

Sun Ray Natural Library Project St. Paul, MN



The Children & Nature Network has launched the Sun Ray Natural Library Project, a new community engagement program at the Sun Ray Library in St. Paul, MN. Youth leaders and the larger community will engage in urban greening projects and library programs that will enhance environmental learning at the site. This nature-rich community hub will provide indoor and outdoor areas designed to foster environmental literacy, a love for nature through reading, and land restoration efforts in partnership with the St. Paul Public Library and the City of Saint Paul Department of Parks and Recreation.



With funding from the Wells Fargo *Environmental Solutions for Communities* grant program and the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Children & Nature Network will support the library in three main efforts:

1. Urban Greening in Conway Park that surrounds the newly renovated Sun Ray Library. The newly renovated library's outdoor reading garden, native plantings and rain garden will be enhanced through this project with tree plantings and additional native plants which will create connections and destinations to encourage outdoor reading, play, and learning in the adjacent park. The community garden in the park will also be connected to library activities through children's gardening activities and culturally-based storytelling.



2. Library Youth and Family Activities. Sun Ray Library staff and volunteers will have a new collection of activities that promote literacy and environmental education through fun, hands-on activities for children, youth, and families. These will include 'Nature Backpacks' that can be checked out from the library, Family Storytime with accompanying nature-based activities, a Family Nature Club to engage residents in outdoor experiences, and other fun activities for the community.

3. Youth Leadership Development. Youth and young adults from the community will be trained as "Natural Leaders" where they will be trained in leading outdoor experiences to engage the community in hands-on environmental activities. These leaders will have further opportunities to attend C&NN Natural Leaders Legacy Camp and will have community-based internship opportunities.

The Sun Ray Library will serve as an excellent demonstration project for how to integrate nature into the community that will lead the way as a model for other libraries and communities across the United States.

"By creating libraries with integrated natural spaces, we create a center for developing kids' intelligence, curiosity and imagination. Books nurture learning and inner imagination, while play in nature engages the sense of curiosity and exploration critical to healthy brain development. Putting both of these essential childhood experiences in one place is a simple idea, but one that could have profound effects on whole neighborhoods."

--Richard Louv, co-founder of Children & Nature Network and best-selling author of *Last Child in the Woods*