Outdoor Learning at the Library:
It’s Only Natural

Presented by Trina Evans
Assistant Branch Manager
How the idea came about

You can see from their faces that learning happens inside and out, BUT a study showed outdoor education improves kids’ grades in 72% of assessments from math and science to attendance compared to indoor learning.

Source: bachelorsdegreeonline.com
Why NEOC?

We wanted the classroom design and activities based on research.

- All Nature Explore programs and resources are based on research and field-testing NEOC by Dimensions Foundation. Dimensions Foundation explores how children (ages 3-6) develop visual-spatial skills, and how early childhood educators could best support that development.

**ONE KEY FINDING:** Spending time outdoors (including in unstructured, self-directed play) benefits children intellectually, physically, socially, and interpersonally, because nature provides a powerful context for learning.
NEOC Certification Requirements

1) Well-designed outdoor space — Provide evidence that principles from the Learning with Nature Idea Book were used in the design.
2) Staff development — Provide evidence that staff attended a full-length Nature Explore Workshop
3) Family involvement — Provide evidence that activities or materials designed to increase family awareness and involvement in nature education for young children are provided regularly.

TIP: Make time to plan well, consider insurance, zoning, neighbors, funding, future expansion, etc.
Fill a need for your patrons and community

TIP: For board buy-in, make sure it dovetails with your long-range plan. Do the same for community buy-in.
Community response

“"We love it!”
“It adds value to the library!”
“I can’t believe a library has this!”

TIP: Seek out and document patron feedback for marketing and for future fundraising for upkeep or expansion

We have a parent who regularly drives 9 miles to it, passing parks and other venues along the way, because she and her daughter love it so much.
What was the process?

TIP: Create a presentation of what you want to do and why

Children spend more time watching TV and playing video games than being active outside, which has negative developmental effects.

Source: *The Last Child in the Woods* by Richard Louv
Community partnerships are essential

TIP: Set out donation jars around town, especially near the designated location

Howard County Master Gardeners
Community partnerships are essential

TIP: Network!

Unexpected bonus:
Howard County Master Gardeners and Lowe’s now have a partnership that the two hadn’t been able to work out until they met while working on NEOC.
Community partnerships are essential

Dr. Doug Eglen asked if he could create an analemmatic sundial

TIP: Be open to additional ideas as community takes ownership
Community partnerships are essential

TIP: You can get a lot more done if you schedule work days and provide pizza!

GM Cares and staff volunteers
Community partnerships are essential

TIP: Don’t be afraid to ask!

Background story:
We’d asked and received a yes – and then two tornadoes touched down. We sat back and waited to remind them for the check.

Howard County Commissioners gave $10,000
Community partnerships are essential.

TIP: Go for the grants. You just might get them!

Duke Energy’s grant provided almost $10,000.
BEWARE: Stumbling blocks - but – don’t let ’em stop you. It’s worth it.

TIP: Garage sales are great places to find outdoor supplies
BEWARE: Stumbling blocks - but – don’t let ’em stop you. It’s worth it.

TIP: Ask staff to donate items, such as sand pails
BEWARE: Stumbling blocks - but - don’t let ’em stop you. It’s worth it.

TIP: Remember to get photos of it in use
BEWARE: Stumbling blocks - but - don’t let ’em stop you. It’s worth it.

TIP: Keep it open even when you’re closed
Celebrate the end result!

TIP: Send out invites to board, staff, media, donors, and volunteers and have an official ribbon-cutting
Celebrate the end result!

TIP: Give tours
Celebrate the end result!

TIP: Use items, such as wood cookies and sand pails, to serve snacks and then reuse them for the classroom.
Celebrate the end result!

TIP: Honor special givers and send copies of media coverage to them to show the difference they’ve made.
Update it!

TIP: Add to it. Change out items seasonally. Keep ’em coming back.

Background story:
We had patrons decorate rocks (part of the Kindness Rock craze) during the Summer Reading Program to create the rock river at NEOC.
Programs

TIP: Participate in local garden walks and festivals to showcase your classroom
Programs

TIP: Remember programs for adults. They love it, too!
Programs

TIP: Use it year 'round
Programs

TIP: To increase traffic and circ, have items for checkout for passive programs.
Go live!

TIP: Host performances and concerts

Ron Bowers
Library programming brings opportunities for children

The Kokomo-Howard County Public Library made headlines multiple times this year by bringing unique educational programming to Howard County.
Resources

KHCPL.org

dimensionsfoundation.org

natureexplore.org
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