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For more information: Dan Seligson, communications director, 202.261.6481

Children and Nature Initiative Launched in Brooklyn

Health care providers focus on benefits of outdoor activities to fight obesity, disease

WASHINGTON, D.C. —Using a unique program that enlists leading health care providers to train their colleagues, the National Environmental Education Foundation this month launched an initiative designed to help pediatricians and other health care professionals to improve children’s health by “prescribing” outdoor activity.

The [Children and Nature Initiative](#), which kicked off at the [Prospect Park Zoo and Audubon Center](#) in Brooklyn, N.Y. last weekend, is creating “Nature Champions,” health care professionals who will train other providers to refer families to parks, nature centers or wildlife refuges within economically, racially and culturally diverse communities.

In all, 40 health care professionals will be trained as champions, including at an upcoming event in West Virginia. The new champions will then each train 30 other providers within two years, expanding the reach of the program to more than 1,200 health care providers nationwide. From there, the providers can reach potentially hundreds of thousands of families.

“This program addresses two important issues – preventing serious health conditions like obesity and diabetes and reconnecting children to nature. Unstructured outdoor activity may improve children’s health by increasing physical activity, reducing stress and serving as a support mechanism for attention disorders,” said Leyla McCurdy, senior director of NEEF’s Health & Environment program. “By giving health care providers this training, and by connecting them to local nature sites to refer families to safe and accessible outdoor areas, we are working together with parents to encourage children to spend more time outdoors to protect their health. This is a powerful partnership that has the potential to improve the lives of our nation’s children.”

The training and initiatives include technical support, tools and resources for health care providers to be effective in prescribing nature for patients. Online resources include a fact sheet, pediatric environmental history forms and prescription pads in English and Spanish.

NEEF’s “train-the-trainer” and “champion” programs represent a highly successful model. By focusing on training trusted professionals – pediatric health care providers – the Children and Nature Initiative can reach millions of children.

The Brooklyn workshop is funded by a grant from the National Resources Council of America and launched in partnership with the National Audubon Society and the Prospect Park Audubon Center with support from the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

NEEF's Children and Nature Initiative is grounded in science. Our literature review article "Using Nature and Outdoor Activity to Improve Children's Health" has been published in the current issue of the *Current Problems of Pediatric and Adolescent Health Care*. The abstract is available online. <http://www.cppah.com/>

To learn more about the Children and Nature Initiative, visit: http://neefusa.org/health/children_nature.htm.



Knowledge to Live By

The National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) provides knowledge to trusted professionals who, with their credibility, amplify messages to national audiences to solve everyday environmental problems. Together, we generate lasting positive change. NEEF partners with professionals in health, education, media, business and public land management to promote daily actions for helping people protect and enjoy the environment. Through our primary programs -- Classroom Earth, National Public Lands Day, National Environmental Education Week, Business and Environment, Earth Gauge® and Health & Environment -- we offer Americans knowledge to live by. To learn more, call (202) 833-2933 or visit www.neefusa.org.

The Health and Environment program advances environmental knowledge among health care professionals to improve the public's health with a special emphasis on children and underserved populations.

