

## News Release

# U of M Extension Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership (NW RSDP) Joins 6 Organizations to Connect Children and Nature in Polk, Norman, and Mahnomen Counties

*By Itollefs on Wednesday, February 19, 2014* U of M Extension Northwest Regional Sustainable Development Partnership (NW RSDP) joins 6 organizations to bring natural play spaces to connect children and nature in Polk, Norman, and Mahnomen Counties. Even a generation ago, children spent more time outside because it was the normal thing to do. We can all remember the days when we would listen to the birds sing, play in the rain, and use our imagination to contrive games. These experiences are important as they provide a connection to nature and a way to use the imagination. NW RSDP was recently selected to receive \$25,000 in Community Engagement Innovation funding from the Center for Prevention (the Center) at Blue Cross and Blue Shield of Minnesota. This support will be used to connect children and nature in Northwest Minnesota.

The grant will provide funding for a project called Tree Cookies and Mud Pies: A Recipe for Community Health. Engagement activities will focus on four communities: Fosston, Crookston, Ada, and Mahnomen. This project engages in the development and use of natural play spaces in support of health equity and active living strategies. The NW Regional Partnership and its partners in public health, early childhood education, youth development, parks and rec, and resource management, will use storytelling, activity mapping and design workshops to enable communities to create and utilize natural play spaces.

NW RSDP has leveraged partners from various disciplines and agencies. A new partner this year is Alysa Zimmerle, serving with Conservation Corps MN & IA as the Community Mapping and Outreach Specialist with Project Get Outdoors (Project GO), an organization that works to reintroduce kids to their natural environments. Collaboration with Statewide Health Improvement Program (SHIP) staff in the region continues with Kristen Fagerlund, Tammy Carlsrud, and Kelsey Borgen representing Polk, Norman-Mahnomen counties. SHIP works to help Minnesotans live longer, healthier lives by working with communities to gain better access to healthy foods and implement a healthier way of life.

Sarah Reese, director of Polk County Public Health works to connect resources to community members and university partners interested in connecting children to nature. Eric Castle, assistant professor at the U of M Crookston will work to facilitate the planning, design, and implementation of the natural play spaces.

"This project has been a great way to connect university resources to the community. Students in my classes and student researchers have been able to apply what they are learning in real world settings, said Castle."

To learn more about the work of the Northwest Regional Partnership go to <http://blog.lib.umn.edu/rsdp/northwest>. For more information on Project GO initiatives visit [www.facebook.com/pages/Project-Get-Outdoors-Inc/137770441949](http://www.facebook.com/pages/Project-Get-Outdoors-Inc/137770441949).

The Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (RSDPs) give communities in Greater Minnesota access to the University of Minnesota in order to help solve problems and take advantage of new opportunities. As a part of University of Minnesota Extension, NW RSDP brings together local talent and resources with University of Minnesota knowledge and seed funding to drive sustainability in four areas: agriculture and food systems, tourism and resilient communities, natural resources, and clean energy.

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