

Being in Nature - A Prescription for Better Health



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Outline

1. **Why?** What is the need?
2. **Who?** Who are the audience?
3. **What?** What programs to offer?
4. **How?** How to structure these programs?
5. **So What?** What are the outcomes?

Credit River Watershed

Orangeville

Caledon

Erin

Georgetown

Brampton

Mississauga

The Headwaters

Credit River

River Mouth

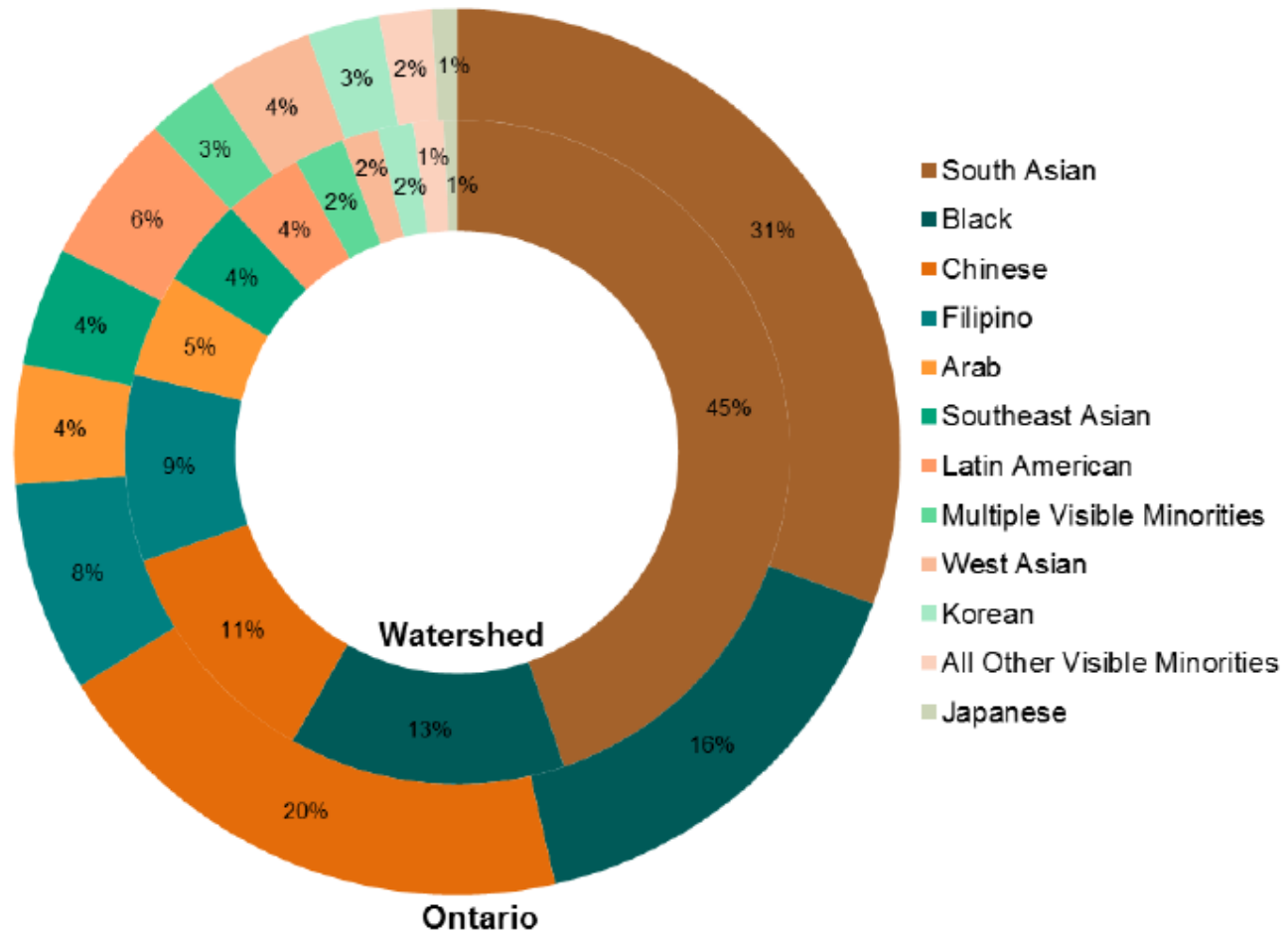
Lake Ontario

Image © 2009 First Base Solutions
Image © 2009 DigitalGlobe
Image © 2009 TerraMetrics



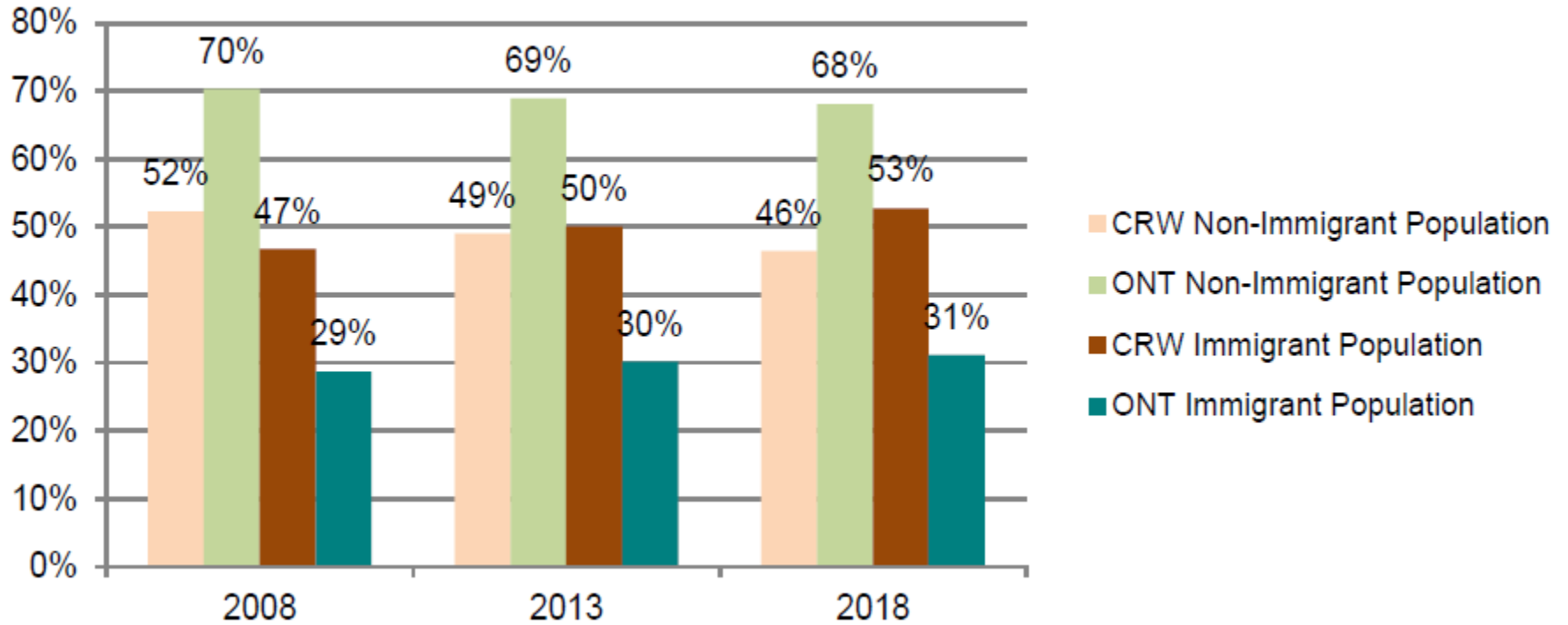
Ethnicity

Visible Minority Composition, 2013



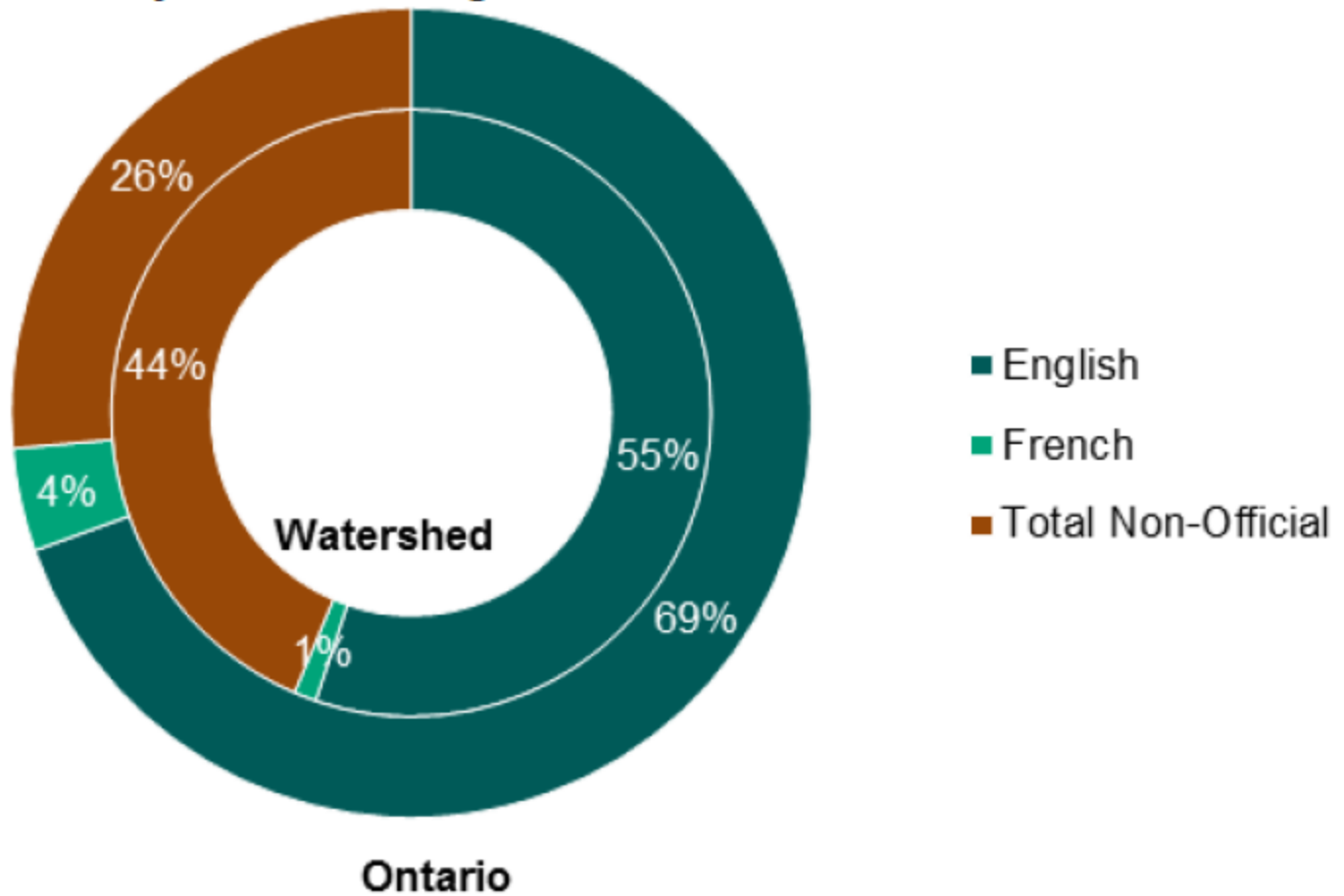
Immigration

Population by Immigration Status, 2008-2018



Languages

Population by Mother Tongue, 2013



CVC's Multicultural Outreach Program



Common Barriers for Accessing Nature for Newcomers - Language

- Low levels of English language.



Common Barriers for Accessing Nature for Newcomers - **Employment and Income**

- Low levels of employment and income.



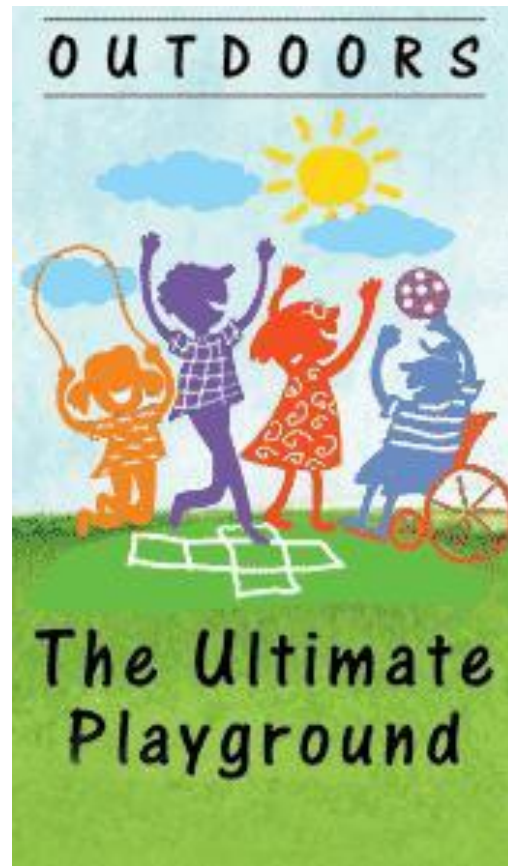
Common Barriers for Accessing Nature for Newcomers - Social Environment

- Lack of sense of community belonging



Common Barriers for Accessing Nature for Newcomers - Physical Activity

- Lack of physical activity



Identified Gaps

- Minimal connection with nature.
- Lack of awareness on conservation areas.
- Fear for natural outdoor spaces.
- Transportation challenges.
- Physical health concerns.
- Language barriers.

What Programs to Offer?

- Language appropriate
- Fit into the cultural norms
- Sensitive to religious/cultural needs
- Seniors inclusive programming
- Transportation Costs
- Gate Fee/Park Fee
- Creating Social Environment
- Providing opportunities for volunteerism

Health and Wellness Program

- Launched in 2014
- Promoting natural areas to foster physiological and psychological well being.
- Clients include -
 - Community health centers
 - Long term care homes
 - Community support groups
 - Hospitals
 - Senior clubs/groups.

Program Structure

- **Presentation**

Nature and Health Connection




Hospital Recovery





Nature and Medicines



- **Cannabis** – sleeping disorders, autoimmune diseases and glaucoma.





- **Coca** – Cocaine was used as aesthetic.



Alzheimer's and Dementia



Asthma



Nature and Us!

Natural Outdoor Spaces Can:

- Reduce Stress
- Reduce anger and aggressiveness
- Improve moods.
- Increase overall happiness.
- Strengthen immune system.
- Decrease blood pressure, heart rate, muscle tension and level of stress hormones.



Program Structure

- Trip to Terra Cotta Conservation Area



Program Structure

- **Easy Trails and Interpretive Hike**



Program Structure

- Lunch options
- Social networking in natural outdoors



Mood Walks Participants

- **May 2016 Collaborated with CMHA Halton.**
- **16 Participants from their Mood Walks program came to Terra Cotta Conservation Area.**



EcoHealth Ontario

Ecohealth

What's in a Green Space that makes us feel so good?

Features in Green Spaces: Trees, woodlands, meadows, lakes, rivers, streams, scenic views, plants, birds, ponds, gardens, and wildlife

Types of Green Spaces: Urban and rural parks, conservation areas, community and home gardens, farmland, green roofs, cemeteries, multi-use trails, sportsfields, beaches, playgrounds, etc.

What is Ecohealth?

Ecohealth is the relationship between human and environmental health.

ECOSYSTEM

Forests
Wetlands
Water
Soil
Plants
Animals

BENEFITS

Clean air & water
Food & medicines
Important natural & wildlife habitat
Less pollution, drought & heat
Less mental anxiety
More social interactions
More opportunity for physical activity

HEALTHY PEOPLE

Improved mental & physical wellbeing
Livable communities

We rely on nature for multiple benefits for both a healthy environment and healthy people.

SOME CHALLENGES



Climate Change Affects Natural Environments and Human Health

Expected human health impacts include:

- Vector-borne diseases (West Nile virus and Lyme disease)
- Extreme weather impacts (injury and illness due to flooding)
- Temperature related illness (heat stress, hypothermia)
- Air-quality effects (Cardiopulmonary diseases, asthma)
- Water and food contamination



Better Physical Health

Living Near Trees & Green Space Has Benefits:

People who live in neighbourhoods with a higher density of trees on their streets report significantly higher health perception and less cardio-metabolic conditions.

Trees help to improve air quality and combat climate change. Over 80 years, the average Canadian tree absorbs 200 kg of carbon dioxide – plus ozone, carbon monoxide, nitrogen dioxide, fine particulate matter and sulphur dioxide.

Walking outside has been proven to provide physical health benefits such as:



Keeping Cool:

Trees, green roofs, and other green infrastructure reduce the demand for heating and cooling by reflecting light and heat, releasing water vapour into the air through transpiration and providing shade.

Reduce Risk of Chronic Diseases:

Green spaces reduce human exposure to air pollutants, thereby reducing risk factors for cardiovascular and respiratory diseases.

Better Mental Health

Contact with nature (including trees, lakes, rivers, wildlife, blue skies) can provide stress relief, reduce brain fatigue, enhance the five senses, and improve memory, mood, positive thinking, decision-making ability, mental sharpness, creativity, and attention span.

Regular Use Of Natural Areas For **PHYSICAL ACTIVITY** Can Reduce The Risk Of Mental Health Problems By

50%

A DAILY WALK IN NATURE

can be as effective in treating mild cases of DEPRESSION as taking an ANTIDEPRESSANT

- Selected Sources:
- Benz et al. (2016) Human Health in a Changing Climate: Sector Perspectives on Impacts and Adaptation. (ed.) J.J. Warren and D.S. Lemman; Government of Canada.
 - Kamin et al. (2010) Neighborhood green space and health in a large urban center. *Scholarly Reports* Vol. 5.
 - Zepnick et al. (2015) Green City, Only Nature Heals by Health – an Evidence Review. Toronto: Public Health.
 - Zepnick et al. (2015) The impact of green space on heat and air pollution in urban communities: A meta-analytic systematic review. David Suzuki Foundation.

Five Things You Can Do

- 1 **COLLABORATE** across sectors and disciplines (e.g. public health, planning, parks, watershed management, academia) to build awareness and influence the protection and enhancement of green space by highlighting the benefits to human health.
- 2 **ADVOCATE** for strengthened green space policies that support healthy communities e.g. provision of shade, heat reduction, improved air quality, active transportation, biodiversity conservation and access to green space.
- 3 **PROMOTE** equitable access to green space with a focus on increasing access to vulnerable populations (e.g. seniors, children and people living on low income).
- 4 **INFLUENCE** official plans, watershed plans, strategies and other policies to protect and enhance green space.
- 5 **SHARE** information about health evidence for the protection and/or enhancement of green space.



Who is EcoHealth Ontario?

ecohealth-ontario.on.ca

EcoHealth Ontario is a collaborative of public health, environmental, planning, parks & education sectors who:

- ✓ Raise awareness of the public health benefits of a healthy & sustainable environment
- ✓ Build a common vision around ecohealth
- ✓ Influence policy
- ✓ Develop and share ecohealth research, information, and outreach tools

EcoHealth Ontario gratefully acknowledges the Ontario Trillium Foundation, Forests Ontario and our Steering Committee members for their generous support of our work.

EcoHealth Ontario Steering Committee

- Conservation Ontario
- Community of Practice in Ecosystem Approaches to Health, Ontario Node
- Credit Valley Conservation
- Delta Lions School of Public Health, University of Toronto
- Forests Ontario
- Ontario Professional Planners Institute
- Ontario Public Health Association
- Simcoe Muskoka District Health Unit
- Toronto Public Health
- Toronto and Region Conservation
- York Region Community and Health Services



CREDIT VALLEY CONSERVATION

Questions

