

# Kids to face, embrace elements all day long at outdoor preschool [CA-ON]<sup>[1]</sup>

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## AVAILABILITY

See text below.

## EXCERPTS

Children will play outside all day, rain or shine, in warm or wintry weather at Canada's first outdoor preschool.

The Carp Ridge Forest Pre-School promises its students few comforts like plastic toys, climate control, or electric power when it opens in about two months in Ottawa's rural western outskirts.

Instead, it boasts a garden, trails through the woods, and a tent-like shelter called a yurt, and aims to help children aged three to six connect with nature.

Marlene Power-Johnston, the school's coordinator said she was inspired to start the preschool while trying to find daycare for her 22-month-old daughter, Hazel Avery Johnston.

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Power-Johnston learned that outdoor preschools have existed for decades in Germany, Denmark, the U.K., and Ireland, and decided to try the idea in Canada.

"I really wanted my child to grow up with environmental principles ...to be able to connect to nature and to grow that connection and the love for nature and from that connection," she said.

On Wednesday, Power-Johnston offered a tour of the preschool site... which features a natural health clinic and a learning centre surrounded by 77 hectares of woodland.

Accompanied by Hazel, who was dressed in red rubber boots and a bright yellow raincoat, she led the way along a leafy path among the trees toward the school's yurt, a tent-like shelter in the woods that will be used for storytime or naps. En route, Hazel stopped several times to collect stones and acorns.

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As Power-Johnston was speaking to a CBC reporter, Hazel dodged back outside into the rain.

Her mother noted that most children, like Hazel, don't complain about the weather and European outdoor pre-schools actually have less access to shelter than hers will.

"Some of these societies ... are a lot less risk averse and also are a lot less afraid about being outdoors in nature," she said.

Contrary to many parents fears, Power-Johnston said forest pre-schools in Europe report fewer sick days a year than indoor pre-schools.

Dr. Rachel Colley, an expert in childhood obesity at the Children's Hospital of Eastern Ontario, said she thinks the forest pre-school is an important step at a time when preschoolers are spending more and more time watching TV.

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- reprinted from the CBC News

**Region:** Canada<sup>[2]</sup>

**Tags:** physical environment<sup>[3]</sup>

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