

# Nature Based Education Institute

May 19, 2018

Sponsored by University of Maine at Farmington

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## Session Title: Making It Happen: Transitioning to An Outdoor Classroom

Session C 10:30-11:45

Location: North Dining Hall B

### Presenters

- Sasha Shunk (shunkchildcare03@gmail.com)
- Bridget Barden (bridget.barden@yahoo.com)
- Brendle Johnson (brendlejohnson@gmail.com)

### Who will benefit most from this session?

- Early educators (B-5 age students)

### Who else may benefit:

- Early educator directors/administrators
- Any age/grade Educator

**Session Description:** Bringing nature into your curriculum and classroom environments can be very intimidating and overwhelming. Our goal is to demystify nature so that all educators and administrators can feel comfortable and confident making their classroom a nature based classroom. There is endless research that provides information regarding nature's benefits for children's development. We strive to incorporate nature in our spaces and teaching. We hope to help teachers and administrators learn more about outdoor classrooms and how to make it a primary learning space. The presentation will give a brief description on Nature Explore and how to begin your outdoor classroom in your program. We were trained and inspired by Nature Explore, a nationwide program that educates programs on outdoor learning and how to adapt your classroom outdoor space into your primary learning space. The goal is to create a space that you can be outside for the majority of the day and children can engage in nature.

How? Adapting and creating an outdoor space sounds complicated and financially straining but it is more achievable than many think. The spaces that Nature Explore requires for certification are common areas found in typical classrooms, i.e. art, music and movement, blocks, reading, gathering space, action area, eating area, etc. Providers can use materials they already have to create these areas in an outdoor environment. We are a small program with less than 15 families enrolled and have limited funding. Using materials we already had, and great thrift store finds, we created a space that was certified within a year.

**How will participants engage in nature during your session?** During the session, we will move the group outside, where we will bring materials and elements of our own outdoor classroom and set them up as we do at the space itself. The participants can explore and play as the children would while being able to interact and ask questions of presenters.

### Presenter Biographies

- Sasha Shunk, owner. Sasha has had a family child care for fifteen years, and has been an accredited provider for eleven years. Sasha is a certified NAFCC accreditation observer, SMCC Practicum Mentor, and holds the Maine Inclusion Credential. Sasha is part of the UMF cohort program, working toward her Bachelor's Degree in Early Childhood Education.

- Bridget Barden, lead teacher. Bridget has been an early education teacher for ten years in both center and family child cares. She became an NAFCC Accredited co-provider two years ago. She is an NAFCC accreditation observer, and holds the Maine Inclusion Credential, and is working toward her Bachelor's Degree in the Psychology.
- Brendle Johnson, assistant teacher. Brendle is a student in the UMF cohort program for Early Childhood Education. She has been at Shunk Child Care for three years, coming into the program during the transition to Outdoor Classroom.