



## **Improving Children's Health through Nature: Be a Nature Champion!**

Your local park is not just a great place to explore—it may be the latest tool for improving the health of your young patients. Growing evidence supports what many of us have experienced first hand—going outside is vital for our wellbeing, especially for children.

**The American Academy of Pediatrics** encourages children to have unstructured, free playtime for their physical, emotional, social and cognitive development. Now, the National Environmental Education Foundation (NEEF) is working with pediatric healthcare providers to encourage outside play for healthier kids.

NEEF has researched peer reviewed medical studies indicating that being outdoors can increase children's physical activity, reduce stress, aid in healthy development, and serve as a support mechanism for attention disorders. (The full NEEF literature review can be found at [www.neefusa.org/assets/files/NIFactSheet.pdf](http://www.neefusa.org/assets/files/NIFactSheet.pdf)).

Yet many children are inside and inactive, while rates of conditions like childhood obesity, asthma vitamin D deficiency, and attention deficit disorders continue to rise. These chronic conditions may lead to cardiovascular, pulmonary, and mental health disorders in adulthood. If trends persist, our children may be the first generation at risk of living shorter lives than their parents.

### **Be part of the solution. Join the Children and Nature Initiative!**

The Children and Nature Initiative addresses two important issues— preventing conditions like obesity and diabetes, and reconnecting children to nature. The Initiative trains healthcare providers to be Nature Champions, so they can train other healthcare providers to recommend outside play for children and their families.

#### **Why Nature Champions?**

The Children and Nature Initiative employs NEEF's proven model for training and mobilizing healthcare providers, which has been successful in training thousands of healthcare providers on environmental health issues.

#### **Who can be a Nature Champion?**

Nature Champions come from diverse pediatric healthcare professions, including: physicians, nurse practitioners, family physicians, physician assistants, and school nurses in both clinical and school settings.

#### **How does the program train Nature Champions?**

NEEF will hold a national train-the-trainer workshop to educate 30 pediatric healthcare providers to become Nature Champions in various locations. The training will take place in Shepherdstown, WV in September 2010. NEEF will cover travel expenses and provide a \$500 honorarium for each Nature Champion.

#### **What does a Nature Champion do?**

Nature Champions mobilize their colleagues to get children outdoors. Following the national training, Nature Champions will each train 30 providers in their own communities within the next two years. Ground rounds, lunch and learn seminars, or existing conferences and workshops are often good opportunities to engage colleagues.

#### **What tools does the program provide?**

NEEF will provide the tools and resources needed to train local healthcare providers. Nature Champions will receive a fact sheet, literature review, environmental history forms, a Power Point presentation, a prescription pad for outside play, and other patient education materials. NEEF is also available to provide technical assistance to support Nature Champions on an ongoing basis.

#### **How does the program get kids outside?**

Using the NEEF supplied prescription pad and educational materials, healthcare providers counsel families about the health benefits of nature and refer patients to a local nature sites. Nature sites provide safe, age appropriate outside activities, and can include Audubon Centers, Fish and Wildlife refuges, city or state parks, or other easily accessible outside areas.