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Improving Children's Mental Health Through Outdoor Recreation

Hannah Presot

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Improving Children's Mental Health Through Outdoor Recreation

Hannah Presot OTD/S, Brenda Richards OTR/L, and Kristen Pataki OTD, OTR/L

Background

- Children today are experiencing mental health concerns.
 - "According to the 2019 Cuyahoga County Youth Risk Behavior Survey: Overall Prevalence, 77% of respondents felt very stressed and 33.7% of respondents felt sad or hopeless (Prevention Research, n.d.).
 - Other mental health concerns for children
 - Self-esteem, anxiety, and bullying
- The mental and physical health of children can be an indicator of their future adult behaviors and wellbeing, so it is imperative to promote positive mental health at a young age to prevent future concerns (Mygind et al., 2019).
- Occupational therapy interventions "promote occupational performance in areas of occupation, including education, play, leisure, work, social participation, activities of daily living (ADLs), instrumental activities of daily living, and sleep and rest, within a variety of environments, such as school, home, community, and health care settings" (Arbesman et al., 2013, p. 120).
- Occupational therapy practitioners are trained to identify and provide intervention for children with mental health concerns (Arbesman et al., 2013).
- Nature and outdoor recreation have been shown to improve mental health.
 - Improves ability to cope with stress
 - Improves mood
 - Improves self-esteem
 - Reduces anxiety and depression
 - Increases attention levels
 - Increases resilience
 - Increases independence
- Nature based programs can improve:
 - A child's self-concept, self-esteem, self-efficacy, problem solving, resilience, academic performance, cognitive performance, mood, and physical health (Mygind et al., 2019).

Brief Biography

I am a third-year student in the Occupational Therapy Doctorate Program. My goal as a future occupational therapist is to use a holistic and client-centered approach to provide the best possible care for the individuals I work with. I will enable and support them to complete activities of daily living and activities that are meaningful to them.

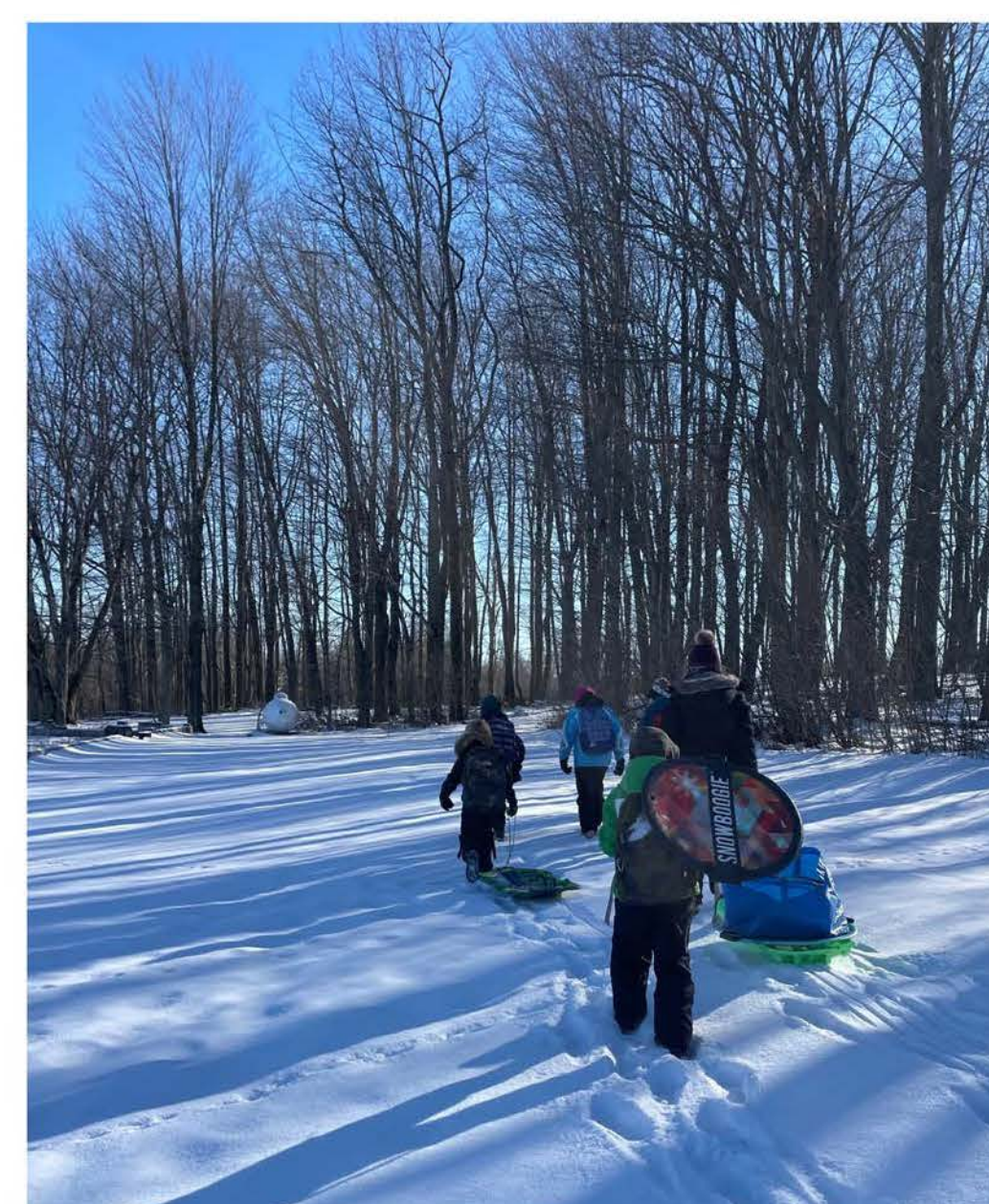
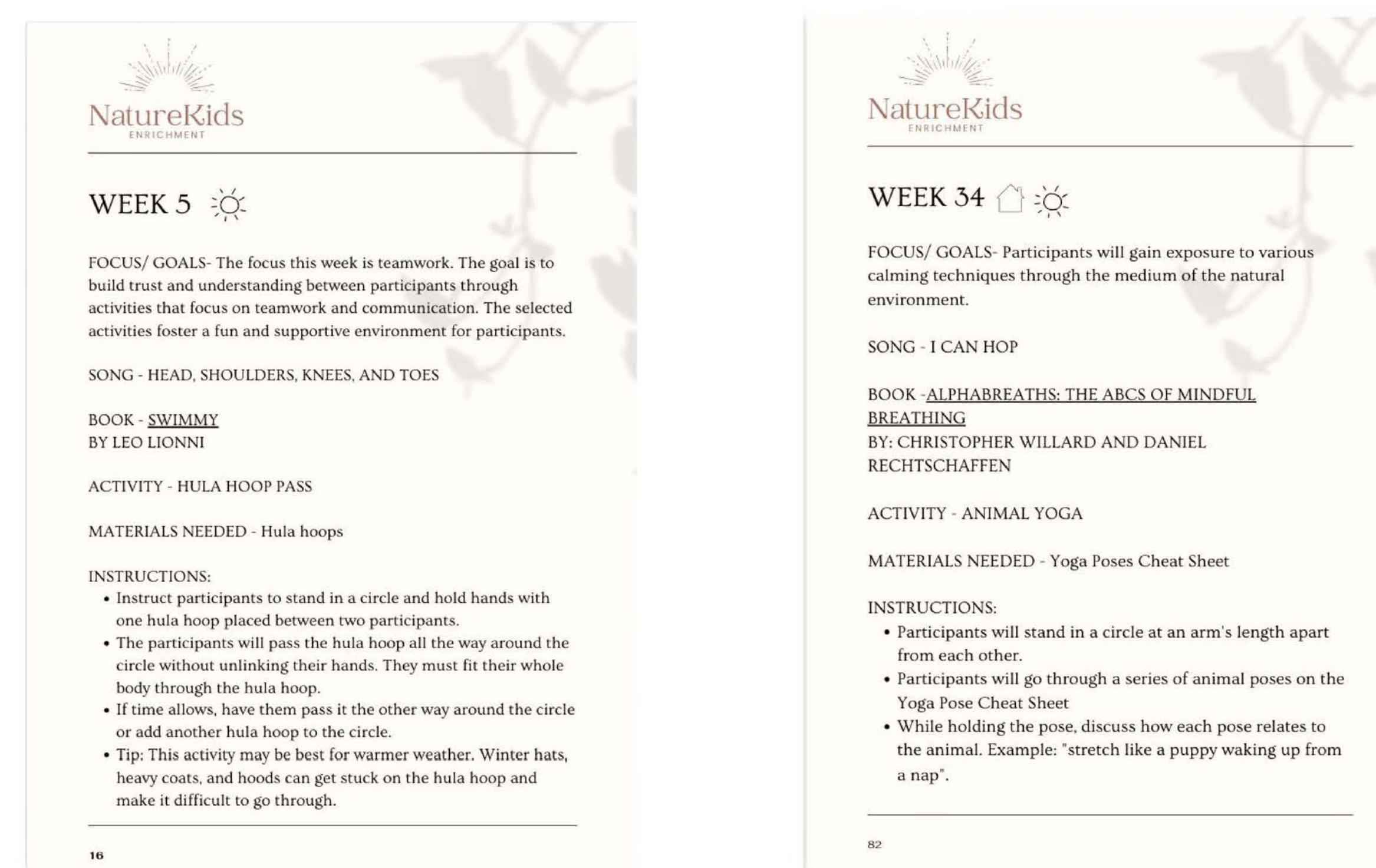


Capstone Activities

This capstone focused on using outdoor recreation to improve mental health in the pediatric population. In partnership with The Center for LifeSkills, an outdoor enrichment program for children was modified.

Capstone experience activities included:

- Observed the current program and determined ways to enhance the mental health of the participants
- Hands-on experience with leading the current program
- Implemented portions of the modified program
- Observed and participated in a school-based mental health program
- Observed and participated in another nature-based program
- Observed occupational therapy treatment sessions in a pediatric outpatient clinic
- Developed five weeks of modified curriculum plans with a focus on mental health
 - Topics:
 - Emotions
 - Deep breathing and yoga
 - Movement
 - Teamwork
 - Positive thinking



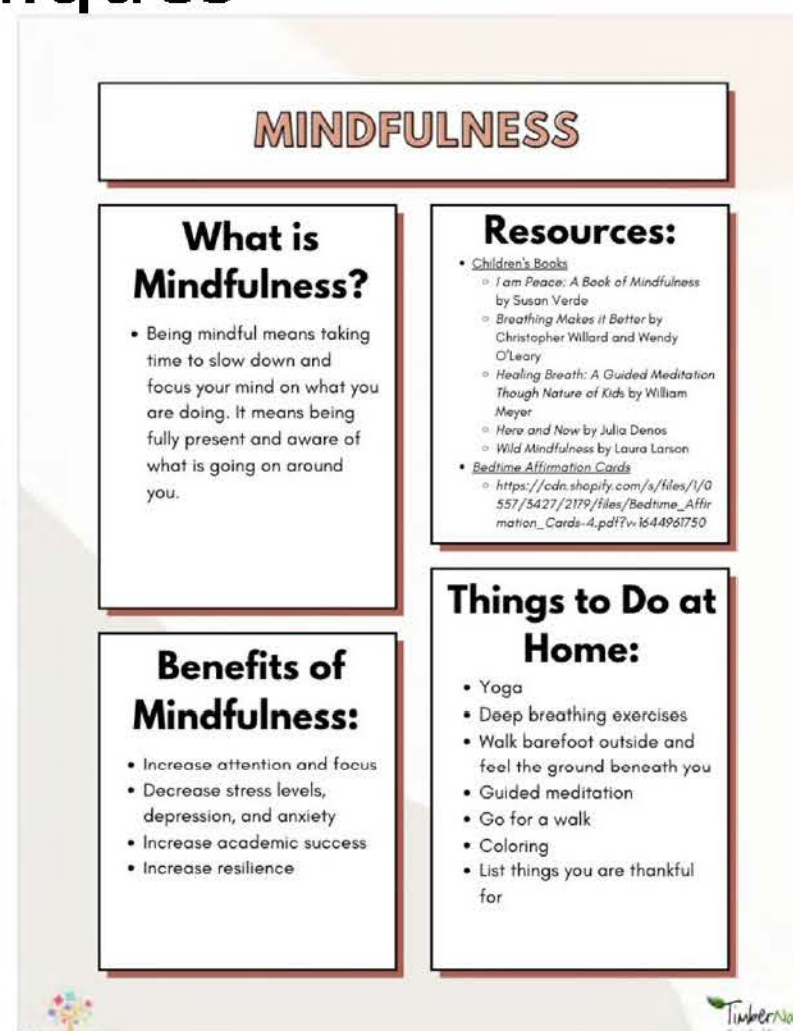
Improving Mental Health Literacy for Caregivers

Handouts for caregivers were developed to increase mental health literacy and improve carry over of mental health practices at home. The topics of the handouts included:

- Emotions
- The benefits of nature on mental wellbeing
- Deep breathing
 - Examples of deep breathing techniques
- Mindfulness
 - Yoga pose examples
- Positive thinking
 - List of positive affirmations

Information provided on the handouts included:

- An overview of the topic
- Benefits of the topic
- Things to do at home/tips
- Resources
 - Recommended children's books
 - Recommended books for caregivers
 - Links to related videos
 - Links to articles or websites for caregiver to review



Key References

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