

Innovative outdoor program comes to Winnipeg daycare ^[1]

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EXCERPTS

A new program at a Winnipeg daycare is taking preschool aged kids into the great outdoors in hopes connecting with nature will foster a life-long appreciation for the environment.

Field and Forrest Nature School is a nature-based education program started in Europe that has been growing in popularity in North America for the last decade, and Discovery Children's Centre says it's the first in Manitoba to offer it.

"We've become a very indoor culture," said Discovery's executive director Ron Blatz. "The typical Canadian child is spending five per cent of their day in the daycare centre system outside, and 95 per cent inside.

"Other countries with similar climates are outside two-and-half times more than we are... we've got to do better."

The program is run Monday, Wednesday, and Fridays and sees the up to 18 four-year kids taking part spend two-and-half hours exploring the outdoors, twice a week at Discovery's 'Adventure Playground' on their property at 367 Hampton St. and once a week in the forest at Living Prairie Museum.

"It's not just about playing outdoors, children are learning about themselves and the world around them. It's a process that is freely chosen, personally directed, and intrinsically motivated," explained Kim Crockett, an early childhood educator at Discovery who runs the program after receiving training last year. "So if they happen to find a worm while they're digging we wait in the back and see what they're going to do next. If they're showing real keen interest then we'll ask them how the worm feels or where they think the worm's going or what they think worms eat."

The program runs from mid-September to the middle of June, and Crockett tells Metro the kids will stay outdoors up until temperatures drop to -25 C—wearing proper winter wear of course—and the daycare will have a fire pit set up for extra warmth.

The Field and Forrest Nature School is open to all four-year-olds, and kids don't have to be enrolled at the daycare to take part. Costs are also subsidized by the provincial government, meaning the maximum fee for parents is \$5 a day.

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Region: Manitoba ^[3]

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