



Carl Schurz Park Conservancy | Spring 2021

# Park Notes

## Nature's Vital Role

The Power of Our Park to Improve  
Physical Health and Mental Wellbeing



# Our Park, a Source of Health and Wellbeing

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Board Secretary

In recent years, Carl Schurz Park Conservancy has been working hard to apply best practices in environmental conservation, with acute awareness of the value of the park as a habitat for native species, a source of clean air, and as part of a web of natural spaces that strengthen the city's capacity to respond to climate change. With new data from researchers who are examining the connections between health and nature, we are becoming equally aware of—what some of us have felt instinctively—the power of our park to improve physical health and mental well-being.

Remarkably, Frederick Law Olmsted, considered to be the father of American landscape architecture, wrote in 1865, that viewing nature “employs the mind without fatigue and yet exercises it; tranquilizes it and yet enlivens it; and thus, through the influence of the mind over the body, gives the



effect of refreshing rest and reinvigoration to the whole system.” Now, in fact, it has been proven—green spaces have curative effects.

Specialists at the Yale School of Environmental Management report:

**“A growing body of research points to the beneficial effects that expo-**

**sure to the natural world has on health, reducing stress, stimulating the immune system, and promoting healing.” (1)**

New research is taking place around the globe. Doctors at the University of Essex in the U.K. found that people who spend at least two hours a week in nature

report overall better health and well-being than those who don't experience nature at all. Scientists in Denmark found that children who lived in neighborhoods with more green space had a reduced risk of depression and other psychiatric disorders later in life. And Canada  
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ENERGY GOALS CARDIO RUN WELLNESS FOCUS RESOLUTION SPORT



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dian researcher Dr. Elizabeth Nisbet states:

**“You can boost your mood just by walking in nature, even in urban nature. And the sense of connection you have with the natural world seems to contribute to happiness even when you’re not physically immersed in nature.”**  
(2)

The research confirms the many physical benefits of interacting with nature, from reducing obesity to increasing overall fitness. These benefits are matched by improvements in mental outlook. Studies are showing that time in nature lowers anxiety, improves mood, increases self-esteem, and reduces the negative effects of loneliness and social isolation. According to Dr. Marc Berman of the University of Chicago:

**“Imagine a therapy that had no known side effects, was readily available, and could improve your cognitive functioning at zero cost. Such a therapy has been known to philosophers, writers, and laypeople alike: interacting with nature. Many have suspected that nature can promote improved cognitive functioning and overall well-being, and these effects have recently been documented.”** (3)

This is an exciting time for us at Carl Schurz Park Conservancy as the importance of what we do every day to sustain the park becomes ever clearer. Armed with significant data on nature-health connections, we continue to work with vigor to ensure that park users find clean, green, and safe spaces for recreation, meditation, social interaction, and learning.

This past year especially, people sought out the park as an alternative to their own four walls, offering greenery and beauty, space for exercise, and safe social connections. Over and over visitors told us that the park was essential in helping them to overcome anxiety and maintain a healthy lifestyle. Not surprisingly, their testimonials correlate with the emerging research:



*“I have successfully fought cancer twice and believe that is due to being able to walk peacefully every day in the open air, along the Esplanade and around the gardens of Carl Schurz Park. Actually, I don’t think I would be here without having had my dose of Carl Schurz Park each day.”*

*“We are doing our best and loving Carl Schurz in all its splendor. It has been our safe place. Our sanctuary.”*

*“The Park makes me feel grounded. The trees and the open sky have helped me cope with frustration and fear during this surreal time.”*

*“I have lived across from this park for 17 years, but until now I had not been free to appreciate all that it offers to me and to others. It has helped to keep me sane and to recover my health.”*

We have always known instinctively that Carl Schurz Park is vital to the neighborhood. The quiet, the beauty, the safety, the space for communal or ceremonial activities, the opportunities for recreation, the views of the water and the horizon beyond are some of the qualities that draw people consciously or subconsciously to the park. What we now know for certain is that those very qualities can affect every aspect of one’s life. Additionally, access to parks can improve health outcomes for entire neighborhoods and are the key to a healthy community.

As new scholarship illuminates the beneficial links between exposure to nature and improvements in human health, it affirms the importance of the Conservancy. We are proud to be stewards of this wonderful greenspace and prouder still to sustain a park which will, in turn, help to ensure a healthier Upper East Side.

References:

1. Robbins, Jim. Ecopsychology: How Immersion in Nature Benefits Your Health. Yale Environment 360. Jan. 2020. <https://e360.yale.edu/features/ecopsychology-how-immersion-in-nature-benefits-your-health>
2. Nisbet, Elizabeth. Nurtured by Nature. Monitor on Psychology. Vol. 51, No. 3. American Psychology Association. <https://www.apa.org/monitor/2020/04/nurtured-nature>
3. Berman, Marc et al. The Cognitive Benefits of Interacting with Nature. Psychological Science. Vol 19, No 12. 2008. Am Ass for Psychological Science. [https://psych.utah.edu/\\_resources/documents/psych4130/The%20Cognitive%20Benefits%20of%20Interacting%20with%20Nature.pdf](https://psych.utah.edu/_resources/documents/psych4130/The%20Cognitive%20Benefits%20of%20Interacting%20with%20Nature.pdf)