San Diego is rich in nature, but not everyone lives near a park or canyon and not everyone feels comfortable seeking out nature. Check Out Nature helps to connect families to nature through their existing relationships with local libraries and recreation centers. We use these connections to jump start a new connection to nearby nature.

The San Diego Check Out Nature Backpack Program is at a library or a recreation center near you! Families can check out a nature backpack just like you would check out a library book, and go forth and explore. Youth groups can check out enough backpacks from a recreation center so that everyone has supplies for a canyon adventure. Backpacks include materials to get San Diegans started on outdoor adventures, like binoculars, magnifying glasses, pocket nature guides, plus water bottles, whistles, first aid kits and more.

Why do this? Nature brings calmness and respite from busy lives, it provides an opportunity for learning, it’s good for our health, and it’s often free and closer than we think. A child’s connection to nature gives enjoyment and wonder, and creates a future environmentalist and steward of the natural world.

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LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Getting kids outside. That’s the first step, and we’re pleased to partner with you and the rest of the San Diego community working to connect children to nature. Spending time outdoors means healthy play, exploration, and the joy that comes from the natural world. Together we provide opportunities and support to provide that vital link between children and the both magnificent and ordinary outdoor spaces of San Diego.

Towards these goals this year we partnered with librarians, park and recreation leaders and community organizations to kick start San Diego’s Check Out Nature program. Have you checked out a backpack from your local San Diego City Library? Give it a try! Thanks to this team effort Check Out Nature proved to be so effective we were awarded an Opening the Outdoors grant from the San Diego Foundation to expand the program. As part of that expansion, we will train recreation center staff in Nature-Based Programming AND use those sessions to “Train the Trainers,” so that more and more youth leaders will be comfortable leading activities like hiking San Diego canyons.

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ASK THE DOCTOR: OUTDOOR PLAY KEEPS THE EYE DR. AWAY

Rates of myopia, commonly known as near-sightedness, have been soaring in the United States and around the developed world. If current trends continue it is estimated that more than half of Americans will be near-sighted by 2050. Eye doctors are alarmed because myopia can cause many vision threatening complications. Why is this startling increase happening? There is evidence that the increasing amount of time children spend indoors is the culprit. During childhood and adolescence the human eye is developing, and bright light and wide open visual fields are important in forming a normally shaped eye. Without enough of these, the eye shape is a little longer than normal, resulting in the abnormal focusing length that causes myopia. Children today are spending half as much time outdoors as their parents did, depriving them of the stimulation they need for healthy eye development.

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INTERNATIONAL MUD DAY 2019

June 29th is International Mud Day, and in 2019 San Diego celebrated in the mud at Crown Point Park. International Mud Day aims to connect children around the globe through the earth. Kids of all ages played in the magnificent mud pit, crawled over, under, and through the obstacle course, made mud pies in the mud kitchen, and generally had a muddy good time. Dr Bronner’s Magic Foam Experience made washing up fun. Over 2,000 participants enjoyed the event, and we are already planning for next year.

SDCaN was proud to partner with the City of San Diego Parks and Recreation, the County of San Diego Health and Human Services, and Live Well San Diego in putting on this muddy festival for San Diego’s children. Hope to see you next year!

Karin Robertson is the president of the Board of Directors of San Diego Children and Nature
RAISING CHILDREN WILD

Who did not love the book “Where the Wild Things Are” as a kid? The animal in all of us cries out to be free as the boy in this story. But really, how often do we give ourselves, or our children, this opportunity? Our children have even fewer opportunities to be “wild and free” than we did (“we” being the Gen Xers) as kids.

Sure, walking in the woods, noticing plants and animals is nice and all but what happens when you get down on all fours and BECOME that rabbit you spied in the bush? Or that praying mantis you almost stepped on? Or what if you flapped your wings and became that beautiful Monarch butterfly?? What does that do to your experience in nature? It enhances it a thousand times. Using ALL of your senses to immerse yourself in nature is a key component in absorbing the experience into your body.

The next time you are on a trail with your children (or students) and see an animal or insect, observe it for a minute or two and then mimic the motions. Ask them questions about how they think the animal smells or sees or hears.

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FAMILY ADVENTURES IN NATURE

We are 10 years into this endeavor, a family nature club we founded to connect local families to nature. Called Family Adventures in Nature, the club, with the help of many other leaders, has now organized nearly 1,500 outings and is approaching 2,500 members. Many a child has taken his or her first camping trip with us, and quite a few have climbed their first tree, gotten muddy for the first time, or taken their first real hike with us. It has been a life-changing experience for us, and helped improve our connection with nature, and with our community. For the most part it has brought us joy and inspiration, but it also has its challenges.

When we started this, in 2009, our boys were barely out of their toddler years; today, they are teenagers. Frankly, we now often experience reluctance from our boys (“Do we have to go? It’s all little kids.”) Most of the families do have children much younger (median age is about 5-7).

And, if we are completely honest, we too sometimes struggle to find the motivation.

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GARDENING WITH CLASS

The Master Gardeners of San Diego County has put on the “Gardening with Class Conference” every other year for over a decade and focuses on an audience of educators from preschool to high school levels. The conference is designed for teachers and school garden coordinators in SD County to share how to create, sustain, and use all kinds of school gardens, to encourage networking, and to provide resources to perpetuate the use and expansion of school gardens.

San Diego Children and Nature (SDCaN) has been part of the “Gardening With Class Conferences” as exhibitors and presenters since SDCaN was first established in 2009. SDCaN volunteers have presented on topics such as: There’s a Great Classroom-Just Outside the Door, Prescription: School Gardens, NGSS in Your School Garden.

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RAISING CHILDREN WILD CONT

Or you could even mimic motions of animals you don’t see and just really want to become. You can pretend you are a coyote stalking through the bushes or marking its territory. Why not pretend to be a Heron slowly moving through the water just waiting for its lunch to swim by and then STRIKE! Or if you want to be really silly, pretend you are a flying fish jumping out of the water taunting their predator. There are so many things you can be that create another level of awareness of the animals and even the plants that surround you. Plus, it has been scientifically proven that crawling can improve brain function and the ability to focus.

So, go out there and free the canine (or feline) or whatever within!! Add a few yips and howls to that as well. Mother Nature knows we could all use a good release these days!!

Judy Osman is a naturalist and SDCAN board member and the mother of a nature child herself.

NATURE PLAY KEEPS THE EYE DR. AWAY CONT

What can we do? Young children need at least 2 to 3 hours of outdoor time daily to have the best chance of normal vision. Parents can focus on increasing the time their children play outside, encouraging outdoor sports activities, and making outdoor and nature activities a family habit.

Communities need to work together to make sure every neighborhood has safe and appealing outdoor green spaces. Schools can consider outdoor teaching for part of the school day. Time spent outdoors in nature is also known to improve mood and behavior, decreases stress and ADD symptoms, and helps children to maintain a normal weight. Not only will our children see better, but they will also be happier, healthier, and smarter if we turn off the TV and computer and tell them “Go outside and play!”

“Cynde Lane is a board certified retired Kaiser Permanente pediatrician with 30+ years of experience in general pediatrics.”

CHECK OUT NATURE CONT

Check Out Nature is a strong and growing program due to the terrific collaboration between San Diego Children & Nature and our partners listed below. We are so grateful and appreciative of the work librarians, park and recreation workers, rangers, Live Well San Diego partners and our SDCaN volunteers do every day to make San Diego a better place to live.

We’re now in our second year, and thanks to the San Diego Foundation, we’re expanding.

San Diego Children & Nature is honored to have received an Opening the Outdoors grant for Check Out Nature.

Karin Robertson is President of the Board of Directors of San Diego Children and Nature.

Check Out Nature backpack and contents. Available now at your local public library.
But, each and every time, we are still glad we went once it’s done. We of course love being in the great outdoors, and the San Diego area has so much to offer. A lifetime is not enough to explore and enjoy it all. But it can be a bit stressful to be responsible for 5 to 50 other families on the trail, worrying about snakes, getting lost, running out of water, or dealing with campers that forgot important supplies, like tent poles. But, we always end up enjoying the time with the other families. On the way back home, there are two standard conversations we have. “Boys, are you glad you went?” The answer is always “Yes” and it is frequently “Yes!!!” And between us, we look at each other knowingly and say, “We did a good thing.” These are the things that have kept us motivated this past decade, as we’ve seen the club grow and change, and our boys grow and change. The joy of nature exploration never fades. We enjoy the time in nature, watching how others connect, and experiencing their joy vicariously. And we love the feeling we get when our altruistic bone is tickled, when we know we have made others happy, shared with our community, and just maybe helped cultivate the next generation of environmental champions.

Ron & Janice Swaisgood are the Founders of Family Adventures in Nature and past presidents of the SDCAN Board of Directors.

San Diego Mud Day.
San Diego Children and Nature works with families, nature providers, and community organizations to together connect children to everyday nature. We try to be the catalyst to move kids outside, whether it’s at home, at school, or in the community. Won’t you join us?

Spreading the word about the health benefits of being outdoors provides an additional nudge to take that step out the door. Audiences this year included medical students at UC San Diego, teachers taking a webinar, and readers of the Live Well San Diego blog.

And for pure fun we helped put on the second annual San Diego Mud Day.

Leta Bender is a volunteer with the Master Gardeners Program and Judie Lincer is a naturalist educator with the San Diego Audubon Society, an active member of the California Native Plant Society Garden Committee and a long-time SDCAN board member.

Karin Robertson is the President of the Board of San Diego Children and Nature.
We are on the web!
Www.sdchildrenandnature.org

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Mission: San Diego Children and Nature leads the regional movement to connect all children to nature by providing professional learning, and networking for educators, families, and communities.

San Diego Children and Nature (SDCaN) was incorporated as a 501(c)(3) organization in October 2015. SDCaN brings the national children and nature movement to San Diego.

Monthly meetings are held on the first Wednesday of the month from 5:00 to 6:30 P.M. at the San Diego Audubon Society’s offices at 4010 Morena Blvd. and are open to the public. Email first to verify location and time.

UPCOMING SDCaN & PARTNER EVENTS

December

February

March