



YOUTH EMPLOYMENT EXPERIENCE

Success Story

Maxine Krawczyk (employee) and Scott Ross (Founder) at "base camp" of the Forest School in Meadowville

Experiential education in nature helps build children's confidence and resiliency

THE CLASSROOM IS 25 ACRES OF

woodland in the rural countryside of Pictou County, in the small town of Meadowville, NS. Hemlock, maple, spruce and pine trees, hiking trails and the Big Caribou River are all part of the rich learning environment.

Within this setting, the Pictou County Forest School delivers outdoors educational programs for children from ages four to 14 – based on the principle that nature immersion helps a child gain knowledge and skills that support success in many aspects of their lives.

Activities include animal tracking, plant identification, shelter building, fire setting and other survival skills.



MEADOWVILLE,
NOVA SCOTIA

Canada

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Maxine presenting samples during a lesson on plant identification at Forest School



Maxine leading group of students downhill from basecamp for a hike

“It’s all about connecting kids with nature and providing challenging experiences to help them develop resiliency and gain confidence,” says Scott Ross, an experienced teacher and the school’s founder along with his wife, Kristin Ross. “The programming also builds important ‘soft skills’ that include communication, decision-making and working as a team.”

There is clearly a strong desire for this type of experiential outdoors education. When the school launched its first programming, week-long day camps in the summer of 2021, it took just 24 hours for all the spots to be filled and the waiting list to hit 70.

Children and their parents long to get away from classrooms, homework, computer screens and experience something more immersive and in the moment.

With a clear and growing demand, Scott and Kristin developed “forest school” programs for the fall of 2021, bringing in groups of children in different age groups: the Goslings, from ages four to seven; the Foxes, eight to 11-year-olds; and the Wolves, 12 to 14 years old. Each group attends the program one day a week, and the rest of the week they attend school or do their at-home schooling. Each term lasts five weeks.

The program is designed to complement the children’s education and is particularly valuable to children who struggle with the traditional school system, Scott says.

“Kids who are not succeeding for any number of reasons in the conventional school system are able to find success here, many for the first time,” says Scott.

Scott sought to bolster staffing for the school’s popular programs. Thanks to funding from CPRA’s Youth Employment Experience program, they were able to hire Maxine Krawczyk to be a course guide. The CPRA program, supported by the Government of Canada, is designed to help organizations in parks and recreation build capacity, while creating employment opportunities in the sector.

Maxine’s background includes teaching at Montessori schools in Warsaw and Paris and delivery of outdoor programs at those schools and in other positions.

Maxine says it’s clear that children are craving opportunities to explore the outdoors and have first-hand experiences in nature. “Parents very much want this for their children as well,” she says. “Of course, the pandemic was part of the reason for the surging desire to connect with nature. It’s also the fact that children need a break from their tightly scheduled lives built around traditional school (the classroom), homework and extracurricular activities,” she says.

“You can truly see how much the kids are gaining by taking part in concrete, in-the moment activities away from theory and abstract concepts,” she adds. “They blossom through hands-on tasks and participating in the wildness of it all.”

As the fall wound down, the Pictou County Forest School was busy planning its programs to begin in February 2022, with a new curriculum customized for the season.

“When there is plenty of snow, it’s great for animal tracking and snowshoeing,” says Scott. “Learning from nature provides value all-year round.” 🍁