

NEW CAMPAIGN LAUNCHES TO CONNECT KIDS WITH NATURE TO IMPROVE HEALTH

Coalition marks the first time in New Jersey nature-based education, health, after-school, and youth-centered organizations come together

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Bernardsville, NJ - The NJ Kids in Nature coalition announced today the launch of a new campaign to improve the overall wellbeing of children in New Jersey through increased connections to nature. Research from many studies over multiple decades shows that connecting with nature improves physical and mental health in children.

The NJ Kids in Nature Coalition was formed to provide support to organizations connecting children with nature, partner with our healthcare community to raise awareness about the importance of outdoor play for children's physical and mental health, and increase access to nature and the outdoors so all our children are healthier and happier.

Funding through the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has enabled New Jersey Audubon to spearhead the NJ Kids in Nature coalition, whose mission is to uplift, support, and celebrate the organizations connecting all kids with nature to improve childrens' overall physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing.

"NJSACC - NJ's Afterschool & Out-of-School Time Professional Network, is happy to support the newly launched NJ Kids in Nature coalition in contributing to the development of the wellbeing of youth. Out-of-School Time is a wonderful opportunity to encourage both youth and those who interact with them to enjoy the many benefits of exploring the outdoors throughout our very diverse state," said **Dagmar Wojcik (she/her/hers), Quality Team Director, NJSACC: NJ's Afterschool & Out-of-School Time Professional Network.**

"Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey (BGCNJ) is an Alliance of 22 Boys & Girls Club organizations serving more than 55,000 youth ages 5-18 throughout the Garden State. BGCNJ works to strengthen and grow the Boys & Girls Club mission to enable all young people, especially those who need us most, to reach their full potential as productive, caring, responsible citizens. I am very pleased to be serving on the newly-launched NJ Kids in Nature Coalition Steering Committee to help improve the wellbeing of children, and inspire a connection with nature to benefit long-term healthy lifestyles," said **Susan Haspel, State Director of Boys & Girls Clubs in New Jersey.**

"Exposing all of New Jersey's children to the benefits of play, the wonder of discovery and the reality of belonging is a foundation for addressing the environmental, social and health

struggles our state faces," said **Renata Barnes, Director of Programming and Community Engagement, Outdoor Equity Alliance.**

"Whether you are a parent or other responsible adult, a healthcare professional, educator, or part of a business or organization that works with kids, you can make a difference," said **Merrill Eppedio, Director, Strategic Communications & Learning, Johnson & Johnson.** "I am excited "

"As the Nation's largest provider of childcare, The YMCA is committed to nurturing the potential of every child and teen. From early childhood programs, afterschool care and enrichment, to summer camp, the 30 NJ YMCA Associations understand how physical activity and the outdoors support children's development in spirit, mind and body. WE strive everyday to provide a holistic and equitable experience for the children and families we serve," said **Suzanne Cornell, Sr. Director, Strategic Partnerships and Engagement, NJ YMCA.**

"Waterspirit is proud to be a part of the Children in Nature coalition. Waterspirit's core values include the right to clean water and fresh air because we recognize the benefits of time spent in nature. I am personally so grateful to the Children in Nature Coalition to offer this valuable resource to parents and schools who are working together to help kids get outside," said **Anne Price, Program Manager, Waterspirit.**

"The coalition's new website, njkidsinnature.org has resources for healthcare professionals, educators, and caring adults to learn more about the benefits of nature for children's physical health and mental well being, and easy steps they can take today to make a difference and help kids all over New Jersey enjoy the benefits of spending more time outside" said **Kristy Omelianuk, Network Engagement Manager at Children & Nature Network.**

"Outdoor learning sparks wonder and creativity in children and provides endless opportunities for playful problem-solving. The NJ Kids in Nature Coalition builds tremendous opportunities for children and their grown ups to enjoy this kind of exploration," said **Lauren Madden, Professor of Elementary Science Education, The College of New Jersey, Department of Elementary and Early Childhood Education.**

"The New Jersey Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance (NJASPERD) is dedicated to promoting responsibility and development of healthy active lifestyles for New Jersey's students, educators, and community members," said **Carol Ciotto, Executive Director, New Jersey Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreation, and Dance.** "We are thrilled to be part of the newly launched NJ Kids in Nature coalition to help improve the wellbeing of our state's children. NJASPERD looks forward to collaborating on providing opportunities and resources to promote outside play that can

develop a wide range of skills essential to their physical, social, emotional, and cognitive development and is beneficial to their overall health.”

“The Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education envisions a world in which all New Jersey’s children have equitable and safe access to the outdoors for learning and play.”

Kelly Wenzel, President, Alliance for New Jersey Environmental Education.

“The NJ Kids in Nature coalition envisions a world in which all New Jersey’s children joyfully play outdoors, inspiring a connection to the environment and resulting in long-term healthy lifestyles,” said **Allison Mulch, Director of Education, New Jersey Audubon.**

Founding Steering Committee members include:

- ANJEE (Alliance of New Jersey Environmental Educators): <https://anjee.org/index.html>
- Boys & Girls Club in New Jersey: www.bgcnj.org
- Children & Nature Network: <https://www.childrenandnature.org/>
- The College of New Jersey School of Education, Environmental Sustainability Education: <https://envsus.tcnj.edu/>
- New Jersey Audubon: <https://njudubon.org/>
- New Jersey Association for Health, Physical Education, Recreational and Dance: <https://njahperd.org/>
- NJSACC: NJ’s Afterschool & Out-of-School Time Professional Network: <https://www.njsacc.org/>
- Outdoor Equity Alliance: <https://outdoorequityalliance.org/>
- Waterspirit: <https://www.waterspirit.org/>
- New Jersey YMCA State Alliance: <https://www.njymca.org/>

To learn more and make a difference visit www.njkidsinnature.org.

Contact: Chris Neff, chris.neff@njudubon.org, 908.396.6660

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