

## Nature Play – get muddy, play and have fun

This year, we have run 3 Nature Play groups, each lasting 8 weeks. Nature play sessions ran at Corstorphine Hill, Pilrig Park and Saughton Park. Nature Play is for parents/carers with preschool children (aged around 2-5 years old) and lasts 2 hours. The aim of nature play is to allow children time to play in an outdoor green space area, preferably wooded and for them to engage in child-led free play. Parents interact and play with their child, allowing their child to take the lead in play and exploration.

A number of play resources are laid out in the area and includes: mud kitchen, magnifying glasses, collecting baskets, dinosaurs, cuddly toys, wooden musical instruments, hammocks, ropes, tarps. Each week, a theme is introduced such as sounds and an activity is suggested linked to the theme e.g what sounds can you hear or make in nature? Snack time is generally half way through the session, allowing parents and children to share food and drink while listening to a story, linked to the theme like “How the dawn chorus came to be”. Snack time is a sociable time, where parents can chat together, share ideas and experiences and get to know each other better.

It is lovely see children play with mud, water, make mudpies, paint trees with mud and generally get messy. It is also lovely to see parents interacting with their children and playing together.



Some of the older children are more able to participate in imaginative play, building mini homes for toys, bugs and dinosaurs. One boy who loved dinosaurs, built a separate pen for the herbivores and carnivores as well as a special place for the eggs.

The following week a new home was built and the musical instruments were played while songs were sung to get them to sleep. This boy was constantly instructing his dad what to do and the father followed his son's instructions. Their interaction and ability to play together imaginatively was lovely.

During the last session, a fire is lit in a firebowl during snacktime and marshmallows are toasted. A flint and steel is used to light the fire and parents and children take turns to make a spark, if they want to.



Feedback from parents has been very positive and many are surprised how little the children need to be entertained in the outdoors. Many children play with the same items every session, whereas the parents need the variety of activities and ideas. Many parents said that they will try to take more walks and spend more time in the outdoors. **One parent said that coming to Nature play has reminded her to spend more time exploring in one spot and not to just rush by.** We hope, funding permitting, to run more Nature Play Sessions in Edinburgh soon.