

Forest School Field Trips

“Supporting your exploration beyond the confines of your fences
into the natural world, where boundaries are co-created
and imagination is unlimited.”

- Leah Smith

Forest School Field Trips are experiences designed to connect you and your centre to your closest patch of wild space, so nature play is as convenient and accessible as possible. Joining you on your turf, I can guide and facilitate sessions in the forest that give your children an opportunity to engage and interact with their environment in ways they may not have done before.

The Goals of this program are to:

- Offer education on the methodology of Forest & Nature School
- Support to your team of educators in applying these methods
- Encourage and empower the staff to expand their play/ learning areas into their local and accessible natural environment
- Provide hands on guidance and practical techniques to promote safe exploration of Manitoba's untamed green spaces

The key principles of the Forest School movement are:

- Regular repeated access to the same patch of land
- Child led exploration (emergent curriculum)
- Risk assessment
 - documentation
 - collaboration with your colleagues
 - children's involvement
- Viewing children as competent and capable people
- Nurturing a sense of community within the children: less adult dependence, more independent problem solving and teamwork
- Process vs. Product approach to learning
- Adults engaged in 'meaningful work'



A typical forest school session is structured with routine while allowing plenty of room for free play and open exploration.

- Central meeting place/location in the woods is established
 - laying down a tarp as a 'home base' & welcoming the children with a story and some ground rules: Be Gentle, Be Kind, Stick Together.
 - assessing the risk in the area and reducing those risks: clearing away natural & unnatural debris, becoming aware of hazards and flagging off our physical boundaries.
- Free- Play/ Meaningful work begins with inspiration from the story or loose parts provided by nature or the educators
- Re-Gathering the group to share discoveries, journal & thank Nature.

The Inspiration

Tree lined riverbanks and open forests are abundant in this province and contain treasures just waiting to be discovered. Connecting children to the natural world is of paramount importance as we move as a globe towards sustainability and environmental protection. Bringing yourself, and the young people in your care, regularly to a consistent patch of land builds a relationship with nature. Fostering that relationship offers meaningful observations, as the children experience changes in the weather, the seasons and the all the elements that influence the natural world from day to day, and month to month.

List of Benefits of Forest & Nature School
as written by the Child & Nature Alliance of Canada

- Improved confidence, social skills, communication, motivation, and concentration (O'Brien & Murray, 2007);
- Improved physical stamina, fine and gross motor skills (O'Brien & Murray, 2007);
- Positive identity formation for individuals and communities (Russell et al., 2013);
- Environmentally sustainable behaviours and ecological literacy;
- Increased knowledge of environment, increased frequency of visiting nature within families (O'Brien & Murray, 2007);
- Healthy and safe risk-taking; • Improved creativity and resilience;
- Improved academic achievement and self-regulation;
- Reduced stress and increased patience, self-discipline, capacity for attention, and recovery from mental fatigue; (Russell et al., 2013, p. 482);
- Improved higher level cognitive skills (Atchlet, Strayer & Atchley, 2012);
- Male inclusion in education. (Children & Nature Network, 2012; Massey, n.d.).



“Unless we are willing to encourage our children to reconnect with and appreciate the natural world, we can’t expect them to help protect and care for it.”

-David Suzuki



A Brief History

The first idea of Kindergarten was founded by Friedrich Froebel in the early 1800's. The name Kindergarten itself means child garden, implying that children are precious living things that will flourish in the right environment with a little bit of tending to and nurture from a caring individual (Muelle, 2013).

Meanwhile, in Scandinavia, 'Friluftsliv' was already deeply a part of their culture, providing a connection to the world beyond the human existence (Gelter, 2000). This experience of the 'free open-air life' boasts rewards of higher consciousness and a spiritual wholeness that can only come from immersion in nature. It was only natural that their education system had outdoor learning at the core of it's curriculum. In 1950, 'Walking Kindergarten' was initiated by Ella Flatau, who added a daily hike in the woods to the standard curriculum. It has now expanded to having over 10% of all schools in Denmark being a Forest and Nature setting (Stasiuk).

This format for enhancing child development is a growing movement in Canada as many child care centres adopt these values into their programs as well as Forest & Nature Schools continue to sprout up across the country.

With the origins of forest school rooted in a both a deep regard for children as competent & capable beings and the knowledge that an outdoor lifestyle is essential to living a holistically healthy life, the future looks very bright for Canadian youth.



References

Gelter, H. (2000). Friluftsliv: The Scandinavian Philosophy of. *Canadian Journal of Environmental Education*.

Muelle, C. M. (2013). *The History of Kindergarten: From Germany to the United States*. Miami: Florida International University, USA.

Stasiuk, P. (n.d.). *EARLY NATURE LESSONS IN DENMARK'S FOREST PRESCHOOLS*. Retrieved from The Official Website of Denmark: denmark.dk/en/meet-the-danes/forest-preschools

About Leah

Leah Smith has over 15 years of experience working with children in a variety of settings. From large early learning centres to private family child care, she brings the love of nature and the passion for the outdoors to those around her. Leah is an ECCEII, Forest School Practitioner and parent of two wild children. She now aims to expand her work in this field by sharing her education and experience with groups and individuals, offering a holistic approach teaching children and supporting the adults in their lives.



- Working in the childcare field since 2005.
- Trained as a Montessori Teacher for preschool aged children-
- Holds an honours diploma from Red River College's Early Childhood Education program
- Certified Forest School Practitioner via Forest School Canada
- Has been facilitating workshops for the Manitoba Childcare Association since 2014
- Former board member of the Manitoba Nature Summit, now a workshop presenter for their events.
- Worked for Fort Whyte Alive in their inaugural year of Forest School programming as the lead ECE.
- Currently working with adults to connect back to nature's rhythms through following the seasonal successions as well as through their own authentic expression.

Services Offered

- Empowerment through Risk- Workshop/ Presentation for ECE's/ Parents
 - sharing tips and techniques that reduce stress and increase self-worth through outdoor play.
- Forest School Field Trip Guide
 - Joining your centre's staff and children in your closest patch of natural space, connecting us to the land and learning about managing risk
- It's all Fun & Games Workshop
 - Learn and Play new games for kids of all ages that promote teamwork, use your senses and best of all: No supplies needed.
- Custom, Co- Created workshops also offered.
 - Whether you're looking for a fun team-building event or an outdoor skill development opportunity for your staff, I can facilitate your group through a variety of experiences with goals of leaving you feeling connected to our Earth and excited to bring your program outdoors more often!

For further questions on these services & their pricing, please contact me directly. Leah Smith, natureallyleah@gmail.com, 204-995-7627