

Family Voice Bulletin – Issue 21 (Sept 21st) Nature and Your Mental Health

Summarized by KJ (Krystal-Jyl) Thomas, MSW, RSW

In this weeks session, facilitators KJ Thomas, MSW, RSW and Jillian Crabbe, MSW, RSW were joined by guest speaker; Andrea Prazmowski presenting “Nature and Your Mental Health”. Nature and Forest Therapy is a research-based framework that supports wellness through immersion in natural settings. Additionally, it can help to remind of our place within the world, and bring healing through that remembering. While Nature & Forest Therapy is a newer therapy, the powers of nature have been long known and practiced amongst Indigenous teachings.

Nature is a power that surrounds us, and offers us far more than just it’s beauty. Over the years, studies have been performed that bring fourth evidence of the impacts nature can have. One study showed that even having a window view of natural scenery can strengthen healing. Time outdoors can improve moods, expand ways of thinking, and give more meaning to life. This has become so evident in studies, that some doctors have begun writing prescriptions for more time in nature. Some parks have begun to waive the fees for folks entering on doctors orders. Over, and over again, the scientists, doctors, and poets agree, spending time in nature, improves health.

In today’s culture, we do not spend as much time outdoors as we once did years ago. Often, we need to remind ourselves, or schedule special time to be outside. The Japanese have long known and studied the benefits humans find in nature. A practice called Shinrin-Yoku, meaning, “to immerse oneself in the atmosphere of the forest”, has come to be known as “forest bathing”. Through monitoring devices, studies showed improvement in the function of vital organs when taking walks in the forest as opposed to cities. Things like reduced blood pressure, reduced cortisol, and improved heart rates were observed- all of which reduce stress. Additionally, forest walks showed higher scores for vigor, and decreased scores for depression, fatigue, anxiety, and confusion. Nature has incredible abilities to nurture both our physical and mental health.

When spending time in nature, be present, slow down, follow your senses, and notice. Try to observe and preserve the feelings that nature lends to you. This can help motivate and inspire more time in the natural healing world we live in.

Benefits of spending time in Nature

- Boosts immune system
- Improves function of vital organs
- Increased sense of well being
- Relaxation and stress reduction
- Positive impacts on depression
- Calming
- Encourages focus
- Encourages creativity

Ways to Immerse in Nature

- Gardening
- Birdwatching
- Exercise in natural settings
- Nature Photography
- Outdoor art
- Games/sports outdoors
- Picnicking
- Botany