

Foreword: Invaluable Resources

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Over the past 150 years, a blink of an eye in terms of human history, our experiences in relation to nature have changed radically in much of the world. Dramatic migration to cities—coupled with urban planning and design that emphasized gray over green infrastructure, inequality, and perhaps an overvaluing of technology—has led many people to be divorced from nature, with little access to nature’s social and ecological benefits. At the same time, stress levels are rising. Though medicine has made incredible advances in recent decades, life spans that had for many years been lengthening are now contracting in some communities (Squires 2017). Our communities continue to face old and new challenges: some human-made, some natural, and often a mix of both—as with Hurricane Sandy in 2012 in the New York metropolitan area.

In the United States, we are quick to acknowledge the destructive power of nature. But our confidence in gray infrastructure and technology can also lead us to under-recognize nature’s capacity to both address ecological challenges and heal and promote well-being. Greater investment in green and blue infrastructure—and the social mechanisms that can create and nurture them—has the potential to combat a host of personal, ecological, and societal challenges. But we must act to increase this investment.

I think that what is often forgotten is the fact that we are a part of nature. Our need to connect with it is innate. When it’s lost, we suffer. This is why, we at the TKF Foundation have worked for more than two decades to give people the opportunity to connect with nature; to restore this essential, sacred bond. A simple concept, yet wholly profound when exercised.

In addition to our involvement with the Landscapes of Resilience gardens, we have supported the creation of more than 130 meaningful greenspaces that comprise the Nature Sacred Network, places where individuals can pause in an organic setting; one designed to encourage moments of mindful reflection and feelings of peace and well-being. Most of these spaces reside in communities hard hit by poverty, despair, stress, and other persistent challenges, including prisons, hospitals, and underserved city neighborhoods—places where hope is needed most.

These projects vary in size and complexity, but what unites them in success is a unique formula we’ve honed over the years in partnership with people and places. It is an approach that is deeply rooted in the communities each project serves—tailored to reflect and celebrate the community’s unique culture and values. From this source springs an authentic kind of pride: a restored sense of community and promise. Invaluable.

As we look to the future, it is our hope that we as a “community of communities” reimagine our cities and societies through a social-ecological lens. Small, nearby places of green infused into urban landscapes offer more than

beauty. They serve to reorient us in powerful ways—offering a moment of solace; asking us to pause, reflect, and refocus. In today’s frenetic world, that moment can change everything.

Literature Cited

Squires, D. 2017. The shortening American lifespan. New York, NY: Commonwealth Fund. <https://www.commonwealthfund.org/blog/2017/shortening-american-lifespan>.

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