

Together Relax Unplug Explore In The Trees

Sustaining Healthy Families **in the Shuswap.**

The children in our community are vulnerable. Our most recent Early Development Instrument (EDI) results confirm that children in our community, like many others across the Province, have weak social/ emotional and physical development skills. As Early childhood Educators, we're all aware of the reality that families are spending more and more time indoors and participating in structured activities, and less and less time outdoors participating in open ended play.

“Provincial rates of vulnerability in the areas of Physical Health & Well-Being, Social Competence and Emotional Maturity have all increased over time. This presents the next challenge: to develop and enact programs and policies to strengthen development in these areas.” -Human Early Learning Partnership

As participants of the ECEBC Leadership Innovation Program, 5th Cohort, we are creating a project that inspires families to be together, relaxed, unplugged, and exploring in nature.

“As an Early Childhood Educator, I understand that children learn best through play and exploration,” says Dawn Lee, “... we need to strive for balance between the virtual and natural worlds.”

Our goals are in line with our City's Strategic Plan in which we are meeting children's needs by providing open ended play opportunities to support all areas of development.

The City Of Salmon Arm Parks and Recreation Master Plan 2012 states that recreation is a vital public good, a basic right for all and essential to mental and physical wellbeing.

Our community's vision is to create an atmosphere where families are active and curious about nature. It's critical that we all have a healthy relationship with our natural environment, each other, and the community as a whole.

Here in Salmon Arm, we've partnered with City officials and Rotary club to enhance an under developed park by installing six drums made from recycled materials, a hanging wooden xylophone, and interactive signs that encourage outdoor exploration through our senses. The green space is located in an open and accessible area of town, close to schools, childcare, and recreation facilities. The park is a beautiful home to many plant and animal species- both land and aquatic. We haven't just created a Drum park but rather a place for gathering, reflecting and appreciating the natural surroundings. This is a place to escape from the pressures and stress of today's society. Come together, make connections, notice patterns, take deep breaths, plug into nature and discover that everything is interesting and alive...A true oasis!

"Rhythm is the basis of self-regulation. We all felt secure and safe from the sound and feel of our mothers heart beat as infants. The universe moves to a rhythm, our belief is that drumming brings us back to those roots of self-regulation and security. Drumming crosses all boundaries of age, ability and culture." –Friday Bailey

This project has enabled us to share what we know about family connection and attachment, play, stress, nature, rhythm and technology - all in one place. A most pleasant surprise has been the number of adults and even seniors who are experimenting with rhythm and beat. We are consistently asked "Can I do anything I want?" No rules can take many people out of their comfort zone but we always see them leaving with a smile says Trudi Hobson.

To sustain both healthy families and our natural environment, Early Childhood Educators need to be a strong collective voice with community partners to advocate for healthy physical, social and emotional development through active, open-ended outdoor play. Together, Relax, Unplug and Explore in the Trees.

Friday Bailey, Dawn Lee and Trudi Hobson are Early Childhood Educators working with Shuswap Children's Association to support children and their families to play, grow and thrive.