

Health and Wellbeing Board, March 22nd 2018

Benefits of Parks, Green Space and Nature

1) **MPs' Select Committee 'Future of Public Parks' National Inquiry Report published in February 2017**

- Threat from reduced funding for parks and green spaces – calls for statutory service declined.
- Role of H&W Boards: “very clear guidance to Local Authorities that they should work collaboratively with Health and Wellbeing Boards, and other relevant bodies where appropriate, to prepare and publish joint parks and green space strategies..” No details on how funding and protection of UK’s public green space will be achieved.
- Local Authorities to “encourage and support...and work with” local Friends of Parks Forums in all LA areas.
- Parks Action Group and cross-governmental group set up and funded, (£500,000).
- HLF: no new rounds of Landscape Partnerships, Parks for People and Townscape Heritage. Impact on parks sector.

2) **Value of Parks, Green Space, Nature:**

Research disciplines linking health with the natural environment include:

- **Biophilia** - man’s innate connection with nature, (Wilson EO, 1984, Biophilia, Cambridge: Harvard University Press ISBN 0-674-07442-4; The Biophilia Hypothesis, Ed.by Kellert, S.R. and Wilson, E. O., 1993, Shearwater Books/Island Press, Washington, D.C.)
- **Attention Restoration Theory** – restorative effect of nature on perception and concentration, (Kaplan R and Kaplan S, 1995, The experience of nature: A psychological perspective)
- **Psycho-physiological Stress Recovery Theory** – the effect of nature on stress reduction, (Ulrich RS, 1983, Aesthetic and affective response to natural environment in Altman I and Wohlwill JF (Eds) Behaviour and the Natural Environment. New York:Plenum, pp85-125).
- **Ecopsychology**, the connection between the mind and nature, the psychological and the ecological. (Ecopsychology: restoring the earth, healing the mind, 1995, Theodore Roszak, Mary E. Gomes, Allen D. Kanner, Sierra Club Books).

3) **Potential Benefits from Green Space and Nature to many, (most), aspects of life:**

Physical health; Mental health; Cultural and spiritual health; Social health; Economic wellbeing; Safety and security.

Examples:

Viewing nature:

- Improves concentration, remedies mental fatigue, improves psychological health, (Kaplan, Ulrich, Rohde and Kendle).
- Reduces stress, and improves stress recovery, boosts immune system, (Ulrich, Kendle, Parsons).
- Reduces incidence of reported illness at work, improves job satisfaction, (Kaplan and Kaplan).

Being in nature

- Reduces severity of symptom of children with ADD and improves concentration, (Taylor et al, 2001)
- Improves residents’ satisfaction, (Kaplan 2001)
- Assists cognitive functioning in children, (Wells 2000)
- Helps to heal emotional and psychological conditions, substance abuse, and boosts self confidence.

4) **Reviews of research connecting health and nature:**

a **Australian studies from 2002, summarised in 2005, updated in 2008 and 2015**, examine in excess of 600 peer reviewed publications summarising the evidence base from research over more than three decades.

i) **Healthy nature healthy people: ‘contact with nature’ as an upstream health promotion intervention for populations, 2005.** Cecily Maller, Mardie Townsend, Anita Pryor*, Peter Brown and Lawrence St Leger, *Affiliated with the NiCHE, Research Team (Nature in Community, Health and Environment) of the School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University, Melbourne, Australia. Health Promotion International, Volume 21, Issue 1, 1 March 2006, Pages 45–54, <https://doi.org/10.1093/heapro/dai032>

“Health promotion agencies have already recognized the need for innovative, ‘upstream’ approaches to health and well-being, and are seeking potential alliances/opportunities to this end. Collaboration with the environmental management

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sector, and the use of public natural spaces in population health promotion is a clear potential strategy. As demonstrated through this review, the individual and community benefits arising from contact with nature include biological, mental, social, environmental and economic outcomes. Nature can be seen therefore as an under-utilized public resource in terms of human health and well-being, with the use of parks and natural areas offering a potential gold mine for population health promotion.

In this light, natural areas can be seen as one of our most vital health resources. In the context of the growing worldwide mental illness burden of disease, contact with nature may offer an affordable, accessible and equitable choice in tackling the imminent epidemic, within both preventative and restorative public health strategies”.

ii) **Healthy parks, healthy people: the health benefits of contact with nature in a park context. A review of relevant literature.** 2nd edition March 2008. School of Health and Social Development, Faculty of Health, Medicine, Nursing and Behavioural Sciences, Deakin University, Burwood, Melbourne. Approximately 335 research sources examined.

“The significance of the health and wellbeing benefits from interacting with nature, including in park settings, the implications for public health, and the need for collated up-to-date information on this topic...cannot be overestimated”. (Forward)

“...recent research shows that “green nature”, such as parks, can reduce crime, foster psychological wellbeing, reduce stress, boost immunity, enhance productivity and promote healing. In fact, the positive effects on human health, particularly in urban environments, cannot be over-stated. As a result, urban planning should ensure that the communities have adequate access to nature” (Executive Summary).

https://www.deakin.edu.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0016/310750/HPHP-2nd-Edition.pdf

Recommendations: “Develop ways of integrating parks and nature into public health

- Cooperation through a partnerships approach is required between government departments, park management agencies, health professionals, and researchers to successfully integrate parks and nature in public health;
- Health promotion agencies have already recognised the need for innovative, ‘upstream’ approaches to health and wellbeing, and are seeking potential alliances/opportunities to this end;
- It may be beneficial to initiate this process by examining how contact with nature via parks could be used as a preventive measure, potentially contributing to, for example, the Australian National Health Priority Areas of Cardiovascular Disease and Mental Health;
- The use of parks and nature to improve health and wellbeing is supported by the Jakarta Declaration (World Health Organization, 1997) and its predecessor, the Ottawa Charter for Health Promotion (World Health Organization, 1986) which calls for creating supportive environments (both natural and social) and a reorientation of health services to be shared among individuals, community groups, health professionals, health service institutions, and governments”.

This report was adopted in **Parks Victoria “Healthy Parks – Healthy People”** strategy, (Victoria, Australia: pop. 6 million).

“Healthy Parks Healthy People is the foundation of Parks Victoria’s approach to park management, recognising the critical connection between nature and the physical, mental, social and economic health and wellbeing benefits that parks provide individuals and communities”.

http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0008/693566/Guide-to-Healthy-Parks-Healthy-People.pdf

iii) **Healthy Parks Healthy People: the state of the evidence, 2015.** Prepared for Parks Victoria by Mardie Townsend, Claire Henderson-Wilson, Elyse Warner and Lauren Weiss, School of Health and Social Development, Deakin University. The report expands the evidence-base on the health benefits of parks drawing on 659 peer reviewed publications representing a thorough cross section of available publications relevant to ‘parks/nature’ and ‘health’.

http://parkweb.vic.gov.au/data/assets/pdf_file/0003/672582/HPHP_state-of-the-evidence_2015.pdf

b **Natural Thinking, Investigating the links between the Natural Environment, Biodiversity and Mental Health, 2007,** Dr William Bird. http://ww2.rspb.org.uk/Images/naturalthinking_tcm9-161856.pdf

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Dr William Bird, Strategic Health Advisor to Natural England and a GP in Reading, independently chairs the Outdoor Health Forum to promote the use of the outdoors for health. <http://www.intelligenthealth.co.uk/prevention-is-best-medicine/>

“The evidence is sufficient to suggest that a major trend may be at work. It is time for these findings to be acted upon by research funders, policy makers and public health professionals, and be more thoroughly researched, because the health benefits identified by existing work could have enormous implications – contact with nature may be an effective component of:

- Treatment for children with poor self-discipline, hyperactivity and Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).
- Coping with anxiety and stress, particularly for patients undergoing operations or cancer treatment.
- Strategies to reduce crime and aggression.
- Benefiting elderly care and treatment for dementia.
- Concentration levels in children and office workers.
- Stress.
- Healthy cognitive development of children.
- Improving hospital environments.
- Strengthened Communities.
- Increased sense of wellbeing and mental health.

Summary of recommendations:

- **Research** “relationship between health and the natural environment”.
- **Planning:** “Local authorities should work with public health to understand the value of green space as a resource to benefit the physical and mental health of a local population and surrounding community, and to maintain this healthy environment for future generations to enjoy and utilise for their well-being”.
- **Hospital Estates:** “quality measures that include views of trees or grass from a window or access to a garden”.
- **Education:** “government to encourage schools to reconnect children to the natural environment”.
- **Social Marketing:** “For DH, Natural England, Cabe Space, land owners, health and environmental NGOs and the voluntary sector to work together to understand and lift the barriers that prevent people from spending more time in the natural environment”.
- **NHS:** “include contact with nature and outdoor access in the tools it uses to treat and prevent health problems. The environment sector should facilitate this by providing access to nature in a way that supports health needs”.
- **Evaluation:** “Evaluation of projects that change the availability of accessible green space should consider this as a potential change to health resources”.

C **The Last Child in the Woods, Saving Our Children From Nature-Deficit Disorder**, (Richard Louv, 2008, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill), includes over 303 references to research, focusing on children, identifying “NDD: nature deficit disorder” and the transformative effect of nature on children. **The Nature Principle, Reconnecting with Life in a Virtual World**, (Richard Louv, 2011, Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill, 2011), highlighting many benefits to health and wellbeing from nature. Richard Louv is Chair of the CNN: Children’s Nature Network, working to reconnect children with nature. <http://richardlouv.com/> <https://www.childrenandnature.org/>

5) Challenge / opportunity:

- **Parks funding:** “As a non-statutory service, parks have been in the frontline of the cuts since 2010, with budgets falling on average by 40% – and in some cases by far more..... HLF has revealed that by 2020 parks will be in a worse state than they were in the mid-1990s when HLF began its funding”, The Parks Agency, Stroud, Gloucestershire. <https://www.theguardian.com/travel/2017/dec/25/in-austerity-britain-people-need-parks>
- **Cost / benefit analysis:** value of parks and green space as upstream intervention, (with potential, significant cost savings long term): parks, green space and natural areas should be seen as an important health resource, with both a preventative and restorative contribution to be utilised in public health strategies.