



## **Family Nature Groups Pilot Project Report**

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### **Project Summary**

The investment of additional community presentations and leadership of Family Adventures in Nature (FAN), resulted in the establishment of five Nearby Nature Clubs between 2009 and 2010 and the participation of more than 300 families in family nature activities. As of May 2012, there are 10 Nearby Nature Clubs (NNCs) that serve upwards of 650 families (475 on Meetup.com plus 300 on Facebook with some overlap between the two). Leaders were identified and supported as they organized and scheduled activities for their Nearby Nature Clubs. Ongoing networking with Children & Nature Network leaders has strengthened strategies and overall efficacy of programming. Online surveys of 117 families and interviews of 23 parents showed that families participating in Nearby Nature Clubs have increased their family's time in nature, are more comfortable going into natural areas, allow their children to have more unstructured play in nature, and have their children ask more to go outside and play. Families generally seek activities that have low costs, include unstructured play, and provide exploration and physical activity. The planned family group event helps families overcome barriers that limit their experiences in nature: knowing local nature places, suggested activities with children in nature, precautions relating to health and safety, and confidence to organize family-based outings.

### **Background**

When families spend time in nature, they slow down, interact with each other, experience the wonder of nature together, and foster lifelong connections to the natural world. Children are happier, healthier and smarter when they learn in nature and play outdoors—whether it is in their schoolyard, nearby open space, wilderness, or backyard. Kids develop motor skills and fitness, follow their curiosity and creativity, get a sense of place, and gain special memories of nature that carry throughout their lives. Yet most families are unaware that nature is in our backyards and in our neighborhoods—and that these places are accessible, affordable and just as special as Yosemite National Park. Many families lack knowledge of local places to go, suggested activities with children in nature, precautions relating to health and safety, and confidence to organize a family outing.



Inspired by Richard Louv's book, *Last Child in the Woods* (2005), nature clubs for families are springing up all over the country. A nature club for families is essentially a group of people that share a common interest in connecting children and nature. They can be made up of single parents, grandparents, extended families, neighbors, homeschoolers and more. Some groups meet weekly while others meet monthly or bimonthly, but they all share a common goal of getting out in nature with their kids on a regular basis and include plenty of time for unstructured play.

Nationally, the Children & Nature Network (C&NN) offers a guidebook *Nature Clubs for Families Tool Kit* (2008) that suggests:

- Nature Clubs for Families can be created in any neighborhood—whether inner city, suburban, or rural—and in any economic setting.
- Nature Clubs for Families can be joined or created by any family—single parents, extended families, friends who feel like families.
- The Nature Clubs for Families approach can break down key barriers, including fear of strangers, since there is safety in numbers.
- There is the motivation factor—it's much more likely you and your family are going to show up at a park on Saturday morning if you know there's another family waiting for you.
- Shared knowledge: Many parents want to give their kids the gifts of nature, but they don't feel they know enough about nature to do so.

Family Adventures in Nature (FAN) formally began its group in November 2009. Holding two to three family adventures per month, it grew quickly, as did the desire and need to connect families and nature on a more regular basis closer to home. Under the umbrella of FAN, the first Nearby Nature Club sprouted up in February 2010 in the Scripps Ranch/Poway area of San Diego and named itself "Wilderness Wednesdays," and four others formed within a year. FAN leadership provides informal mentorship as necessary in addition to a leader backpack full of "adventuring tools" and additional resources such as field guides.

FAN is now comprised of these smaller, regionally-based Nearby Nature Clubs and collectively reaches over 650 families in the San Diego region with family- and nature-based experiences near where they live. They meet on a weekly or bi-weekly basis in "nearby nature," and close to home with the desire that families will really get to know, understand and appreciate what is right in their backyards. Additionally, FAN continues to host 2-3 outings per month within the natural areas of San Diego County, thus providing a variety of adventuring opportunities each month for families.

FAN has a website ([www.FamilyAdventuresinNature.org](http://www.FamilyAdventuresinNature.org)) and has written a strategic plan. Its vision is "to witness the social change needed for every family, in every community, to develop a deep and lifelong connection to, and responsibility for, the natural world." The mission for FAN is "to inspire and support families to unite in a commitment to frequently enjoy fulfilling experiences in nature, and ultimately to foster a deep, lifelong connection to, and responsibility for, the natural world." In other words, they want to connect more people to and strengthen relationships between children, families and communities to nature.

Family Adventures in Nature is a collaborative partner with the San Diego Children and Nature



Collaborative (SDCaN), which is bringing educators, ecologists, parents, community leaders, and others together to inspire communities to nurture, empower, and engage youth in cultivating their relationship with nature (website [www.sdchildrenandnature.org](http://www.sdchildrenandnature.org)). Over 60 organizations are working together to preserve opportunities for San Diego's children to learn in nature and play outdoors, under the fiscal sponsorship of the San Diego Audubon Society.

## Methods

Janice Swaisgood served as project coordinator, and was paid as a consultant on the project. She contributed additional hours in leading Family Adventures in Nature and serving on the Working Board of the Collaborative.

Tasks 1 through 4 were supported by the Sempra Energy Foundation in a grant to the Collaborative in September 2009. Tasks 5 and 6 were supported by the USDA Forest Service in a grant to the Collaborative in September 2010, as part of a study on factors affecting adults' decisions about nature activities for children. The San Diego Audubon Society served as the fiscal sponsor for both grants.

## Project Goals

Nearby Nature Clubs are primary vehicles for supporting families' efforts to experience nature with kids, coordinated by Family Adventures in Nature (FAN). The Nearby Nature Groups Pilot Project was undertaken to learn more about how these groups can be established and supported, and to increase nature-based activities for local families. The following goals were set for the project:

1. Increase awareness of Nearby Nature Clubs and the benefits of family activities in nature
2. Establish and support five Nearby Nature Clubs in San Diego (by September 2010)
3. Stimulate discussion and sharing about experiences in Nearby Nature Clubs
4. Gather information about Nearby Nature Clubs, including the demography of participants, and how they are meeting participants' expectations and needs
5. Assess how participation influenced attitudes and practices in spending time in nature with their children

## Task 1: Educational Presentations

- a. Compile a list of 20 target audiences/organizations focused on families in nature.
- b. Develop an interactive workshop-style presentation for reconnecting kids to nature, including the benefits of connecting kids to nature as well as consequences of spending too little time outdoors.
- c. Explore with participants the roadblocks and approaches to spending time in nature, and develop a "Family Action Plan" for connecting with nature as a family (with or without other families, specific to each participant's needs).



- d. Give presentations to at least six established family-oriented organizations, such as PTAs, church groups, and the YMCA, modifying it for the audience.
- e. Administer evaluation form at workshops, developed with evaluation consultant Leanne Teiper.

### **Task 2: Promotional Materials**

- a. Develop flyers and/or postcards announcing workshops and events, in English and Spanish (depending on the audience).
- b. Develop a bilingual brochure promoting Nearby Nature Clubs.

### **Task 3: Establishment and Mentorship of Nearby Nature Clubs**

- a. Actively seek out and recruit potential Nearby Nature Club leaders, using the website, brochures, presentations, and purposeful observations at family activities.
- b. Identify and solicit potential leaders to establish and operate additional Nearby Nature Clubs.
- c. Offer mentorship to potential leaders, including one-on-one support for individuals seeking leadership in existing clubs and for those interested in forming new Nearby Nature Clubs.
- d. Develop a “leader packet” of supporting materials to provide for new leaders and attend start-up organizational meetings and other initial club activities to provide guidance and problem-solving in the critical early phases of new club development.
- e. If enough new recruits are identified, lead workshops for prospective leaders to share experiences and co-develop leadership strategies.

### **Task 4: Networking**

- a. Initiate contact with leaders at “Children & Nature Network” and other key organizations, such as other family nature clubs outside of San Diego.
- b. Stimulate discussion and sharing of “lessons learned” for the mutual benefit of clubs in San Diego and beyond.

### **Task 5: Survey of Family Adventures in Nature/Nearby Nature Club Participants**

Families in the San Diego region were invited to participate in telephone or online surveys regarding their experiences and perspectives about time in nature with their children. Detailed methods are provided in the project report (SDCaN, 2011)

An online survey was offered to about 400 members of Family Adventures in Nature, with an email inviting their participation. SurveyMonkey software was used to obtain the responses and then to tabulate the data. The following questions were asked:



1. Gender, marital status, ethnic background, and educational background
2. How did you hear about FAN?
3. What do you like most about being a part of Family Adventures in Nature? (select three)
4. How many Family Adventures have you participated in?
5. What do you like most about being a part of Family Adventures in Nature? (select three)
6. What changes would you make to FAN? (provide specific comments)
7. As a parent (or grandparent) you have a lot of responsibilities. What, if anything, prevents you and your family from spending [more] time in nature?
8. Actions and attitudes relating to nature, before and since you joined FAN (list)
9. Statements about the importance of children's experiences in nature (list)

#### **Task 6. Interviews with Family Adventures in Nature/Nearby Nature Club Participants**

Interview questions are provided in the project report (SDCaN 2011).

- a. Select about 25 families for interviews, from more than 400 members of Family Adventures in Nature. (Care was taken to ensure that as diverse a group as possible was included in the potential interviews. This includes members from a diverse set of backgrounds and experiences, from never having participated in an outing to regular attendees.)
- b. Develop questions and interview protocol with evaluation consultant, and conduct interviews by telephone. All interviews were digitally recorded with the respondents' permission, and all interviewees were assured of confidentiality.
- c. Conduct individual interviews by the same individual over the phone, recording them digitally recorded with participant permission. Interviews lasted, on average, 10 minutes.

The focus of the interview was to gain an understanding of what factors parents consider for the activities with their children. The interview protocol consisted of 12 questions, starting with demographic information, including family structure and age of children. The next series of questions concentrated on favorite family activities and the factors that parents consider when choosing a family activity. Last, questions related to the parent's attitudes and behaviors related to nature.

The following questions were asked:

1. Can you tell me a little bit about your family. For instance, how many children do you have, their ages and gender, and whether you are single or married.
2. Do you work as well as parent? If so, can you tell me a little about your work including how many days you work and hours.
3. Can you tell me about your favorite activity that you and your children like to do together? What about it made it your favorite? How often do you and your children do that?



4. When you're choosing something to do with your children, what factors do you consider? (Probing questions included: For instance, are there certain areas or types of experiences you think are really important for your children to experience? Do you seek activities to do or just do what you know about? How about timing and logistics? How does the cost of an activity factor into your decision making?)
5. Do you and your children like to do any nature-related activities? If yes: Can you tell me a little bit about the nature activities that you like to do? How often do you do these? How do you hear about nature activities? If no: Can you tell me why not?
6. Can you tell me about your personal nature experiences? For instance, do you like to do things that involve being outdoors in nature?
7. Do you like to do activities outside in your own time? If so, what kinds of things do you like to do? Did you have nature activities when you were a child?
8. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how would you, personally, rate the importance of nature in a child's life? [10 would be that nature is absolutely important to a child's life and 1 would be that nature is not at all important in a child's life.]
9. Why did you choose this rating? [Try to get at why they feel this way about nature and children. If given a short answer, ask if they can explain some more.]
10. On a scale of 1-10, with 10 being the highest, how do you think your spouse or child's other parent would rate the importance of nature in a child's life?
11. Why did you choose this rating?
12. Do you have anything else you would like to share with me about how nature activities are chosen in your family?

## Results

Results for Tasks 1 through 4 are written in the first person, from the perspective of the project coordinator Janice Swaisgood. Results for Tasks 5 and 6 are summarized from the final report of the study supported by the USDA Forest Service (SDCaN 2011).

### Task 1: Educational Presentations

I initially spent a fair amount of time targeting audiences and contacts for existing organizations that had some sort of family programs in place (YMCA for example, with documented locations around county and a contact person). While this approach gave some contacts, it became evident that our movement was growing more organically and that a different approach may be warranted. One of the methods of "growing" the movement and the number of Nearby Nature Clubs here in San Diego was to look for potential leaders among presentations and on our own NNC's outings. In doing that, we have successfully overseen the "startup" of five clubs.

I also spent a good deal of time developing a workshop presentation/powerpoint (more time than allotted I believe). Scheduling the presentations involved another "change in plans." I initially envisioned seeking out presentation locations/audiences and then finding a "leader" hopefully from within the audience. That idea naturally evolved into being lucky enough to find the leaders



first, then secure a location for the presentation, then give the talk/workshop. This is beneficial in several ways, as the “follow up” is already there. I get people excited and motivated and there is a leader there, nearby, with nearby outings already scheduled. Another huge benefit is that the talks then also serve as great publicity for their Nearby Nature Clubs. It’s a win-win for all!

Here is a summary of presentations given to date, each with modifications made for the specific audience and date. It includes presentations given after the project was completed, making the list current to the date of this draft project report. It also includes movie screenings of *Mother Nature’s Child* and *Where Do the Children Play?* (Fuzzy Slippers Productions, 2011)

Date	Location (audience)
April 29, 2010	Valley Elementary (Poway Unified School District-PUSD Preschool Families)
May 21, 2010	Summit Unitarian Universalist Fellowship
September 23, 2010	REI Encinitas
October 21, 2010	Creekside Elementary (PUSD Families)
November 4, 2010	REI San Diego
November 18, 2010	Encinitas Library
January 26, 2011	ELAC Committee Meeting (La Mesa Spring Valley School District)
March 28, 2011	Co-op Preschool of San Diego (Point Loma)
April 13, 2011	Scripps Ranch Community Center
April 15, 2011	Cuyamaca Child Development Center
April 26, 2011	Valley Elementary (and PUSD Preschool Families)
May 18, 2011	La Jolla Methodist Nursery School
January 25, 2012	<i>Mother Nature’s Child</i> Screening (SDCaN general meeting/MTRP)
March 8, 2012	<i>Mother Nature’s Child</i> Screening (University of San Diego)
March 29, 2012	Family Nature Club Webinar (national)
April 19, 2012	<i>Where Do the Children Play?</i> Screening (Innovations Academy)
April 27, 2012	<i>Mother Nature’s Child</i> Screening (BOOST Conference, Palm Springs)
May 8, 2012	Mission Hills Community Preschool
May 15, 2012	MomsNext (RB Presbyterian Church)
May 15, 2012	<i>Mother Nature’s Child</i> Screening (Gillispie School)

I have learned a lot in the process of giving the presentation. It has been fine-tuned and updated as necessary, mainly based on feedback from participants and updating research, including the incorporation of ideas from Richard Louv’s latest book, *The Nature Principle* (Louv 2011). These interactive workshop-style presentations focus on current research about connecting kids and nature and the impacts of this connection, ask participants to reflect on their own experiences in nature, look at road blocks to getting out in nature, and develop an “action plan” for furthering their families’ connections with nature.

Evaluations indicate a very powerful and positive response to the presentations. Most



participants indicate a positive change in terms of aspirations of spending more time outdoors with their children as well as understanding the importance of doing so (including unstructured time in nature). Additionally, the workshop was rated as consistently meeting/exceeding participants' expectations. The "Action Plan" served well in the workshops, but I believe it would be beneficial to develop a method of following up on this aspect of the workshop.

**Task 2: Promotional Materials**

Presentation flyers have been developed, in English and Spanish. An English-only brochure was developed to promote FAN and Nearby Nature Clubs and was also developed in Spanish. Printing of the brochure has been covered by a variety of sources, including San Diego Audubon Society, Sustainable Scripps Ranch, and personally by the Swaisgood Family. The brochure continues to be updated with each printing, to reflect the current status of Family Adventures in Nature and its numerous Nearby Nature Clubs. The brochure (and postcards purchased by the Swaisgoods) are regularly used at community fairs, presentations, movie screenings and other outreach events.

I have continued to develop flyers as necessary to promote these interactive workshop-style presentations and other events. As we developed a good communication system and announcements for club events though, the need to create flyers for those events became less necessary.

**Task 3: Establishment and Mentorship of Nearby Nature Clubs**

The new leaders of the Nearby Nature Clubs have received mentorship and guidance when necessary, and have also added a lot to our group. Several of them are now on the steering committee for "Families in Nature" (subcommittee of SDCaN) and have spent a considerable amount of time meeting not only for their own new clubs but also to work out a vision and mission statement. Additionally, we are able to mutually mentor one another and work on longer term planning both for the Nearby Nature Clubs and for "Families in Nature" in a more general fashion.

Mentoring new leaders has been one of the best aspects of this work. These are the current Nearby Nature Clubs and their leaders:

Name of group and Location	Meeting day/time	Leader
"Wilderness Wednesdays" Meets in Scripps Ranch, Poway, Rancho Penasquitos	Wednesdays, alternating between morning and afternoon and evening	Shawna Hamon
"Encinitas Explorers" Meets in Encinitas, Leucadia, Carlsbad, Solana Beach and Del Mar areas	Fridays, alternating between morning and afternoon	Kacy Lafferty (started by Yasmin Shaddox)
"O'side Trail Tribe" Meets in Oceanside and surrounding areas	Wednesday afternoons	Amanda Byzak
"PB Peregrines"	Mondays, twice a month	Sylvia Busby



Meets in Pacific Beach, Clairemont and La Jolla areas	in the morning	
Groups formed in early 2012		Leader
“Pequeños Exploradores”	Tuesdays, twice a month	Jazmin West (bilingual Spanish)
“Urban Canyoneers” Meets in the Balboa Park area	Thursdays, twice a month in the morning (with occasional evening outings)	Tracey Gibbs
“Sense of Wonder Wednesdays” Meets in the South Bay Area	Wednesday afternoons	Angel Tachiquin (bilingual Spanish)
Yet unnamed group Meets in Point Loma-Ocean Beach	Tuesdays, twice a month	Ilisa Goldman
“Central Wanderers” Meets in the College-Rolando area “Thursday Trekkers” Meets in the Mira Mesa/Scripps Ranch and Rancho Penasquitos area	Thursdays, mornings and afternoons (alternate) Thursday mornings	Cham Edussuriya  Mylinh Arnett

Working with and mentoring these leaders has been an honor and a privilege. I have learned a lot myself in the process and our club is much stronger because of their involvement. Each leader also participates on the FAN Steering Committee. The final version of our vision and mission statement is attached and serves as a guiding principle for our work together. There is much to be done and we have not yet identified a leader for the east county or south bay areas.

I had conversations with and worked a little with Anjie from Lemon Grove who was/is interested in starting a group, but she decided that she needed to wait until her daughter was a little older. She also expressed interest in participating in our group as a member for a while longer before officially taking on a leadership role. Another group that started but then ended was “Tuesday Trails” in the La Mesa/College Area. The leader of that group decided to have another baby and put the club on indefinite “hold”. Her baby is now a few months old and we are talking about the club starting again, perhaps in the fall. This leader is Cham, who as of Spring 2012 started up a group called “Central Wanderers”. Another group that started was called “Nature’s Playground”. After that leader had her third child, she decided to not lead the group and no real attempt was made to replace her.

Information needs for new leaders were identified, to ensure that new leaders in Nearby Nature Clubs will have the tools and resources necessary to facilitate their work as volunteer leaders. An initial toolkit is needed to describe FAN’s mentorship, philosophy, and how to get started. This future toolkit will include a copy of *Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv(2005), “A Parent’s Guide to Nature Play” by Jim Finch (2009), *Afoot and Afield in San Diego* by Jerry Schad (2007), and master copies of a variety of resources to be shared with families (such as “Tips for Exploring”, “Step Outside”, and “Tips for Hiking with Young Children”).

Another essential element to the Nearby Nature Clubs is the development and distribution of Family Leader Backpacks. The initial six backpacks and first aid kits were donated by REI, and the Sempra Energy Foundation, through a grant to the San Diego Children and Nature



Collaborative (SDCaN) provided funding for “filling” these backpacks with a set of magnifying glasses, a bug box and a set of field guides. Since the initial six backpacks were allocated, FAN has been providing new leaders with the same set of materials.

Each backpack will include local field guides, *Sharing Nature with Children* by Joseph Cornell (1998), a set of ten magnifying glasses and bug boxes, a first aid kit, handouts that can be shared with adults for use with families, release of liability and photo release forms, and sign-in sheets.

#### **Task 4: Networking**

Nationally, the local FAN leaders participate on the Children & Nature Network task force developing and sustaining the “Natural Families Network” ([www.childrenandnature.org/movement/naturalfamilies/clubs](http://www.childrenandnature.org/movement/naturalfamilies/clubs)).

This is another task that has gone very well to date. My initial contacts with national leads and contacts in other regions were helpful and also ended up leading to the best networking imaginable. I was asked to be on the Advisory Board for C&NN’s “Natural Family Network.” This new group is the evolution of FNCs at C&NN. In participating roughly every other week in conference calls, I have established relationships with several key people, including Cheryl Charles, Avery Cleary and Amy Pertschuk. I have thoroughly enjoyed problem-solving and developing this new facet of C&NN along side the key players I mentioned, as well as phenomenal leaders in various regions of the country (both family nature club and key partner leaders such as Nature Rocks and REI). The relationship has definitely been mutually beneficial.

On another note, I initiated contact with two other club leaders, one in San Diego (Sage Sprouts family nature club) and one in Arizona. Our conversations (not billed for) have been interesting and in particular the gal in Arizona is interested in our model of a Nearby Nature Club.

#### **Task 5. Survey of Family Nature Group Participants**

The online survey was offered to about 400 members of FAN, and 116 completed the survey in February 2011, for a response rate of 29%. Survey results were tabulated for general demographic information, participation in outings, feelings about being part of the group, recommended changes, attitude toward spending time in nature, and barriers to spending time in nature.

The respondents were 88% female, 9% male, and 3% undeclared. Marital status was 89% married, 5% single, 4% separated and divorced, and 3% undeclared. They were 74% Caucasian non-Hispanic, 8% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 5% mixed, 1% each Native American and middle Eastern, and 8% undeclared. Educational status were 45% undergraduate degree, 46% graduate degree, 1% high school graduate, 5% some college, and 3% undeclared. Looking at the demographics of the participants also confirmed some things we knew: while we have achieved some cultural diversity in the group, approximately 75% of those completing the survey were Caucasian. It also confirmed that the majority of the children are age 10 and under, with a spattering up to age 14 and above. There are clearly some challenges ahead in growing the groups and reaching out to a variety of people.



Results from the survey include:

- Most respondents learned about FAN through someone they knew.
- When asked about how many “adventures” they had participated in, the responses from participants varied from nearly 30% having not been on an adventure to 17% having been on 10 or more adventures.
- Responding to the question, “What do you like most about being a part of Family Adventures in Nature,” most survey participants identified places to explore nature and motivation, both commonly listed as barriers (lack of motivation and not knowing where to go). Participants of the survey acknowledged the positive impact on the psychological and physical well-being of their children, as 44% identified one of those as what they most like about being a part of FAN.
- Even though over 43% of respondents indicated no changes were necessary, others identified changes. For instance, FAN typically used to offer one or two “adventures” on the weekends each month, but the survey indicated that over 32% wanted more opportunities on the weekends.
- The survey asked an open-ended question about barriers to spending time in nature, “As a parent (or grandparent) you have a lot of responsibilities. What, if anything, prevents you and your family from spending [more] time in nature?” Over half related to lack of time, schedules, and various specific activities.
- Based on this survey, families participating in FAN have increased their family’s time in nature, are more comfortable going into natural areas, allow their children to have more unstructured play in nature, and have their children ask more to go outside and play.

Participation in Family Nature Clubs, specifically Family Adventures in Nature, parallels the benefits seen nationally; it is motivating for both children and adults, and gives ideas of new places to experience nature. The planned family group event overcomes two common barriers to nature activities: lack of motivation and not knowing where to go. A third of the parents identified meeting new people and socializing, and a third agreed that “it’s just plain fun!” The FAN affiliation reminds families of nature activities as they receive weekly email messages announcing nature walks. Even families that rarely participate in a FAN event get ideas about where to go for family activities in nature.

Families’ experiences can be enhanced by inviting and considering feedback about the nature activities. As almost a third of the families surveyed wanted more “adventures” on weekends, FAN now hosts two to four weekend events each month. As distance to activities was identified as a barrier, there is a need to seek out new leaders and develop new sub-clubs in more areas in the county. Weekend outings are often organized in various geographical regions, increasing driving distances for families that participate in outings far from their home.

### **Task 6. Interviews with Nearby Nature Group Participants**

Seven factors were identified by at least a third of the parents: cost, unstructured play, exploration, earth stewardship, time, physical activity, and enjoyment. Half of the parents



mentioned cost and “unstructured” attributes of spending time in nature. Analysis showed that all parents (100%) stated at least one child factor in regards to their decision-making, such as opportunities for the child to explore, learn, move, and enjoy. This reinforces the importance of parents understanding how nature experiences contribute to healthy child development. A closer look at parenting philosophies and styles might further the understanding of how parents make decisions about nature and other family activities.

More than a third of the parents interviewed sought activities that offered physical activity and time for children to explore and make their own discoveries. Reasons they gave include to spend time in nature included getting away from modern technology, learning about the earth and wanting to care for it, and experiencing the beauty of nature. Almost half of the parents identified the psychological and physical well-being of their children as elements they most like about being a part of FAN.

More than half of the parents interviewed sought activities that provided their child with the opportunity to be autonomous, seeking out those that were “unstructured,” had “no rules,” or required the child to make one’s own decisions. For many of these parents, unstructured play is a way for children to learn about and manage themselves and their surroundings. More parents, who stated a nature activity was their favorite family activity, sought unstructured or autonomous experiences for their children than parents who stated another favorite family activity. This finding suggests that parents who favor nature activities seek unstructured play for their children.

More than half of the parents identified cost as the most important factor, citing tight family budgets and choosing their activities partly based on whether they could afford them. Even those who stated that they can sometimes afford higher cost activities still appeared to take cost into consideration. Nature can be highlighted as a free or low-cost family activity.

More than a third mentioned time as a factor influencing family activities, including the length of the activity and when it occurs. Often families have several schedules to work around, including the parents’ work, naps, sports, and school activities. Once these are accounted for, the remaining time with the family may be considered very valuable.

## Conclusions

This project has demonstrated the benefits of Nearby Nature Clubs to build leadership capacity and resources in the movement to reconnect children and families to nature in San Diego. While there are currently ten Nearby Nature Clubs, some are functioning at higher levels while others are still in need of mentorship. All voluntary, the current leaders are amazingly dedicated people who want to do the right thing for their families and their communities. Future investments would provide current leaders with the mentorship they need as well as necessary tools as they venture out with families and build community. We have not yet been able to purchase some of the desired resources for leaders, such as copies of *Last Child in the Woods* (Louv 2005), *Sharing Nature With Children* (Cornell 1998) and *Afoot and Afield in San Diego* (Schad 2010).

Participation in family-centered nature experiences may be increased by communicating the values of nature activities for child development, promoting the relatively low cost of nature experiences compared with other family activities, and offering more organized and scheduled



nature activities for families. Family Adventures in Nature/Nearby Nature Clubs have increased opportunities for families' time in nature as well as comfort levels for going into natural areas, allowing their children to have more unstructured play in nature, and having their children ask more to go outside and play. Families generally seek activities that have low costs, include unstructured play, and provide exploration and physical activity.

The planned family group event, like those found in Family Adventures in Nature, overcomes three common barriers to participation in nature activities: lack of motivation, fear (of the unknown and known risks) and not knowing where to go. A third of the parents identified meeting new people and socializing, and a third agreed that "it's just plain fun!" Structured programs may encourage families to spend more time in nature, both as scheduled family nature groups or offered by nature education providers at various locations.

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## Contacts

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