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## ***LEAVE NO CHILD INSIDE: THE FACTS***

### **Why are kids indoors?**

A generation of children has been left inside. Fears about safety, a dearth of organized activities and sprawl that fails to incorporate sidewalks, bike paths and nearby play areas are among the barriers to getting outside, while electronic media are providing kids with alternatives to outdoor activities.<sup>i,ii,iii</sup>

- In the early 1980s, kids spent about 100 minutes/week engaged in some type of outdoor activity. Today, that number has been halved to just 50 minutes/week.<sup>iv</sup>
- A survey of mothers reveals that a lack of adult supervision, crime and safety are factors preventing their children from playing outside, but the greatest barriers are TV and computers.<sup>v</sup>
- Today's youth spend nearly 6.5 hours/day with electronic media up from about 4 hours/day in 1999.<sup>vi</sup>

### **Consequences of leaving our kids inside**

#### *Behavioral and Academic Performance*

- Research has shown too much screen time may lead to poor school performance<sup>vii</sup> and increases in aggressive, violent, and high-risk behaviors.<sup>viii</sup> The more time a teenager spends playing violent video games, the more likely s/he is to get into fights, argue with teachers, and underachieve in school.<sup>ix</sup>
- Research has linked early television exposure with subsequent attention deficit disorders,<sup>x</sup> which may cause significant impairment of social and academic performance.<sup>xi</sup> Approximately 7.8% of 4 to 17 year olds have been diagnosed with attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD).<sup>xii</sup>

#### *Health and Wellbeing*

- Children watching more than 5 hours/day of TV are nearly 5 times more likely to become overweight or obese than their peers who watch less than 2 hours/day of TV.<sup>xiii</sup> Children are more likely to eat when watching TV than when engaged in other activities.<sup>xiv</sup>
- The obesity rate among youth has risen from 5.7% in the 1970s to 18% today.<sup>xv</sup> Nearly 1/3 of American children are overweight and risk developing diabetes and other chronic illnesses. For the first time in history, a generation of youth may have a shorter life expectancy than its parents.<sup>xvi</sup>
- Overweight children are likely to face discrimination from peers which can impede learning and are often too embarrassed to participate in competitive physical activities.<sup>xvii</sup>

### **Promising research: nature heals**

- A recent study commissioned by the California State Legislature found that at-risk children who participated in outdoor education programs saw gains in self-esteem, conflict resolution and problem solving skills, and improved their science test scores by 27%.<sup>xviii</sup>
- An in-depth report called "Closing the Achievement Gap," noted benefits gained from environment-based education include: 1) academic improvements in reading, writing, math, science and social studies; 2) reductions in classroom disciplinary problems; 3) greater engagement and enthusiasm for learning; and 4) a notable sense of pride and ownership in accomplishments.<sup>xix</sup>
- "Green outdoor activities" have been found to significantly reduced the symptoms of ADHD in children and adolescents,<sup>xx</sup> and promote creative and egalitarian play.<sup>xxi</sup>
- Kids who play outside and limit their screen time are more physically fit than their sedentary peers.<sup>xxii</sup>

Today's youth suffer from academic, behavioral and health problems due in part to their sedentary lifestyles. Outdoor environmental education programming may offer one solution for improving academic and social performance and could start children on the road to becoming more healthy and active adults.

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