is responsible for workshops with the students and the community. Stefania invited me to participate in their last workshop, and I tried to be an influence towards parks and nature. I found that the students do not have the 'feeling' yet towards children and nature; nevertheless, the different proposals to recover different public spaces were excellent. I have no doubt that if they are implemented the quality of life of the community will improve. But we have to do something more to get better projects for small children.

The next step is to try to influence the students before the workshop. I am going to participate as a guest in some part of the courses to let the students

know more about children and nature and to give specific examples that might inspire them. Since I am a psychologist and not an architect at all, I am going to need help here. If anyone has ideas or good examples they will be very welcomed.

If the students are better prepared in terms of designing with children and nature in mind, they could be an excellent resource for the communities that organize and propose their projects to the city. I never thought I would be involved in an Architecture program, but if that is what the park demands, then it will be.

This has been a long and winding road with unexpected turns, but creating parks for small children is team work and I am trying to build the team.

If you want to suggest or share ideas or examples, please to write me:
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Ivan Galindo is a member of the NACC Leadership Team.

Wonder Vitals

Wonder, the newsletter of the NACC, welcomes submissions from all NACC members. Please join us at:
www.worldforumfoundation.org/nature.

The NACC Leadership Team is a core group of early childhood educators, designers, and landscape architects who came together in 2006 with a dream to change the world for young children. They represent six continents across the globe, and serve as key contact points for others around the world who have a desire to improve the lives of young children.

The Leadership Team meets periodically to discuss strategies for increasing NACC's outreach and membership, and to find new ways for all of us to work together to further our common mission.

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Sebastian Chuwa, Moshi, Tanzania

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Swati Popat Vats, Mumbai, India
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NORTH AMERICA

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Jeanne McCarty, Fort Worth, Texas, United States
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Gillian McAuliffe, Floreat, Australia
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Doing What We Can with What We Have: Supporting Children's Connections with Nature on a Limited Budget

Ideas from Nature Action Collaborative for Children Leadership Team

When NACC Leadership Team members gathered at the 2011 World Forum in Hawaii, the conversation turned to ways of connecting children with nature regardless of financial limitations. Leaders agreed to send ideas about "doing what we can with what we have." Following are a few of these thoughts, gathered from NACC members worldwide. We'll print more in future editions of *Wonder*. We invite everyone to share your ideas for supporting 'nature on a budget' to: tarahild@natureexplore.org.

From Brazil

Valeria Goncales Andreetto and Angelo Andreetto describe how powerful a low-cost vegetable garden can be in providing multiple opportunities for learning and fun:

"The vegetable garden in our school provides a daily context of research in exploring and processing perceptual taste and smell changes. We work with the children trying to deepen their senses, comparing tastes and smells like sweet, strong, bitter, spicy, salty, and sour. Direct experience with the land increases the respect for nature of the foods we eat, and children's sensitivity to scents, colors,

PHOTOGRAPH BY VALERIA AND ANGELO ANDREETTO



and flavors. It's a fantastic challenge. Assumptions and possibilities that are born in the garden form a joint project of fun. We have experienced how this kind of low-cost nutrition education works with children in a complex gardening project that promotes a balanced relationship with health, taste, and the pleasures of food to the table."

From Haiti

Caroline Hudicourt works with children in an area where much of the infrastructure of her city, including its schools, was destroyed in a devastating earthquake. Despite the challenges, Caroline continues to connect children with the reassuring wonders of the natural world. She shares her ideas here with others who might face the same kind of devastation:

"Take kids out of the city on walks or hikes to put them in contact with the natural environment. Have them plant trees in repurposed containers to give to reforestation projects. Collect seeds from fruit they might eat during the day. Then send the seeds back to the country to be used to replant fruit trees. In programs not faced with these challenges, planting seeds from fruit enjoyed as part of a school lunch or snack might be a wonderful, yet affordable, way to help children experience the cycle of life."

From Australia

Fiona Robbe, a landscape architect, sent this report:



PHOTOGRAPH BY FIONA ROBBE

"We are currently finishing a small low-budget playground with natural materials in the west of Sydney, called Kookaburra Playground. This is a low-income area with significant social issues. We are responding with a theme of kookaburras and lizards, inspiring a more natural, imaginative approach to play, as a panacea to the rushed and compromised lives of these kids. We formed a partnership with a private play philanthropist to fund the additional natural features, consulting with local children to learn their preferences for play outdoors. It was fascinating!"

Fiona reminds us to seek out new ways to fund children's connections with nature. In her case, a philanthropic group focused on play-made nature connections possible for children who would not have experienced these otherwise. With a little creative thinking, might it be possible to find new funders in your area who aren't necessarily focused on environmental issues, but might be interested in bringing more nature to children's lives? Consider organizations such as those who support children's health and nutrition, children with special needs, or groups wanting to strengthen math and science learning.