

FAMILY FORUM

Family Forum is the newsletter of the Minnesota Council on Family Relations, a State Affiliate of the National Council on Family Relations Spring 2008

SAVE THE DATE – MCFR FALL CONFERENCE – THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4!

Rose Allen and Minnell Tralle, Conference Co-chairs

Put **THURSDAY, December 4, 2008** on your calendar. The MCFR Fall Conference will be held at the Continuing Education and Conference Center on the St. Paul Campus.

OUR THEME IS *CONTEMPORARY FAMILIES – FORMATION, FUNCTION AND THE FUTURE*

We are pleased to announce that **Stephanie Coontz** will be the keynote speaker. She will guide us in understanding contemporary families and the historical and social origins of family issues. She will look at family formation, the issues today's parents face today in raising their children, and how we have re-defined the path to adulthood.

Stephanie Coontz teaches history and family studies at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, Washington, and is Director of Research and Public Education for the Council on Contemporary Families, which she chaired from 2001-04.

She is the author of *Marriage, A History: From Obedience to Intimacy, or How Love Conquered Marriage* (Viking Press, 2005), *The Way We Never Were: American Families and the Nostalgia Trap* (1992 and 2000, Basic Books), *The Way We Really Are: Coming to Terms with America's Changing Families* (Basic Books, 1997), and *The Social Origins of Private Life: A History of American Families*. She also edited *American Families: A Multicultural Reader* (Routledge, 1999).

For more information about Stephanie Coontz go to: <http://www.stephaniecoontz.com/>

NATURE, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES: A NECESSARY CONNECTION

Carolyn Carr Latady, MCFR Board Member

Over 200 participants packed the MacMillian Auditorium at the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum on April 4th to attend The Nature, Children and Families: A Necessary Connection Professional Research and Practice Symposium. This conference was the result of a rich collaboration between the Minnesota Council on Family Relations (MCFR) and the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum.

The diversity of perspectives represented by conference participants was a strength that was noted throughout the day – with attendees from many different disciplines, including parent educators, Park and Recreation programs, E-12 educators, faith communities, environmental educators, naturalists, ECFE administrators, graduate students, social service professionals, medical professionals as well as a Feng Shui consultant and a local media celebrity.

The day started with a welcome by Mary Vidas, Public Policy Programs, Minnesota Landscape Arboretum and Betty Cooke, President of the Minnesota Council on Family Relations.

The three morning sessions that followed provided participants with a context for how the issues around children and nature connect with healthy child development; cutting edge research on the impact of green space on children's development

as well as current practice and initiatives that are responding to what we are learning about the necessary connection between nature, children and families.

HEALING THE BROKEN BOND BETWEEN CHILDREN AND NATURE

Martha Farrell Erickson, Ph.D., University of Minnesota, National Board Member, Children and Nature Network; Director, Co-Chair of the President's Academic Initiative on Children Youth and Families

"Why would I go outside? There aren't any outlets." Child being interviewed about what stops children from playing outside.

Marti Erickson provided a broad historical context for how the current issues around children and nature connect with the research she and her colleagues have been studying since the 1970's focused on:

- What does it take to raise a child to become a caring, responsible, respectful adult - especially for a child in high-risk circumstances?
- What are the protective factors that will enable that child to thrive and succeed?
- What is the tipping point between risk factors and protective factors that determines a child's success and healthy development?

This research has identified the importance of the three "C's"

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President's Letter

Betty Cooke, PhD, CFLE
MCFR 2007 President

GREETINGS MCFR MEMBERS,

Our Minnesota Council on Family Relations has long been noted for the outstanding conferences we sponsor every year – our annual conference in late fall and a spring conference usually held in early April. This strong tradition continues with the spring conference just held April 4, 2008, the anticipated fall conference coming on THURSDAY, December 4, 2008 and the spring 2009 conference that is already in the planning stages.

Many of you attended the exceptionally fine conference on April 4th on *Nature, Children and Families: A Necessary Connection* co-sponsored with the Minnesota Landscape Arboretum and held there. Our morning speakers, Marti Erickson, Andrea Faber Taylor, and Nancy Rosenow, provided a wealth of information for us to contemplate, and the afternoon workshops complemented their presentations. Be sure to read all the details in the excellent conference overview prepared by Board Member Carolyn Carr Latady that is posted on our website at www.mcfr.net and summarized in this newsletter. Thanks to our MCFR conference chair, Tammy Dunrud, and our partner chair from the Arboretum, Mary Vida, and all involved with this special event.

Save the date of THURSDAY, December 4, 2008, for our annual fall conference focusing on the **complexity of contemporary family formation**. Our keynote speaker is the nationally known expert, **Stephanie Coontz**, who has written many books including *Marriage, A History* and *The Way We Never Were*. Thanks to Minnell Tralle and Rose Allen who are co-chairing the conference committee and leading this effort.

Board Member Sara Lassig is chairing the 2009 spring conference likely to be held in early April 2009. Plans are underway on a topic focusing on the **interface of families and health**. Please let Sara know if you are interested in serving on this conference committee.

We are excited by the increasing numbers of individuals who are attending our conferences, and we want to make sure that all who want to attend can afford to. Consequently, in recent months we have had a committee working together to better define the scholarship application process for both students and others with financial need. Through use of an *Application Form for MCFR Conference Registration Scholarship*, we will be publicizing the availability of scholarships along with conference publicity in the months ahead.

In addition, we have also created a **Student Scholarship Fund** to which MCFR members can donate at any time. The *Student Scholarship Contribution Form* is available on the MCFR website at www.mcfr.net/student_scholarship_contributions.doc. All proceeds from the annual fall conference **Silent Auction** also go to this fund.

Other important MCFR developments described in articles in this newsletter include:

- MCFR new and renewal membership and conference registration available online through Eventville
- New MCFR logo and MCFR brochure being developed
- MCFR website being updated
- Student mentorship opportunities soon available

This is an exciting time to be an MCFR member. Please feel free to contact me at any time at 612.625.7792 or cooke047@umn.edu with your ideas, challenges, and desire to get involved. Have a great summer!

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AND THE FUTURE

THE MENTORSHIP PROGRAM – BEGINNING THIS FALL!

Heather Dubbeldee, Section Chair
Kristin Dillon, MCFR Treasurer

One of the primary goals of the Student Section has been implementing a mentorship program for its members. Now that we are fully up and running, we are ready to build this exciting opportunity for students and professionals. The education students receive often focuses more on content and provides minimal opportunity to experience potential professional roles of interest. Additionally, the dynamic of some academic advising relationships prohibits students from asking “real” questions about different paths and careers, especially when the interest does not fit with the advisor’s career plan for the student. A mentor

relationship would connect students and professionals looking to enter the family field with professionals currently working in the family field. After surveying current Student Section members and MCFR board members, we know that both students and professionals want and are willing to commit to varying levels of participation. Currently, some of the options include:

- One time conversation
- Multiple conversations
- Job shadow
- Volunteer internship

In order to begin this process, an e-mail

will be distributed to the MCFR listserv late summer or early fall requesting you to complete a simple online survey. This survey will allow MCFR to (a) learn more about its professional members and students, (b) gauge level of interest in the mentorship program, and (c) create the database of career roles and student interest in order to begin matching students with professionals. We are very fortunate to have such a wealth of incredible professionals and dedicated students in our membership and we are very excited to help build connections between these groups.

MCFR MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE UPDATE

Tammy Dunrud, Membership Chair

We are pleased to announce that MCFR now has online membership registration and dues renewal as a benefit to our members. This means that you can go to the MCFR website to renew your yearly membership with a click of a few buttons or register as a new member. When complete, you print a receipt and you’re done until next year. A yearly email reminder will pop up when your membership is due. No more trying to remember when you have to renew again!

The system has other benefits too such

as online conference registration and the ability to print your own conference receipts. It will also allow Linda Vukelich, the MCFR administrative coordinator to track conference statistics and budget for reporting purposes. Check out this new, exciting feature by going to www.mcf.net. Simply click on the membership renewal link and fill in the blanks. The system will retain your information for the next time and all you will have to do is update it.

We are all moving forward with this

new technology enhancement together. Since this is a member benefit, please let us know what you think of it by calling 651-407-0950.

COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE REPORT

Beth Yokom, Communications Chair

Exciting new things are happening with MCFR Communications! We have hired a graphic designer who is working with us to create a new look for MCFR, including a new logo, brochure, and tri-fold conference display board. Also in the works is a new website template. When the website template is completed, Pa Nhia Yang, a student at UMN and a Member-at-Large MCFR Board member, will take over maintenance of the site. Many thanks to MCFR President-Elect Rose Allen, who has expertly maintained the MCFR website since its inception. Watch for the new MCFR logo and website this fall, 2008!

SPRING 2009 CONFERENCE:

FAMILIES, HEALTH, & MENTAL HEALTH

Save the Date: Friday April 3, 2009. Conference topics will include families & autism, health policy and health insurance, post-partum depression and implications for families, children’s mental health, the role of teachers and family professionals in working with children with chronic and terminal illnesses, and much more. Please contact Sara Lassig at Lass0044@umn.edu if you are interested in being on the conference planning committee.

Stay up-to-date at [WWW.MCFR.NET!](http://WWW.MCFR.NET)

SAYING GOODBYE DURING A TERMINAL ILLNESS

Sara L. Lassig, MSW, PhD

Beginning in our early childhood years, most of us were taught to wave “goodbye” when parting company with others. But what if we knew we wouldn’t be returning? Would our goodbye be the same? How would we say goodbye? What if we didn’t have time to say goodbye?

These were some of the questions that eventually led to my

doctoral dissertation exploring the saying goodbye process during

a terminal illness, for those who identified with a saying goodbye process. I had long been interested in end-of-life issues and the area of grief and loss, and always wondered exactly what it meant for the many families who were facing a terminal illness.

Certainly, it is not only the dying individuals who are affected by these impending death situations and terminal illnesses, but also the dying person’s family members and socially important others. Grief and loss are embedded in relational and social contexts with the family being important in both of these. In situations where both the terminally ill individual and one or more family members or close friends know of the impending death, a unique circumstance is created.

Previously, researchers found that the act of saying goodbye during an impending death situation had a significant influence on bereaved persons’ future outlook and post-death adjustment. However, information concerning exactly **what** the “saying goodbye” processes are or the meaning individuals ascribe to saying goodbye, remained unclear. When a terminally ill person is asked about the saying goodbye process, he or she may tell a story or give specific examples of an interaction. Although this specific instance or story could appear arbitrary, it is likely selected because it holds meaning for that individual within the time and place surrounding the impending death situation.

Many family professionals will, at some point in their careers, work with individuals and families facing an impending death situation. Although there is no wrong or right way to interact with families facing such a situation, it is important that professionals have an awareness of the meaning and importance that some individuals and families place on the intentional process of saying goodbye. Given that the number of individuals living with a terminal illness is increasing every year, it is important to bring end-of-life issues to the forefront of family science and other related fields. Far-reaching ramifications, including significant grief, fear, worry, depression, and ambiguity may be involved when terminally ill individuals and their family members find themselves in situations where an impending

death is likely.

The purpose of my study was to explore the meaning and processes of “saying goodbye” for individuals who lost a family member to a terminal illness. The guiding questions for this research study were: How do family members say goodbye when a family member has a terminal illness and what is the meaning of that saying goodbye process? This qualitative study included interviews with 28 individuals ranging in age from 26-92 years and consisting of 22 females and 6 males. All participants had lost an immediate family member to a terminal illness, including parents, adult children, siblings, and spouses and partners.

In various ways, all but one of the 28 participants talked about “saying goodbye” to their loved one before they died. Many of the participants also talked about how their loved one said goodbye to them and other family members, or the longing for their loved one to have said goodbye. The articulated meanings associated with the participants’ saying goodbye processes can be best conveyed in the two broad categories of 1) relational and spatial-based meanings and 2) final acts of connectedness.

For many of the participants, the process of saying goodbye

Saying goodbye is embedded and entangled in all of the other issues involved with terminal illness and death.

before an impending death held several meanings of a relational and spatial nature. In assorted ways, participants talked about the desire to be as close to and as fully present in the saying goodbye process as possible. One way this was accomplished was by reducing the physical distance between themselves and the dying person. Second, a part of saying goodbye meant taking extreme measures to be near the dying person and up close to the situation. Third, a few participants talked about saying goodbye in the context of seeing each other again. Finally, participants described saying goodbye as a process meant for two or more persons. That being said, several participants talked about what it was like to say goodbye when the loved one could not or would not partake in this process. The following quotes offer examples of this relational and spatial meaning.

And I just crawled into bed with her and held her, down to her last breath. And I told her how much I loved her, how much I would miss her, but that we would be together again.

I remember saying that I wanted to kiss her. And she was so hooked up to stuff and I am so short. I was too short to lean over the bed to kiss her. One of the people there, who was one of her friends, said "Well tell them you want to kiss her. You know, do what you want." I didn't know I could do that, I thought I had to leave it that way. And, so they lowered the sides and all of that. . . .so I could kiss her and hold her hand. . .and that was important to me.

The last three years we said goodbyes...and I think in order to have a successful goodbye, it needs to be a two-way street. Meaning, each of us has to say goodbye to each other. If only one person says goodbye, there's going to be a bigger void to fill and a deeper hole in your goodbye to each other. I was able to – to move on with my life.

And I had said good-bye, in so many ways. I held him, or held his hands rather, and I touched his forehead, and rubbed his hands. But, he was gone, I mean, alive, but just gone. He never really told me goodbye, and I guess he couldn't. That's one regret, maybe if we had started saying goodbye earlier....

A majority of the participants, when asked about a saying goodbye process, talked about certain acts or actions that were completed or attempted, and were based in connectedness to a loved one. These acts and actions included taking trips, sharing last words, giving advice, writing last letters, and planning for death ceremonies.

Not that how you look on the outside is important, but she had a great smile and just, and this would've been the last days. I got her this sundress, put her in a wheelchair. She has this big sun hat, you know. Wheeled her out on the steps out here, the wooden steps. Did her nails, her toes, and put her hat on. And Sadie Jo (dog) and I took her for a walk.

And I cried and said I didn't know what would happen in the future, and I said I loved him and goodbye. And he was so calm, and he said to me, "I will be with you, I will watch over you, and you will be okay." It was like he needed me to hear those words.

This research has furthered the exploration of a term that is mentioned, though not much explored, in the grief literature. Saying goodbye meant to try mightily to get in the circle with the dying person, to get a front row seat. Surviving family members shared personal accounts that included climbing into bed

with his or her dying loved one, just to be as close as possible for the remaining minutes or days of life. Other participants obtained this physical closeness by engaging in purposeful, tender moments of touching and the sharing of kisses or hugs. In order to achieve the desired physical proximity to say goodbye, some participants had to take extreme measures, such as staying awake all night long to be near the dying person or asking medical providers to remove physical barriers (tubes, bed railings) so that the dying person was more reachable. These accounts display the importance of physical closeness, as one significant meaning associated with saying goodbye.

Saying goodbye also meant that there was little time, but much to do. Many participants talked about specific acts, actions, or words that they or dying family members wanted to share together before the death. Surviving widows shared stories of their spouses' last words of encouragement or love, family members shared accounts of their deceased loved ones' last trips or excursions, and several other participants shared written words in cards or letters that were left by their deceased loved one. For most of the participants in this study, a way of saying goodbye was sharing these final acts of connectedness, or helping their loved one to share any final messages or engage in final trips, excursions, or other acts.

Saying goodbye is embedded and entangled in all of the other issues involved with terminal illness and death. To say the meaning of saying goodbye can be extracted from that web would be a stretch. It is important for family professionals to be aware of the desire to say goodbye that some individuals and family members may have when a family member is facing a terminal illness. A grief therapist, family professional, or social worker can offer facilitation or navigation assistance with saying goodbye throughout these various time points and situations. For individuals and families who are currently dealing with a dying family member, stories of how other families have found ways to create meaningful times and spaces in which to say goodbye might be shared. When individuals or families present following the death of a loved one are expressing regret or sadness at not having been able to or who have not chosen to say goodbye, there are still options. Family professionals can provide gentle guidance in encouraging such an individual to write a letter to their terminally ill family member, or to plan a specific time when they will carefully spend a few minutes saying things that are very important to them. In a society that so often encourages us not to talk about death or dying, it is imperative that family professionals allow and encourage such dialogue to occur. The individuals who shared with me their intimate and personal stories of saying goodbye to a loved one have allowed others to better understand the process and meaning of saying goodbye during a terminal illness.

Family professionals can provide gentle guidance...

STANDARDIZED CHILDHOOD

Review by Ada Alden. Ada is a past president of MCFR and present chair of MNAFEE.

Bruce Fuller. *Standardized Childhood: The Political and Cultural Struggle Over Early Education*, Stanford, California: Stanford University Press. 2007

Recently, young children, their care and education have become a hot topic and some say cutting edge! Many of my MCFR colleagues have been sawing that edge for years. Commentary too often limited to childcare professionals and eager toy marketing specialists has become a chorus of concerned voices that vary from economists, sociologists, and researchers to politicians and grandparents. Eager activists are trying to bring order to childhood. I have heard interesting arguments about the raggedy non-system, lack of system or hodge-podge system presently in place. Dr. Bruce Fuller, a sociology professor from Berkeley, has meticulously documented the various perspectives providing useful insights shaping the debate.

Many are sure early childhood education should be hooked to K-12 systems. Others argue that public education is itself so confounded such a connection would be risky. The mixed market of preschool organizations is not only insufficient but unfair calls out another. Governance should be at the local level. Federal support of Head Start has proven successful. Researchers disagree about short- and long-term impact of programming format, socioeconomic influences and curriculum design. Whether teachers should be licensed or not raises many a hackle. Few agree on how to raise the capacity of families to meet the needs of their children.

I am reminded of the story about five blind men, who after feeling an elephant, were asked to describe the animal. One declared the elephant is “like a wall” after gingerly touching its side. “I believe the elephant is wiggly like a snake” said one, hanging on to the tail. An elephant feels “like the trunk of a tree” said another, clutching the leg. Feeling the ear, one fellow found the others quite silly, as he knew an elephant was like “the sail on a ship”. It waved and furled. Holding on to an elephant is too difficult said another. It waves and swings “like a thick rope”. All of course were wrong. All of course were correct.

“The early education field has become the stage upon which the political future of the modern state—an agenda set by well-meaning elites—confronts the moral tenets and forms of parenting that may characterize particular communities,” claims Fuller. *Standardized Childhood* is an attempt to describe the early childhood elephant. It is a provocative critique and a must for anyone who dares speak for the littlest.

MCFR HISTORY

Sue Meyers, MCFR Historian

It is easy to reflect on changes at spring-time – and when the school year concludes. Given the many activities of MCFR and its members in the past few months, I am proud to have observed collaborations across various disciplines and intergenerational efforts on behalf of families. As long as we connect the family field with the many places that we find families active in life, our background will help others negotiate the changes.

This spring I had the pleasure of observing Sara Lassig share the findings of her doctoral research and dissertation. This presentation on “The Long Goodbye” documented the ways that loved ones said goodbye at the end of a terminal illness. The topic might have appeared to be a downer, but her presentation indicated the strength and capacity of family members to negotiate those difficult final days and gain memories to help in the grief transition.

This presentation was a few days after a presentation that Sara Lassig and Jan

McCulloch gave to the Minnesota Gerontological Society (MGS) annual meeting on “Rural Issues in Caregiving.” The presentation was valued by those in attendance because of its emphasis and examples from rural Minnesota.

And another family professional, Lola Danielson Amendt, was conference chair for the entire MGS conference, and endeavored to make sure that families across the life cycle were represented in the program. She excelled at the integration of family in the aging / gerontology field. Lola was with the University of Minnesota Extension – working in Scott County.

Throughout the professional life of our colleagues, they continue to grow and develop. Ted Bowman, has recently authored a book of poems and essays published by the Moravian Church publication offices. Any of us who have appreciated Ted’s gift with language can appreciate this new book.

Jean Illsley Clarke continues to provide

exceptional teaching to family colleagues. Workshops have taught many on skills to link to families.

Ada Alden is doing exceptional work as program chair for NCFR’s Association of Councils. Ada’s integration of ideas into the NCFR organization continues to be exciting.

Many others continue to use their expertise by mentoring others throughout their lives and by reminding others on the value of families. I believe we all can remain proud of this vital group of family professionals who continue to “think families” across the life cycle, intergenerationally, and through collaborative endeavors in non-family subjects (e.g. the spring program at the Landscape Arboretum).

Keep blooming where you are planted!

NEWS FROM THE NATIONAL COUNCIL ON FAMILY RELATIONS

Marcie Brooke, CFLE
Past President, MCFR and NCFR Association of Councils

The Association of Councils is made up of the Presidents and Representatives from state and regional councils of the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR). Each year at the National Conference of NCFR the Association of Councils (AOC) hosts a Leadership Training Workshop. This year the Program Chair for this event is our own Minnesotan, Dr. Ada Alden.

Ada has been very instrumental in meeting with groups and committees on what it means to be a member of NCFR and what role does NCFR play in helping state and regional councils to grow.

As many of you may know, under the leadership of the new NCFR Executive Director, Diane Cushman, NCFR is working closely with Dwight Jewson, a well know marketing executive in the field of "branding". Dwight, the son of the late Ruth Jewson, is giving of his time and talent to help NCFR grow in stature and membership.

Ada as the Program Chair for the AOC Leadership Training Workshop and elected member of the AOC executive board is asking and seeking answers to questions many of us may have taken for

granted or never really explored. These questions directly impact and involve the new "branding" of NCFR. When the AOC presidents and representatives meet in November in Little Rock, Arkansas they will be given an opportunity to learn about the structure of NCFR. The structure of the Sections, the Conference itself and how to submit proposals for the conference will be an integral part of this informative Leadership Training workshop.

The Affiliate Councils also have a great deal to offer our Student/New Professionals in terms of awards, scholarships and professional development.

Dr. Richard Sale of Texas, President of the AOC this year and Dr. Stephen Brown of Pennsylvania the Secretary and I as Past President of AOC, having followed Dr. Raeanne Hammond of Messiah College in Pennsylvania, work together with others on the executive board. The

AOC executive board meets monthly by teleconference. There is a position opening this coming year for Student/New Professional Representative. Justin Dwyer of Illinois's term expires in 2008. I hope you received my AOC list serve message regarding this notice. Please consider either self nominating or nominating a colleague. This is a wonderful opportunity to learn, to network, and to develop your professional work in the context of the National Council on Family Relations.

PS. Save your dollars for this National Conference in Little Rock, Arkansas, November 4-8.2008. You will not be disappointed!!!! I believe you will be energized and empowered in the work you currently do every single day. Thank you.

A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Hope you all have a great summer and that you enjoy this issue of the newsletter. My thanks to all of the contributors.

Again, I encourage each of you to consider contributing to *Family Forum* by preparing a book review or a research article/brief or by submitting an item for "Members' Corner" (our version of Letters to the Editor). If you have any suggestions for improvement of *Family Forum*, please let me know. Thank you.

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MINNESOTA COUNCIL ON FAMILY RELATIONS AWARDS

MCFR President Elect Rose Allen

MCFR gives two awards in recognition of contributions to the family field each year. They are:

- o **Friend of the Family Award** is given to a professional or organization who may or may not be in the family field, but who has made significant contributions to the quality of family life in Minnesota.
- o **Ruth Hathaway Jewson Distinguished Service to Families Award** is given to a professional in the family field who is recognized for outstanding work on behalf of families. Preference is given to individuals who are members of NCFR and MCFR.

Award recipients are recognized at the MCFR Annual Fall Conference.

In the past, the nomination process has been done through the MCFR board of directors. This year, we are asking MCFR members to participate in helping us find nominees.

If you have individuals or organizations you would like to nominate (including yourself), complete the form on the web site http://www.mcfr.net/nomination_form_mcfr_awards.doc and send it to Rose Allen, MCFR President Elect at allen027@umn.edu Nominations are due no later than October 1, 2008.

Past award winners http://www.mcfr.net/board_information/about_mcfr.html are listed on the MCFR web site.

NATURE, CHILDREN AND FAMILIES: A NECESSARY CONNECTION

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– Connection, Competence and Contribution – all necessary building blocks to healthy development – with “Connection” being closely related to the issues being discussed at the conference. Dr. Erickson reflected that while she and her colleagues were studying these important risk and protective factors, something else was happening to children and families across America.

Dr. Erickson highlighted “windows of opportunity” to begin to address the disconnection between children and nature. She advocated for initiatives that reach out to and educate parents and grandparents as well as reframe the issue to address the needs of parents. Strengthening these family connections includes encouraging families to “unplug,” follow their child’s cues and curiosity and discover the great outdoors together.

In conclusion, Dr. Erickson encouraged participants to get involved and left them with the following quote: “You have the power to ‘make the environment’ that will reconnect children and families to nature!” To learn more, visit www.cnaturenet.org.

KEYNOTE: WHY CONTACT WITH NATURE IS A NECESSITY FOR HEALTHY CHILDREN: STATE OF THE EVIDENCE

Andrea Faber Taylor, Ph.D., Landscape and Human Health Laboratory at the University of Illinois, Urbana- Champaign

Dr. Faber Taylor, Child Environment and Behavior Researcher, presented systematic evidence that Louv’s *Nature Deficit Disorder* may be real; that contact with nature fosters healthy child development and can be used to encourage families’ use of green spaces. She noted that she often gets asked why research is needed in this area, as many feel that we already know the importance of children being connected to nature. However, policies do not change without numbers and evidence.

Dr. Faber Taylor and her fellow researchers studied why green space is a necessity and how it impacts children’s day-to-day functioning. The results of their research provide insight on the effects nature has on all children, as well as children living in impoverished public housing and those coping with AD/HD.

Dr. Faber Taylor provided summaries of two of these research projects.

VIEWS OF GREENERY HELP GIRLS SUCCEED

In a study conducted in a Chicago public housing development, girls who lived in apartments with greener, more natural views scored better on tests of self-discipline than those living in more barren but otherwise identical housing. The study tested children on three component abilities of self-discipline: concentration, inhibition of impulsive behavior, and delay of gratification. Girls with green views scored higher on average than girls with less green views on all three tests. Boys showed no link between test scores and the amount of nature near home, most likely because they spend less time playing near home and are then less affected by the environment around it.

Self-discipline is an important personal characteristic. The greater a girl’s self-discipline, the more likely she is to do well in school, to avoid unhealthy or risky behaviors, and to behave in ways that make life success more likely. Maintaining trees and greenery at home may foster in girls the self-discipline they need to succeed.

GREEN PLAY SETTINGS REDUCE ADHD SYMPTOMS

Two surveys of parents of children with Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder have shown that performing activities in green settings can reduce the symptoms of AD/HD. In an initial, Midwestern-based study, parents were more likely to nominate activities that typically occur in outdoor green settings as being best for their child’s symptoms and those that typically occur in indoor or non-green outdoor areas as worst. Also, parents rated their child’s symptoms as better on average after activities that occur in green settings than after activities in non-green settings. In the subsequent, nation-wide study, activities such as reading or playing sports were reported as improving children’s symptoms more when performed in outdoor green space than in non-green spaces.

Finally, Dr. Faber Taylor discussed the implications for families, caregivers, educators and others including:

- Trees and green space are a necessity for supporting children’s healthy development. Even a few trees and grass can make a measurable difference in harsh environments.
- Education for families and caregivers need to stress that nature is good for kids and good for them. These educational efforts should make the research findings available to parents.
- Children’s use of green space and parks should be promoted for their developmental benefits and for support of children with AD/HD.

Dr. Faber Taylor ended her session with the following quote from Richard Louv:

“We don’t all get to go to Yosemite, nor do we have to ... it can be the clump of trees at the end of the cul-de-sac or the ravine by the house. Those places may, in terms of biodiversity not be that important, but to a child they can be a whole universe, where they can discover a sense of wonder.”

MAKING NATURE AND INTEGRAL PART OF CHILDREN’S DAILY LIVES

Nancy Rosenow, Executive Director, Dimensions Educational Research Foundation, Lincoln, Nebraska; Nature Explore Design Consultant; Early Childhood Educator and published author. Her article, “Learning to Love the Earth . . . and Each Other” was recently published in the *Young Children* magazine (January 2008).

“If a child is to keep his inborn sense of wonder . . . he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with

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him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in." Rachel Carson, *Sense of Wonder*

Nancy Rosenow provided participants with a world of ideas and resources for how the emerging research on children and nature can be applied to create environments where children can experience and learn from nature.

One such initiative is the comprehensive Nature Explore program which helps families, educators and others working with children re-connect children with the natural world as an integral part of learning. Nature Explore is a national initiative that grew out of a collaboration between Dimensions Educational Research Foundation and the Arbor Day Foundation. Two components of the Nature Explore initiative are Nature Explore Workshops and Nature Explore Classrooms.

Nature Explore Workshops for educators, architects and landscape architects provide participants with resources and inspiration to more effectively reach all learners while also re-connecting children with the wonders of nature. Design

professionals explore effective ways to apply new research-based, field-tested principles to the design of outdoor classrooms for elementary schools, parks, botanic gardens, children's museums, childcare centers, private homes and other public places.

A Nature Explore Classroom is built on ten guiding principles that represent a well-rounded mix of experiences that can and should occur outdoors for preschool and elementary age children. When well-designed outdoor spaces are combined with a nurturing, caring adult, there are great benefits to children. The ten guiding principles for a Nature Explore Classroom are: 1) clearly delineated areas for different kinds of activities; 2) a mix of activity areas; 3) simple names for activity areas; 4) identifying each area with a sign and other visual cues; 5) ensuring that each area is visible at all times; 6) using a variety of natural materials including trees and other live plants; 7) choosing

elements for durability and low maintenance; 8) maximizing beauty and visual clarity in the overall design; 9) personalizing the design with regional materials and ideas from children and staff and 10) making sure that the space meets all of the regulatory standards for the region.

This overview of the Nature Explore initiative provided participants with a detailed framework that can be used to apply emerging research on children and nature in the many different settings and programs represented by conference attendees.

In addition, there were six concurrent sessions and two learning center sessions. Further detail on the above presentations and brief summaries of the concurrent sessions are available on the MCFR website, www.mcfr.net. A list of resources and links on children and nature is also included there.

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SAVE THE DATE

MCFR 2008 FALL CONFERENCE
THURSDAY, DECEMBER 4!

OUR THEME IS *CONTEMPORARY FAMILIES –
FORMATION, FUNCTION AND THE FUTURE*

SAVE THE DATE

MCFR 2009 SPRING CONFERENCE
FRIDAY, APRIL 3!

FAMILIES, HEALTH, & MENTAL HEALTH