

**Our Children, Our Families Council**  
**Summary of San Francisco Children and Nature Forum**  
April 10, 2015

**Goals of the Effort**

The SFCaN mission is to inspire all sectors of San Francisco society to nurture, empower, and engage youth in relationship with local nature.

The goals of the San Francisco Children and Nature Forum are to:

1. Increase public awareness of the value of nature and outdoor experiences in this city
2. Enhance the ability of parents and program providers to connect children to nearby nature
3. Drive changes in policies, attitudes, skills and behaviors that support the experience of nature in urban childhoods in San Francisco
4. Promote learning, networking and sharing of best practices in the community of agencies and organizations serving children in San Francisco
5. Build a sustainable organization to support our mission and fulfill our vision
6. Advocate for maintenance of local wilderness and provide opportunities for children to access them

The forum is particularly focused on equity, working toward all children in San Francisco, regardless of their neighborhood, having access to the outdoors.

Two initiatives toward these goals were settled on very early on:

- 1) An initiative to explore the liability or perception of liability of outdoor play, and
- 2) An initiative to create and implement a San Francisco Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights.

The forum further hopes to participate in funded collaborative projects that engage stakeholders in the group's efforts, and the forum is also considering expanding its work to create an Outdoor Bill of Rights for the city's youth.

**Focal Population of the Effort**

The target population for the forum is currently all children in San Francisco from early childhood through the 8th grade.

**Impact**

The Children and Nature Forum drafted the San Francisco Children's Outdoor Bill of Rights. The forum then successfully lobbied the full Board of Supervisors to sign a resolution approving the Bill of Rights and recognizing the importance of nature to children's development.

Also, the school district is using the Bill of Rights as their organizing framework for a week-long "get outside week" related to Earth Day. The effort is being promoted throughout the school district and is organized around the 10 experiences outlined in the Bill of Rights.

The forum's greatest strength is that its interdisciplinary focus on health, education and child development is implemented by a broad group of stakeholders.

**Challenges**

The group's biggest challenge is a lack of funding and dedicated staff.

**Origins of the Effort**

The forum, envisioned by Damien Raffa and a preschool teacher in San Francisco, began on Earth Day in 2010. The forum was inspired by the national, now international, conversation about the relationship between children and nature. The founders wanted to initiate an interdisciplinary conversation around urban childhood in San Francisco and

our children’s outdoor experience. The forum creates a space for people who have an interest in the outdoor experience of kids to come together, network, and collaborate on goals in that arena.

### **Leading the Effort**

The forum is led by Damien Raffa and three other steering committee members: Lara Hitchcock (of the YMCA of SF), Zoe Burton (head of the Recreation and Parks Department’s youth stewardship), and Charlotte Hill (director of “Kids in Parks”). The leadership is not funded—participation is voluntary.

### **Members of the Effort**

The membership of the forum is very fluid as all interested parties are invited to participate in the group’s meetings. Meetings are usually attended by 25-50 individuals. Various groups that have endorsed the forum’s work include:

- Presidio Trust
- National Park Service
- Golden Gate National Parks Conservancy
- SF Recreation & Parks
- The YMCA of SF
- SFUSD
- Kids in parks
- The Department of Children Youth & Their Families
- SF ZOO
- SF Youth Commission
- Education Outside
- SF Environment

### **Structure of the Effort**

The forum has hosted meetings on an irregular basis over five years, inviting anybody who has an interest in kids’ experience in SF with nature. The forum has included a broad range of interested parties including pediatricians, landscape architects, park staff, urban agriculture staff, formal and informal educators, urban planners, and families and parents.

### **Related Documents**

More information can be found at [www.sfcan.org](http://www.sfcan.org).