The Get Lost Initiative: Promoting Outdoor Play
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Abstract
This project, called the “Get Lost Initiative”, included reviewing literature on the benefits of outdoor play as well as identifying the performance skills addressed in pediatric therapy settings that correlate to child development. The information was used to educate parents, caregivers, and the community on the benefit of children spending time in natural environments to work on these same developmental skills addressed in a clinical therapy setting. The information was also used by other organizations within the community to further promote opportunities for outdoor play in schools. The project also included the creation of a resource guide with several simple outdoor activities to do in a variety of natural settings. The purpose of this guide is to encourage parents to create opportunities for children to “get lost” and participate in outdoor play. Information about the developmental skills addressed in each activity was also included in the guide. The guide could be viewed in the form a tangible hand out as well as used by other organizations within the community to address in clinical therapy settings. The information was used to educate parents, caregivers, and the community about therapeutic outdoor activities and the benefits of spending time in natural environments.

Goals & Outcomes
- Time log of hours spent observing population at Sprocket Therapy
- List of therapeutic activities modified to be completed outdoors
- Annotated bibliography providing evidence for therapeutic activities and benefits of outdoor play
- Reflection on search strategies used to review literature and find evidence for the benefits of outdoor play
- A resource guide including evidence-based outdoor activities that can be completed in a wide variety of natural environments.
- Additions to the Sprocket Therapy waiting room including a notebook with resources from local parks, a picture wall giving children an opportunity to post a picture of their outdoor adventures, and a large map with a list of local parks in the Nashville area.
- Attendance at The Nashville Outdoor Recreation Festival on April 2, 2016 in order to provide the resource guide to parents and other members of the community.

The Need for Nature
- Children are not engaging in enough sensory experiences, movement, and play to be prepared for the development of motor skills, language, and visual/auditory competence needed to excel in academics.1
- 60 percent of children entering schools have poor posture, 35 percent are overweight, 40 percent have poor circulation, 38 percent cannot adequately coordinate arms and legs, and more than 50 percent lack stamina for running and jumping.2
- Children spend less time outdoors and have less unstructured play than previous generations. This has led to an increase in childhood obesity, vitamin D deficiency, attention deficit disorder, developmental coordination disorder, depression, anxiety, mental illness, and an increase in near-sightedness.1,3
- 5%-15% of children in the general kindergarten population demonstrate difficulties with integrating and processing sensory information and have difficulty participating in activities of daily living.4

Benefits of Outdoor Play
- Playing outside gives children more opportunity to engage in gross motor movement as well as problem solving activities, organization, sequencing, and decision making.2
- Outdoor play helps with the development of skills such as social competence, problem solving, creative thinking, safety skills, and provides increased opportunity for movement and sensory rich experiences with dirt, water, sand, and mud.5
- Outdoor spaces provide children with unique experiences of risk taking, discovery, creativity, mastery and control of certain skills, strengthening sense of self, and inspiring emotion.6
- Children’s working memory, superior working memory, and attention increases after exposure to green space. 7
- Outdoor play is one of the greatest contexts for children to begin developing the ability to perceive and appraise risk while at the same time learning to avoid injuries and engage in a variety of gross motor movements.8
- After contact with nature children show improved cognition, decreased anxiety, increased coordination and balance, improved body awareness and reasoning skills, decreased aggressive behavior, and increased vision development.8,9
- 2-3 hours a day outside during daylight hours decreases likelihood of the development of vision deficits.9

Role of Occupational Therapy
- Occupational therapists’ knowledge of development, the occupation of play, and knowledge of activity puts them in a great position to address play in a unique setting like the outdoors.8
- Sensory integration is one of the most frequently requested interventions for occupational therapists. Activities rich in sensory stimuli will improve the brain and nervous system’s ability to process and integrate sensation increasing a child’s ability to participate in activities of daily living.3

Resource Guide
The resource guide created during this project provided parents and caregivers within the community literature on the benefits of outdoor play as well as a list of simple therapeutic outdoor activities with a description of the developmental skills each activity addressed.

Mission Statement
The mission of the Get Lost Initiative was to promote outdoor play by educating parents and the community about local outdoor resources, simple therapeutic applications, and benefits of outdoor play within various natural environments.

References

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