18-Month Plan to Respond to COVID-19

Times of crisis call for decisive leadership and creative action. Recognizing that we are not going to be operating in a “business as usual” mode for some time, the Children & Nature Network has prepared an 18-month plan for remaining relevant and responsive during this defining moment.

We are entering into a new unknown, a time of social distancing and isolation for an undetermined period of time. None of us knows what this will mean for our families and communities and, yet, we’ve been inspired by the creativity and resiliency of our movement, as we find ways to stay connected to the benefits of nature and each other.

Overnight, we’ve watched the world come together as a virtual community in new and innovative ways: companies, nonprofit organizations, celebrities and regular folks are lowering access barriers, opening their doors and creating unique shared experiences to connect, support each other and meet basic needs. Those showing the strongest and most engaged community response aren’t simply reporting out ideas (i.e. “here’s what you should do”), but rather ASKING their followers to share their ideas and ENGAGING in fresh and engaged interactive communication.

While we will need to do our work differently, C&NN is positioned well to respond quickly and meaningfully to help ensure that children and families have equitable access to the healing power of nature. Our vision, mission and theory of change will remain the same. However, in anticipation of continued physical/social isolation recommendations for at least the next 18 months, we will orient our work to be even more based on robust online communications platforms and virtual convening and creative ways of engaging with our networks virtually.

OPPORTUNITY TO SUPPORT COMMUNITIES THROUGH THIS CRISIS

With the World Health Organization and other health leaders saying that people should only go outside for food, medicine and walks in nature, this crisis provides an opportunity for C&NN to provide leadership and meaningful guidance for families, educators, municipal leaders, public health providers, and others on why and how to connect to nature safely during this crisis.

We have already been receiving calls from public health officials, city leaders, parents and others asking for advice and support how spending time outdoors in nature might help individuals and communities navigate this challenging time. While we will need to do our work differently. But as a virtual organization providing tools and resources rather than direct programs, C&NN is positioned well to respond quickly and meaningfully to help ensure that children and families have equitable access to the healing power of nature.
WHAT OUR WORK WILL LOOK LIKE THROUGH DEC. 2021

While recognizing that this is a fluid situation, members of our Scientific Advisory Council, who are public health leaders in their states (Washington and Texas), assure us that encouraging outside time, especially nearby home and at a distance of at least 6 ft from others, is not only safe but recommended to reduce the anxiety, depression, loneliness, and other ailments that come with social isolation. With that context, below is how C&NN proposes to respond and shift our work.

Core Strategy: Foster Belief that Nature Connection is Critical for Children’s Health and Wellbeing

⇒ Research
Access to evidence-based information will be more important than ever before. Therefore, we will maintain collection of evidence-based information, but at a reduced volume. We estimate that we will add 3 – 5 of the top research articles to our Research Library each month (instead of our current 20 – 30 articles) and publish our Research Digest quarterly, rather than monthly.

⇒ Strategic Communications
Recognizing that we will need to rely even more on web-based tools, we will develop and manage a new website (scheduled to launch early summer 2020) to serve as an online engagement platform. C&NN’s new website will provide actionable tools to help young people and their families connect to nature in this new age of social isolation. It will also serve as a platform for sharing out information, stories and solutions from across our networks. We will focus our strategic communications through the following strategies:

- “Inside-Out: Stories from the Field” digital editorial suite - Our new website will include a rigorous news and storytelling e-zine platform, featuring long form reporting, news, co-branded content, a podcast and more. We will focus on lifting up stories from around the world about what people are doing to support themselves and their families through this new normal.

- Inside-Out Webinar Series - Over the next few months, our new normal finds us practicing social distancing and varying levels (for now) of being quarantined inside our homes and. It is essential for us to take care of our mental health during these times, and luckily in this context, nature is the one thing that never closes.

The series will kick-off with a virtual chat with Richard Louv, answering questions gathered from C&NN audiences followed by a Q&A session from webinar participants. Over the coming weeks, we will crowdsourced simple and innovative ideas of how we can connect to nature for key audiences such as:

- State and local health departments on strategies for supporting mental health through nature connection
- Policy makers
- Funders on strategies they can offer grantees and to help guide their giving
- Parents/teachers/caregivers
- **Vitamin N Challenge** - The Vitamin N Challenge will inspire families to spend time in nature by providing helpful information and fun ideas for creating outdoor adventures, close to home and with safe social distancing as recommended by the World Health Organization and the CDC. We will build a content-rich online platform offering the positive, educational information that parents want and need to support their efforts to get kids outside; ideas for nature connection; access to expert resources; and an online community for celebration and sharing success stories. In recognition that people in some communities may not be able to safely go outside, we will include resources for activities that can be done inside and resources for technological nature connection, which has been shown to reduce stress and an anxiety and improve feelings of happiness and wellbeing.

**Core Strategy: Grow and Support the Movement**

⇒ **Convenings**
In this new reality, we will move to an entirely online platform for convening leaders in the children and nature movement. Even if we are able to hold some version of an in-person gathering, we need to be able to provide a remote participation option. This makes sense both for the environment and as a strategy to encourage more people to engage, growing the movement.

⇒ **Peer Learning/Support**
Leaders in our movement are already telling us that they need opportunities to connect with one another to share resources, support and to stay connected. We will establish regular times for city leaders, youth leaders, green schoolyard advocates, researchers, parents, caregivers, and others to gather virtually.

⇒ **Equity and Inclusion**
We will continue our internal learning around equity and inclusion as a board and staff. We will also continue to listen to and learn from communities who are most impacted by COVID-19 and what supports they need to navigate through this crisis, ensuring that our goal to connect people to nature is sensitive and responsive to people’s needs.

**Core Strategy: Change Core Systems that Impact Children’s Daily Connection to Nature**

**Municipal Government**
We will continue our work to support municipal leaders in 21 cities in partnership with the National League of Cities and 8-80 Cities through designing and implementing city team convenings, conference calls, and virtual site visits to participating cities. We will continue the provision of responsive technical assistance, especially around helping cities navigate park and public land usage during the COVID-19 crisis.

**School Grounds**
We are hearing from public health workers, parents and teachers that outdoor learning opportunities that support children’s mental and physical wellbeing are needed now more than ever. We will continue our work with school districts, municipal government, and state health departments to ensure that all communities have access to outdoor learning opportunities by 2050.
Youth Development
The outdoors as a platform for healing, hope and youth power building has never been more critical. We will continue our work in support young adult leaders through our Natural Leaders network and our partnership with Fresh Tracks. We will also develop tools for youth-serving organizations that uplift youth voices through the platform of outdoor engagement and nature as a healing power.

Policy
We will continue to support the Youth Outdoors Policy Partnership and share out policy efforts through our digital platforms.