

# Focusing on nature has its rewards



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On May 4, the Free Press News Café hosted an event on Nature-Deficit Disorder (NDD).

This term was coined by author Richard Louv in 2005 in a book entitled *Last Child in the Woods*. Using examples from around the world, the author explains how children have become disconnected from nature and the impacts this has on our physical and emotional health.

For me, this book crystallized observations I made during my career as a naturalist.

I once led a group of Grade 10 students who adamantly refused to enter the forest. They were scared. When I asked them the reason, they told me the forest would make them sick. You see, the air smelled different than the (pollution-filled) air they were used to in the heart of Toronto. Another group of Toronto students were afraid to sit on the grass because of the germs.

While leading an ecology field trip near Winnipeg in the mid-1990s, I watched some Grade 10 boys wander down a creek. They returned with bright smiles and pockets filled

with frogs. It was the first time they had experienced the joy of catching frogs! Yet it saddened me that they were young adults.

Since that day, I have been dedicated to conserving and restoring nature in Winnipeg so that every child will have easy access to a neighbourhood forest, field, or wetland.

In Canada, 80 per cent of people live in cities. Most children now grow up in an urban or suburban environment with easy access to manicured parks and playing fields — but few, if any, natural green spaces.

The challenge is to overcome a widely-held perception that there is no place for nature within cities. Unless we expect cities to be places where nature occurs, many city kids will only experience nature once a year on a school field trip — if they are lucky.

In March, I drew the attention of the City of Winnipeg's executive policy committee to the lack of nature in the city. We do not have a planning standard for access to natural areas. When a standard from England was applied, the resulting map showed that most neighbourhoods in Winnipeg have a nature-deficit.

The neighbourhoods near the Bois-des-Esprits are exceptions, so Save our Seine invites you to experience Winnipeg's nature on International Trails Day.

Join us on Sat., June 4 for a photographic scavenger hunt along the trails of the Bois-des-Esprits. There are no prizes. Focusing on nature provides its own rewards.



Supplied photo

**Unstructured play in Winnipeg's Bois-des-Esprits — there's no nature-deficit disorder here.**

*Michele Kading is a community correspondent for St. Vital and the executive director of Save Our Seine — [www.saveourseine.com](http://www.saveourseine.com)*