



Nature Based Social Prescribing

South Georgian Bay Community Health Centre

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Session Objectives and Learning Outcomes

Our goals today are:

- To increase our knowledge of nature based social prescribing activities and their benefits
- To increase our engagement with nature to support overall health and wellbeing
- To increase our awareness of community resources that support healthy, active lifestyles



Did You Know?

- Canadians spend **90%** of their day indoors
- Canadians spend **69%** of their day sitting
- Only **9%** of Canadian children aged 5-17 only get 60 minutes of heart pumping activities a day

Source:

<https://www.ontarioparks.ca/hphp/engage>



What is Nature Based Social Prescribing?

- Nature based social prescribing is an approach that encourages people to spend time outdoors in meaningful and supportive ways as part of their care.
- It recognizes that health is shaped not only by clinical treatment, but also by lifestyle, environment, and social connection.



Building Connection Through Nature

- Beyond individual health benefits, nature-based programs foster a sense of belonging.
- They create opportunities for people to connect with one another, build relationships, and feel part of a community.
- At the same time, they help deepen our relationship with the natural environment, which can be both restorative and empowering.
- This combination of connection and care is essential for long term wellbeing.

The Green Prescription Pilot Project

- In 2022, the Green Prescription Pilot was launched at the South Georgian Bay Community Health Centre.
- The challenge we aimed to address was the growing number of individuals experiencing depression and anxiety, and the need for more holistic, accessible approaches to care and knowing the benefits that nature can have.
- Health practitioners were encouraged to prescribe outdoor activities to clients as part of their care plans, integrating nature directly into health and wellbeing strategies.

Action Taken

- The SGBCHC's pilot ran for eight months and focused on supporting clients in engaging with nature in ways that were realistic and meaningful for them.
- Clients were encouraged to spend time outdoors regularly, while healthcare providers and allied staff supported referrals to nature-based programs.
- Community organizations, South Georgian Bay municipalities, Ontario Parks, local health committees, and for-profit businesses became engaged in the project.



2/20+ Rule

2 hours a week, **20+** minutes at a time

After **20** minutes in nature, your cortisol (stress hormone) drops significantly



SGBCHC nature-based activities include:

- Forest Therapy Walks
- Mindful Meanders in Nature
- Stride and Socialize Walking
- Art in the Park
- Gardening 101
- Seed Sharing
- Community Clean Ups
- Guided Snowshoeing
- Yoga in the Park
- Labyrinth Walks
- Hospice Grief Therapy Walks
- Kindness Rock Painting & Planting
- Sip and Connect
- Diabetes Walk & Talks
- Dietitian Walk & Talks
- Mindfulness Walks
- Learn to Run Series
- Grow Your Own Herb Garden
- Pollinator Plants







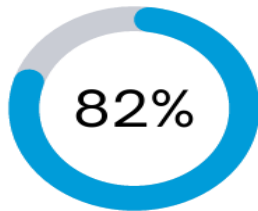
Nature's Impact on Health and Wellbeing

- Clients reported a wide range of benefits. These included reduced stress, improved sleep, decreased anxiety, and a greater sense of happiness and life satisfaction.
- Many experienced improved mood, increased energy, and a greater sense of life balance

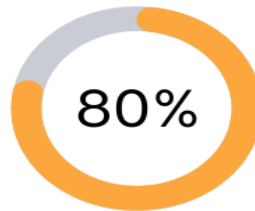


Key Results

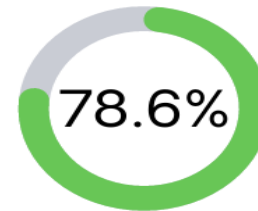
- Nearly **79 %** of clients reported feeling happier after taking part in nature based social prescribing activities
- **23 out of 28** clients said the pilot program helped them spend more time in nature
- **22 out of 25** clients began spending an additional 30 to 60 minutes outdoors
- **88%** of clients reported increased awareness of community resources, helping them continue these healthy behaviors beyond the pilot
- **100%** of the clients said they would recommend spending time outdoors to others



Spent more time outdoors



Increased Outdoor Activities



Felt Happier

BENEFITS OF NATURE PRESCRIBING



Improved Mental Health

- **Stress Reduction:** Spending time in nature lowers cortisol, heart rate, and blood pressure, reducing stress and anxiety.
- **Mood Boost:** Nature improves mood, reduces depression, and fosters happiness.
- **Cognitive Restoration:** Natural settings restore mental energy, improving focus and reducing fatigue.



Enhanced Physical Health

- **More Physical Activity:** Outdoor activities like walking and hiking integrate exercise naturally into daily life.
- **Better Sleep:** Exposure to natural light and outdoor activities improve sleep quality.
- **Boosted Immune System:** Nature enhances immune function, reducing inflammation and improving resistance to illness.



Strengthened Social Wellbeing

- **Social Interaction:** Nature-based activities create opportunities for connection, helping to support mental well-being.
- **Sense of Belonging:** Group nature activities builds community, trust, and emotional support.
- **Increased Confidence:** Participating in outdoor activities with others can build self-esteem and encourage personal growth.

Looking Ahead

- Based on these outcomes, there is strong potential to expand this model.
- Nature based social prescribing is a practical, accessible, and cost-effective way to support mental health, reduce isolation, and promote holistic wellbeing.
- As these programs continue to grow, they can play a key role in shaping more connected, healthier communities.
- Making Green Prescriptions available more broadly across communities and healthcare systems could significantly improve population health.



Call to Action

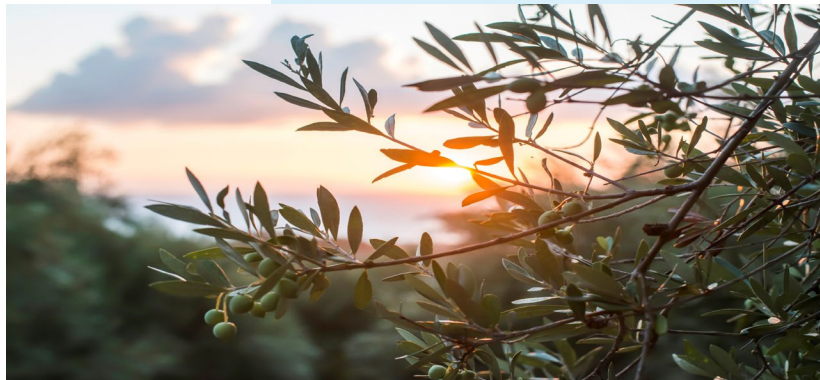
There are opportunities to take action at every level:

- **Individually**, by spending even **20 minutes** a day in nature
- **Locally**, by increasing access to nature-based programs
- **Systemically**, by integrating Green Prescriptions into healthcare practice



Resources

- **BC PaRx:**
<https://www.parkprescriptions.ca/en/prescribers>
- **Park People Canada:**
<https://parkpeople.ca/green-social-prescribing-community-centered-path-to-health-and-belonging/>
- **Healthy Parks Healthy People Ontario Parks:**
<https://www.ontarioparks.ca/hphp>



Closing

Nature is a powerful and accessible tool for improving health and wellbeing.

By integrating nature into care through social prescribing, we can support not just individuals, but entire communities in becoming happier, healthier more connected.

