

Ripple Effects of Nature Everywhere Boulder



Nature play at Primos Park
Photo Courtesy City of Boulder Open Space and Mountain Parks

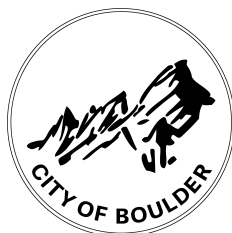
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Appreciations

The successful completion of this Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) report relied on the contributions of several key individuals. Foremost, thank you to the community leaders who shared their experience and insights during the REM session.

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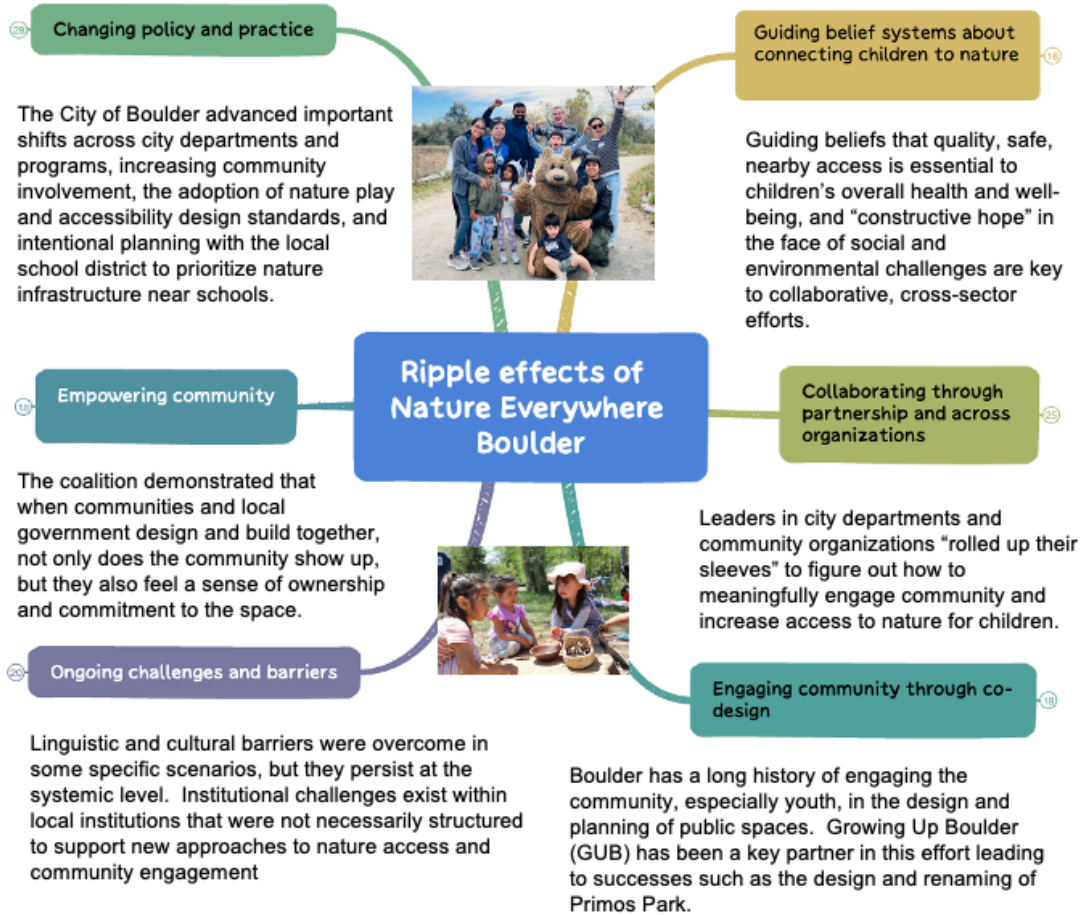
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Ripple Effects Mapping summary graphic

Ripple Effects of Nature Everywhere Boulder

In 2022, Nature Everywhere Boulder, a coalition focused on equitable early childhood nature access, joined the Cities Connecting to Children in Nature early childhood cohort and subsequently participated in the Nature Everywhere Communities peer learning network. In 2025, Boulder participated in a Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) evaluation process to document and understand the impacts of its systems-change approach and extensive nature-connections work. The following core impact themes emerged from the process.

"We share a belief that connecting children, especially those from underserved communities, to nature is essential for their overall well-being and development. Through parks and recreation programs, we can help ensure every child experiences the healing, confidence-building, and unifying power of nature."



"How do we grow children that are responsive and capable of stewarding the natural world?"

Background

Nature Everywhere Boulder (NEB) is a regional coalition of partners in Boulder, Colorado, dedicated to equitable and welcoming access to nature for everyone. The coalition's focus is on early childhood access and activating neighborhood nature connection through collaboration among City of Boulder departments and community organizations. The coalition strengthens collaboration between City of Boulder departments, including Parks and Recreation, Open Space & Mountain Parks, Climate Initiatives, Utilities, Transportation and Mobility, Housing & Human Services and Communications & Engagement. Through Nature Everywhere Boulder, city leaders are partnering with a growing number of organizations, including Growing Up Boulder, Thorne Nature Experience, Boulder Valley School District, Boulder Housing Partners and the Boulder Library District to expand access to nature for Boulder youth and their families.

Nature Everywhere Boulder is guided by the vision of a Boulder community where all youth can play outdoors and feel connected to nature, and where families are confident in letting their children and teenagers go outside independently to enjoy parks, greenways and open spaces. NEB prioritizes equity and accessibility to ensure all children have access to the outdoors, parks, and nature.

In 2022, the City of Boulder joined the Cities Connecting Children to Nature (CCCN) Early Childhood cohort to advance policies, programs, and infrastructure to connect more infants and children up to five years old to nature regardless of race, income or ability.¹ Through participation in the early childhood community of practice, Boulder Parks and Recreation and the Open Space & Mountain Parks (OSMP) department co-developed a Geographic Information Systems (GIS) tool that includes up-to-date data to map children's varying access to nature across the city. Equity mapping helped the city identify areas where children have less access to greenspace so city planning can increase nature access for vulnerable children.² GIS maps guided Boulder's participation in UNICEF's Child Friendly Cities Initiative, the capital investment program (CIP) for youth investment in the Boulder Youth Nature Initiative (BYNI), and site selection for focused youth engagement in place-making and space activation.

Building on lessons learned in the CCCN peer learning network and insights from equity mapping, local partners piloted community engagement strategies at three pilot sites: Primos Park, Wood Brothers and Sawhill Ponds. Boulder OSMP, Thorne

¹ [City of Boulder joins Cities Connecting Children to Nature](#)

² [The Children & Nature Network. Equity Mapping: Yocommunity needs and how it could achieve the ung Children & Nature](#)

Nature Experience and Boulder Housing Partners collaborated to expand the Lil' Explorers 6-week program as a pilot partnership to increase early childhood nature connections. These early pilots led to the development of a strategic vision and framework that informed models for placemaking, space activation and community leadership. Participatory evaluation of the initiative helped OSMP better understand the extent to which it was meeting the community's needs and how to achieve the desired program outcomes.

During the same period, the CCCN initiative evolved into the Nature Everywhere Communities initiative, a national network launched in 2023 by the Children & Nature Network, the National League of Cities and KABOOM! Nature Everywhere Communities grew to 100, increasing equitable access to nature for children everywhere they live, learn and play. Boulder adopted the "Nature Everywhere" nomenclature, aligning its approach with the national movement to advance equitable access to nature for children in the community.

Inspired by participation in the Nature Everywhere Communities initiative, NEB adopted a community-wide approach to build a cross-sector team throughout the city, within its departments, and across community-based organizations. From 2023-2025, the initiative focused on intentional youth engagement and iterative community feedback to establish thoughtful, community-directed nature play and outdoor learning areas and to expand community stewardship and leadership opportunities throughout the city. Community-wide partnerships ensure these spaces remain activated and in use well beyond the initial launch and ribbon-cutting.

From 2023-2025, Nature Everywhere Boulder's achievements include:

- **Developing a city-wide strategic framework for nature access:** The Naturehoods for All Strategic Framework focuses on hyperlocal nature access.³ Using GIS equity maps, city planners focused on equitable access to nature. They expanded to seven pilot Naturehoods: Civic Area, Gunbarrel Hill, Sawhill Ponds, Four Mile Canyon Creek, Boulder and Whiterock Ditch, Goose Creek, and Wellman Creek. The Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan, the City of Boulder's primary policy document developed in partnership with Boulder County, includes nature access goals for the first time. The city will finalize the BVCP in the summer of 2026.
- **Integrating outdoor learning and climate-resilient landscapes into Boulder Valley School District's instruction and operating policies:** The greenBVSD Action Plan aligns curriculum and instruction, climate and culture,

³ A Naturehood is a connected network of close-to-home parks, gardens, open spaces, and natural play areas that connect people with nature through free play, time outdoors, and shared stewardship

and operations to guide district sustainability.⁴ In partnership with Nature Everywhere Boulder, Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) adopted climate-resilient schoolyard designs, nature play and outdoor learning through green schoolyard and curricular efforts aligned with the State of Colorado's Seal of Climate Literacy.⁵ Increased professional development, improvements to schoolyard nature play and outdoor classrooms made schools healthier and more inviting places for children to interact with nature. In addition, increased access to nearby Naturehood sites and an emphasis on walking field trips led to 40 outdoor learning events that reached 3,500 children and youth.

- **Expanding safe pedestrian and bicycling infrastructure to improve neighborhood access to schools and nature play spaces:** The NEB team introduced the national Safe Routes to Parks program to Boulder, making it one of the first recipients of this technical assistance grant and bringing the Safe Routes program to parks in Colorado. Community audits of existing access to Primos Park led to lowered speed limits, quick-build improvements to enhance safety at nearby intersections and event infrastructure to support accessibility for people with disabilities. This interdisciplinary approach resulted in an \$8 million commitment from the city's transportation and mobility department to replace an adjacent bridge and improve multimodal access to the park. Momentum from these pilot efforts also led to similar initiatives to improve safe routes to and from other city parks and open spaces.⁶
- **Investing in paid youth engagement and leadership opportunities:** Youth engagement in the design and activation of nature spaces is a central tenet of Nature Everywhere Boulder's approach. Nature Everywhere Boulder compensates youth for their time and expertise through internships, stipends and other incentives. The coalition prioritizes youth's meaningful co-design and leadership in teen engagement programs, participation in designing park signage and installations, and gathering input for park renovations to inform city planning.

In 2025, the Nature Everywhere Communities initiative invited Nature Everywhere Boulder to participate in a Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) evaluation to strengthen its systems-change approach and to highlight its extensive early childhood nature

⁴ greenBVSD Action Plan: <https://www.bvdsd.org/departments/operational-services/sustainability>

⁵ Seal of Climate Literacy: <https://www.bvdsd.org/departments/operational-sengagementervices/sustainability/climate-literacy>

⁶ City of Boulder Community Connectors Program and Projects
<https://bouldercolorado.gov/services/community-connectors-program>

connections, youth engagement, and citywide planning efforts. Boulder was one of five communities across the United States that participated in this evaluation process.

About the Ripple Effects Mapping process

Ripple Effects Mapping (REM) is an evaluation method that engages a range of program participants to retrospectively and visually map the chain of effects resulting from a program or initiative. The REM process combines elements of Appreciative Inquiry,⁷ mind mapping, group interviewing and qualitative data analysis.⁸

On October 10, 2025, a group of 18 people from Nature Everywhere Boulder (NEB) member organizations came together for a REM session at the City of Boulder's OSMP offices. Erin Allaman, Director of Learning & Evaluation and Co-Director of Research for the Children & Nature Network, and Corrie Colvin Williams, a local evaluation consultant, facilitated the session. At the beginning of the session, participants interviewed each other in pairs using the following Appreciative Inquiry questions:

1. Please share a story about one or more highlights or successes that emerged from the Nature Everywhere Boulder and what you think were the key elements of success.
2. Please tell me about new or deepened connections with others (individuals, communities, organizations, educational institutions, government, philanthropic) you made as a result of your involvement with the Nature Everywhere Boulder? What did these connections lead to?
3. Please share a story about changes in policies, practices, programming, funding or natural or built spaces that emerged from the Nature Everywhere Boulder and what you think were the key elements of success.
4. What unexpected things did you observe in the community that contributed to the success of the Nature Everywhere Boulder?

After the interviews, a representative from each group reported the most important story they heard. These reflections were recorded using a mind-mapping program,

⁷ Appreciative Inquiry is a strengths-based organizational development process, increasingly used in evaluation, that involves the art and practice of asking questions that build on the successful, effective and energizing experiences of those involved with a program. For an overview see https://www.betterevaluation.org/en/plan/approach/appreciative_inquiry

⁸ More information about the Ripple Effects Mapping process can be found here: <https://extension.umn.edu/community-development/ripple-effect-mapping>

which participants could view on a screen. Participants also wrote their interview responses on a note-taking sheet so attendees could add additional reflections to the map after the session.

During a lunch break, the co-facilitators brainstormed a list of core impact themes that aligned with participants' stories. After the break, the facilitators led a discussion of these core impact themes, revising the theme titles and, at times, moving stories that fit one theme more closely than another. During this group reflection, participants also shared additional examples and stories. The guiding beliefs theme emerged during this step, as attendees explained the underlying beliefs that uniquely shaped the Nature Everywhere Boulder initiative. Finally, participants discussed several challenges that had arisen for their coalition. These challenges were added as a core theme.



REM Session, Boulder OSMP offices

After the session, facilitators incorporated all information from the interview sheets into the draft map. An additional six people who were unable to attend the October 10 session responded to the Appreciative Inquiry questions in an online survey, for a total of 24 participants. Once all data was added, the map was reviewed and edited by the REM facilitation team and a NEB core team member.

The core impact themes emerging from the interview process were:

- Guiding belief systems about connecting children to nature
- Collaborating through partnership and across organizations
- Engaging the community through co-design
- Empowering community
- Changing policy and practice
- Ongoing challenges and barriers

The remainder of this report is organized around these six themes with narrative examples from the Ripple Effects Map. Images of each section of the Ripple Effects Map are in Appendix B.

Findings organized by theme

Guiding belief systems about connecting children to nature

The guiding belief that children have a right to spend time in nature and that quality, safe, nearby access is essential to their overall health and well-being is woven into the fabric of the Nature Everywhere Boulder collaborative. This shared belief made Nature Everywhere Boulder’s creative, collaborative, cross-sector efforts possible.

Deeply informed by applied research, communities of practice, and resources from Nature Everywhere, the coalition is rooted in the belief that individual and community-based nature connection is intricately linked to our collective ability to address the climate crisis. The concept of “constructive hope” draws on the scholarship of Dr. Louise Chawla, local scholar and Professor Emerita in the Program in Environmental Design at the University of Colorado Boulder.⁹

“We share a belief that connecting children, especially those from underserved communities, to nature is essential for their overall well-being and development. Through parks and recreation programs, we can help ensure every child has the opportunity to experience the healing, confidence-building, and unifying power of nature.”

Constructive hope refers to the capacity to face environmental threats and uncertainties while finding positive meaning in taking action. In other words, “We cannot save that which we do not deeply appreciate, know, and love.”

For Nature Everywhere Boulder (NEB) partners, constructive hope means thinking outside the box about how to approach the design and implementation of nature play and outdoor learning spaces, what it means to authentically engage the community and youth and how to navigate systems that are often slow to change. By focusing on the key elements of healthy child development, the City of Boulder has changed how it designs public spaces by first considering how the child or youth will interact with the space, from gross to fine motor skills to opportunities for cooperative play, nature exploration, learning, and quiet reflection.

Partners also recognized the interdependence among connecting young people to nature, youth development, and cultivating future environmental stewards. One REM participant reflected, “How do we grow children that are responsive and capable of stewarding the natural world?”

⁹ Chawla, L. (2020) Childhood nature connection and constructive, hope: A review of research on connecting with nature and coping with environmental loss. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pan3.10128>

Collaborating through partnerships and across organizations

The intentional framing of the Nature Everywhere Communities initiative to create equitable access everywhere children live, learn and play, paired with these shared local beliefs, led organizations across the city to learn about each other's work and develop deep, effective partnerships. The strengthened collaboration and partnership have proven essential to connecting children and youth to nature at the desired city-wide scale.

Working within large systems and across departments can be challenging for any new or innovative initiative, as numerous factors come into play. "Parks require planning and maintenance, activation through programming, skilled and trained educators to deliver that programming, thoughtful community engagement to ensure the programming is relevant, and so on." This complexity is not the fault of any single department, but it can create significant barriers to a large community-wide initiative.

"Nature Everywhere Boulder grew collaboration between Parks and Recreation and Open Space & Mountain Parks departments. While our teams were aware of each other, many of us hadn't had the opportunity to learn about the programs each department offers to support underserved populations. Nature Everywhere Boulder brought new faces together, created space to share ideas, and revealed exciting areas of overlap that will strengthen future partnerships."

The NEB coalition, however, has developed thoughtful partnerships within city departments, across sectors and with community partners to overcome these challenges. The REM session revealed that a key foundation for this success was the shared belief among all partners that children and youth deserve access to quality, hyper-local natural spaces. It built on those shared beliefs to create "strategic partnerships and collaborations, bringing people together to help break barriers, create connections to solve problems, gather community feedback to respond to community needs, create safe spaces for the community, and connect the dots among organizations."

REM participants shared how they made new connections, and the coalition facilitated introductions that led to resource sharing of expertise, opportunities, and resources. Key leaders "rolled up their sleeves to figure out how to meaningfully engage the community to reach these shared goals." In doing so, they helped peel back the layers to understand "who to ask for resources, when to ask, and how to do so without hesitation."

Collaboration among city departments led to new programs and opportunities. For example, “Our Parks and Recreation Youth Services Initiative Mentor Program partners each summer with the Open Space & Mountain Parks Junior Rangers Program, creating an opportunity for youth from diverse populations and socioeconomic backgrounds to come together and give back to their community through nature-based service. While their primary focus is trail maintenance, participants gain so much more. They work alongside peers they may go to school with but don’t typically interact with, explore trail systems they’ve never accessed before, and learn about the unique plants, trees, and habitats that make up our local ecosystem.”

The coalition also supported engagement of new partners and partnerships, creating more opportunities for young people to connect to nature. “Through our involvement with Nature Everywhere Boulder, Boulder Journey School developed a strong and lasting relationship with Growing Up Boulder. This partnership has connected our school community to a broader network of people and organizations across Boulder. We are now regularly invited to community events, which have opened opportunities to meet new partners, share ideas, and deepen our engagement with the wider community.” NEB partners leveraged each other’s expertise, remaining nimble, cost-effective, and responsive to the community’s needs and desires.



Junior Ranger Leadership Crew
Photo Courtesy Growing Up Boulder

Engaging community through co-design

A key asset of this coalition has been its ability to engage the community through co-design. Boulder has a long history of engaging the community, especially youth, in the design and planning of public spaces. Growing Up Boulder (GUB) has been a key partner in this effort because of its extensive experience in meaningful youth engagement and leadership. GUB leveraged well-established relationships throughout the community to bring together children, youth, and their families from diverse backgrounds to guide the design of natural spaces. As one REM participant reflected, “The key elements of this success were the openness, respect, and time that GUB dedicated to the process. It felt like a true partnership built on listening, mutual learning, and valuing children’s voices as an essential part of community design.”

In addition to the shared vision of connecting children to nature and strong collaborative partnerships, lasting community engagement requires authentic listening and the capacity to act. Through strong partnerships, this coalition has mobilized the community's feedback and vision by leveraging the strengths of a diverse set of partners to meet those needs. The shared vision has helped keep these efforts on track and aligned with NEB's overall mission.

A particular focus of this coalition, strengthened by their equity mapping efforts, has been to intentionally engage historically marginalized community members. This focus has required partner organizations to offer engagement opportunities that feel culturally relevant and linguistically accessible to community members who have historically had less real or perceived access to natural play spaces. Community partners and bilingual city staff improved NEB's ability to foster connections and increase access to local natural spaces.

“When you create a welcoming space, it leads to nature connection, especially when communication, programming and signage are in the language and culture of the community.”

An important example of empowering the community and elevating voices to address community needs is Primos Park in the Four Mile Canyon Creek



BVSD families at the Sawhill Ponds Grand Re-Opening
Photo Courtesy Boulder OSMP

Naturehood. Co-design with the community led to the activation of a vacant lot that aligned with residents' priorities and needs for a nature-rich public space. Co-design has given momentum to Boulder's hyperlocal planning approach, which uses GIS equity maps and centers the development of close-to-home parks, gardens, open spaces, and natural play areas that link people to nature near where they live. Likewise, these hyperlocal approaches lend themselves to co-design with community members who are willing to engage in planning for nature close to home. The success of these projects informed the Naturehood for All framework.

The Naturehood for All framework has been applied in seven pilot projects. A Naturehood is a connected network of close-to-home parks, gardens, open spaces, and natural play areas that connect people with nature through free play, time outdoors, and shared stewardship. The seven pilot Naturehoods are:

1. Civic Area: Central Park & Civic Area, Eben G Fine Park and The Peoples' Crossing.
2. Gunbarrel Hill: Wood Brothers
3. Sawhill Ponds
4. Four Mile Canyon Creek: Primos Park and Crest View Park
5. Boulder and Whiterock Ditch: Howard Heusten Park and Valmont Bike Park
6. Goose Creek: North Boulder Park and Sanitas Trailhead
7. Wellman Creek: Aurora 7 Park and Admiral Arleigh A. Burke Park

As one city representative noted, co-design principles are rippling through city departments, fostering greater familiarity with and interest in collaboration among departments and with residents. While co-design is not uniformly applicable or practiced, Nature Everywhere Boulder has established models that are setting new precedents in how the city approaches planning.

Empowering community

A result of authentic engagement through co-design is community ownership of redesigned spaces and programs. REM participants reported that they increasingly see community members seeking opportunities to engage their families and neighbors in redesigned natural spaces well beyond the initial phase of engagement. “Building relationships with community leaders, we've seeded opportunities for them to become nature mentors. This has helped build trust, so community members feel comfortable spending time outdoors, from their neighborhoods to parks and open spaces. We're seeing new faces in OSMP public programs as people form new connections and develop a sense of belonging.”

“Through effective community engagement, community members become inspired to take the lead on an initiative to make it feel real for the community and inspire ownership.”



Youth leaders at Primos Park
Photo Courtesy Boulder OSMP

A classic question that often haunts infrastructure projects is, “If we build it, will they come?” The Nature Everywhere Boulder coalition demonstrated that when communities and local government design and build together, not only does the community show up, but they also feel a sense of ownership and commitment to the space. Co-design has led to positive community outcomes that rippled beyond the

NEB initiative. From young families independently seeking new spaces or programs to youth engagement through the OSMP Junior Rangers program and GUB design sessions, this coalition has inspired participation in public planning processes and shifted power dynamics, thereby empowering community members and increasing access to nature.

An example of this, offered during the REM session, was the renaming of “Primos Park” from “Violet Park.” In Spanish, the word “primos” translates to the English word “cousins.” Youth were inspired to rename the park and created the motto: “When you’re at Primos, you’re family.” This motto and the renaming were powerful illustrations of the symbolic transfer of ownership and community empowerment that resulted from cross-sector collaboration and youth engagement.

REM participants shared that community empowerment also rippled from engaging families and neighbors around Primos Park to “capacity building among parents themselves.” The city “hired the first Nature Play Community Connector, who is a monolingual Spanish speaker, mom of preschool age children and member of the neighborhood community adjacent to Primos Park.”

Changing policy and practice

An important outcome of the previous ripples has been changes in policy and practice across city departments, the Boulder Valley School District (BVSD), and other community organizations.

REM participants observed important shifts within city departments and programs. Aimed at removing language and cultural barriers for children and families, Boulder OSMP updated application processes for community connector jobs, simplified bilingual applications, created office hours specifically for Latino families, offered bilingual programs guided by Junior Rangers and hired a bilingual teen nature educator intern. In addition, the Parks and Recreation department now repurposes tree trunks and logs from the city’s wood lot for nature playscapes, a “low-scale high-impact” shift in how the city uses existing resources. OSMP also embraced concepts of nature play and opened its first Nature Discovery Area at Sawhill Ponds in 2025. Once siloed, city departments are finding new ways to adjust policies and practices to increase interdepartmental collaboration and better serve the community.

Based on lessons learned from co-designing with youth and children, city policies and practices now prioritize nature-based play and universal design. “Co-designing with children, youth and preschools leads to more use in spaces built with a hyperlocal focus.” The success of co-design helped address concerns about space

activation and returns on investment in nature spaces. Based on this success, the city is shifting away from installing traditional prefabricated, fixed plastic ADA play structures, which are limited in their ability to provide children and youth with the types of play most beneficial to healthy child development, and codifying nature-based play and universal design into municipal parks policies.

Collaboration between the city and school district led to the installation of nature play and outdoor learning spaces close to schools with a priority on "changing the spaces and places in schoolyards, supporting academic learning, and benefitting physical well-being by sending students and families to connect with nature." Because of the NEB coalition's efforts, the Naturehoods for All framework considers school locations: parklets and nature-play areas in parks adjacent to schools increase opportunities for place-based educational experiences, nature play, and local walking field trips. In addition, the district sustainability policy, the greenBVSD Action Plan, aligns with Nature Everywhere Boulder's goals, amplifying opportunities for school-based outdoor learning and nature play through climate-resilient green schoolyards, curriculum alignment and professional development for teachers.

These shifts in policy and practice are also informing longer-term policies to guide land use and planning. The city and county are now aligned around Nature Everywhere and the Naturehoods for All model as part of their five-year comprehensive planning process. The Boulder Valley Comprehensive Plan, the City of Boulder's primary policy document developed in partnership with Boulder County, includes nature access goals for the first time. REM participants expect the city to finalize the BVCP in the summer of 2026.

Ongoing Challenges and Barriers

At the end of the REM session, facilitators asked participants about the challenges and barriers they faced and, if applicable, those they had overcome. As with any large, multi-partner and community-based collaboration, challenges and barriers to implementation are inevitable. Strong partnerships and established community connections have helped Nature Everywhere Boulder (NEB) navigate some of the largest hurdles.

As a network of city and non-profit organizations, the coalition prioritized "meeting the community where they are, providing bilingual and culturally relevant programming and a persistent commitment to equity has helped establish trust both across leadership and within the community they aim to serve." Through collaboration with partners, OSMP co-developed the Lil' Explorers Program to address community barriers, including transportation, language, and food access, thereby improving families' opportunities to engage with programming. NEB was

able to overcome linguistic and cultural barriers in certain contexts, but they persist at the systemic level. Concerns around language barriers persist across the city, and there is a recognized need and desire to co-create more bilingual signage and programming.

REM attendees shared an ongoing need to build trust among community members to feel safe in the outdoors, citing immigrant and refugee community members who experienced violence in their home country, shaping their experience in outdoor spaces. Community leaders identified this as an ongoing barrier to equitable access to nature, challenging NEB coalition members to consider ways to help families overcome their fears so they can feel safe outdoors, enjoy nature and spend time together. The REM session surfaced the need for ongoing reflection and training to bring a trauma-informed lens when working with immigrant and refugee communities.

Attendees also raised the persistent challenge of talking, convening, and planning without action. Systems-level work often means change that is slow, non-linear or uncertain, obscuring the connection between vision, planning and seeing results. In this context, some REM participants reported facing institutional challenges in “stretching their authority” and advocating for change within local institutions that were not necessarily structured to support new approaches to nature access and community engagement. They recognized that innovation and the coalition's needs sometimes required them to take professional risks as leaders. However, at least one participant noted that, “the moment feels different, like the actors are all ready to move and take ownership of the [institutional] risks.” Drawing on strong professional networks and greater organizational alignment, these challenges were subsiding as the coalition demonstrated success in advancing children’s access to nature.

Additional priorities are ongoing training and sustaining organizations. REM attendees named professional learning opportunities to ensure that organizational leaders and representatives continue to prioritize culturally relevant programming and an equity-informed lens that reflects the communities they aim to serve. They also identified funding and capacity for under-resourced partner organizations as ongoing challenges.

With ripples of success in engaging youth and adult community leaders, co-designing natural spaces, empowering the community, and shifting institutional policy and practice, REM attendees expressed a higher-level concern about whether “the work” they are doing is getting it right: “How do we grow children who are responsive and capable of stewarding the natural world?” NEB coalition members wondered if their efforts and approach would be enough to realize their guiding belief

that children have a right to spend time in nature and that quality, safe, nearby access is essential to their overall health and well-being - and that this could be achieved through “a reciprocal relationship with the community and ecosystems we live within.”

Summary and key takeaways

This Ripple Effects Mapping evaluation documented the broad range of organizational and network impacts of the Nature Everywhere Boulder coalition.

The ripple effects map was developed in October 2025 with input from 24 members of the Nature Everywhere Boulder coalition. At the beginning of the session, participants interviewed each other in pairs using Appreciative Inquiry questions focused on the network's impacts. Five core impact themes emerged from the interview process. In addition, participants discussed some of the challenges they have faced. These challenges were added as a sixth theme:

- Guiding belief systems about connecting children to nature
- Collaborating through partnerships and across organizations
- Engaging community through co-design
- Empowering community
- Changing policy and practice
- Ongoing challenges and barriers

In summary, NEB has cultivated a strong coalition of organizations committed to enhancing equitable access to nature by fostering place-based nature-connection experiences. This group of people and organizations navigated persistent challenges while shifting local policies and practices and innovating to create more equitable and accessible nature connections. The effort is ongoing and constantly evolving as new needs and community perspectives arise. Still, this coalition has built a strong foundation of partnerships, collaboration, and authentic community engagement that will ensure ongoing commitment to expanding equitable access to nature for Boulder's children, teens and their families.

Reflections from Nature Everywhere Boulder's core team

The Cities Connecting Children to Nature early childhood nature connection cohort technical assistance, equity mapping and peer learning, combined with the Nature Everywhere Initiative's peer network, catalyzed to unite City of Boulder departments and community-based organizations around a shared vision: equitable access to nature where children and communities play, learn, work, care for the land, grow into leaders and begin careers.

Our coalition has an expansive vision; we are innovating and creating new ways to make nature accessible and equitable across Boulder. We are also part of a constellation of networks and initiatives with much broader reach: UNESCO's Child Friendly Cities Initiative, the City of Boulder's formal commitment to the Berlin Nature Pact, Nature Kids Boulder County, Great Outdoors Colorado's Generation Wild initiative and the Nature Everywhere Communities initiative. Through partnerships and initiatives, NEB coalition members continued to lead community engagement processes, advocate for changes in city policy and practice, develop the Naturehoods for All model, and deliver presentations on inclusive design practices to local, state, and national audiences.

Rooted in the work of Louise Chawla and the components leading to children's nature connection, action, and constructive hope and guided by collaboration with the Nature Everywhere Communities initiative, Boulder had the foundation, tools, and shared language needed to launch Nature Everywhere Boulder. This partnership strengthened cross-sector coordination, advanced nature-rich placemaking and space activation, elevated youth and community leadership, and aligned local policy with a child- and community-centered approach to nature access.

In 2025, years of effort culminated in changes to the City of Boulder's policies and practices. Open Space & Mountain Parks launched its first Nature Discovery Area, marking a significant milestone in child-centered nature play design. Parks and Recreation made commitments to the use of natural materials. For the first time, we hired a community connector for the outdoor events position and developed a toolkit to support community-led nature play gatherings. Lastly, the City of Boulder finalized its Nature Everywhere Boulder Strategic Vision and the Naturehoods for All strategic framework. We officially launched Nature Everywhere Boulder at the Parks and Recreation Advisory Board on November 17, 2025, with youth leaders and interdepartmental staff. Ali Rhodes, Director of Parks and Recreation, acknowledged this milestone: "Nature Everywhere Boulder initiative centers collaboration, thoughtful design, and authentic community voices in our parks and open spaces."

The REM session provided a moment of reflection, helping us appreciate the level of coordination and systems alignment that has taken place, as well as opportunities to strengthen our coalition. Challenges related to accessibility, inclusion, and representation persist, reinforcing the need for continued collaboration, accountability, and learning as the initiative grows. We regret that the REM session was held only in English, thereby limiting participation by a key community partner in this effort. We view this as a learning opportunity to improve language access and cultural relevance.

Nature Everywhere Boulder prioritizes youth voice and engagement; however, due to the timing and format of this event during a school day, youth were not included in this session. As a result, the perspectives of Junior Rangers, Youth Services Initiative, Forestry Corps, Nature Play and Nature Educator jobs for teens, Play-Maker and educator internships, paid teen consultant roles guiding the North Boulder Park redesign, and other opportunities for youth voice and representation aren't fully reflected in this report.

Following this ripple effects mapping process, we are still exploring ways to uplift youth reflections and stories from Nature Everywhere Boulder. We plan to gather youth perspectives and community members' input in future listening sessions. We will also continue strengthening governance and shared leadership, naming and defining Boulder's Naturehoods, and developing coordinated reporting and data tracking related to placemaking, space activation, and youth leadership and career pathways.

Nature Everywhere Boulder is building more than parks and programs — it is shaping a city where every child, in every neighborhood, has meaningful access to nature and the opportunity to belong, lead and thrive. By continuing to align systems, elevate community voice, and center equity, Boulder is laying the groundwork for a future in which nature is not a privilege but a shared foundation for health, hope, connection, belonging, and possibility.

Curry Rosato, Education and Outreach Manager, City of Boulder Open Space & Mountain Parks

Appendix A- List of partners

Boulder County E Movement

<https://emovement.org/>

Boulder Housing Partners

<https://boulderhousing.org/>

Boulder Valley School District Sustainability Management System: green BVSD

<https://www.bvdsd.org/departments/operational-services/sustainability>

City of Boulder Open Space & Mountain Parks

<https://bouldercolorado.gov/government/departments/open-space-mountain-parks>

Cool Boulder

<https://www.coolboulder.org/>

El Centro Amistad

<https://www.elcentroamistad.org/>

Growing Up Boulder

<https://www.growingupboulder.org/>

HHS Family Resource Schools and Youth Opportunities Program

<https://bouldercolorado.gov/services/family-resource-schools>

National Wildlife Foundation ECHO

<https://www.nwf.org/ECHO>

Nature Kids/Jóvenes de la Naturaleza

<https://caee.org/programs/act/be-recognized/nature-kidsjovenes-de-la-naturaleza>

Parks and Recreation Youth Services Initiative (YSI)

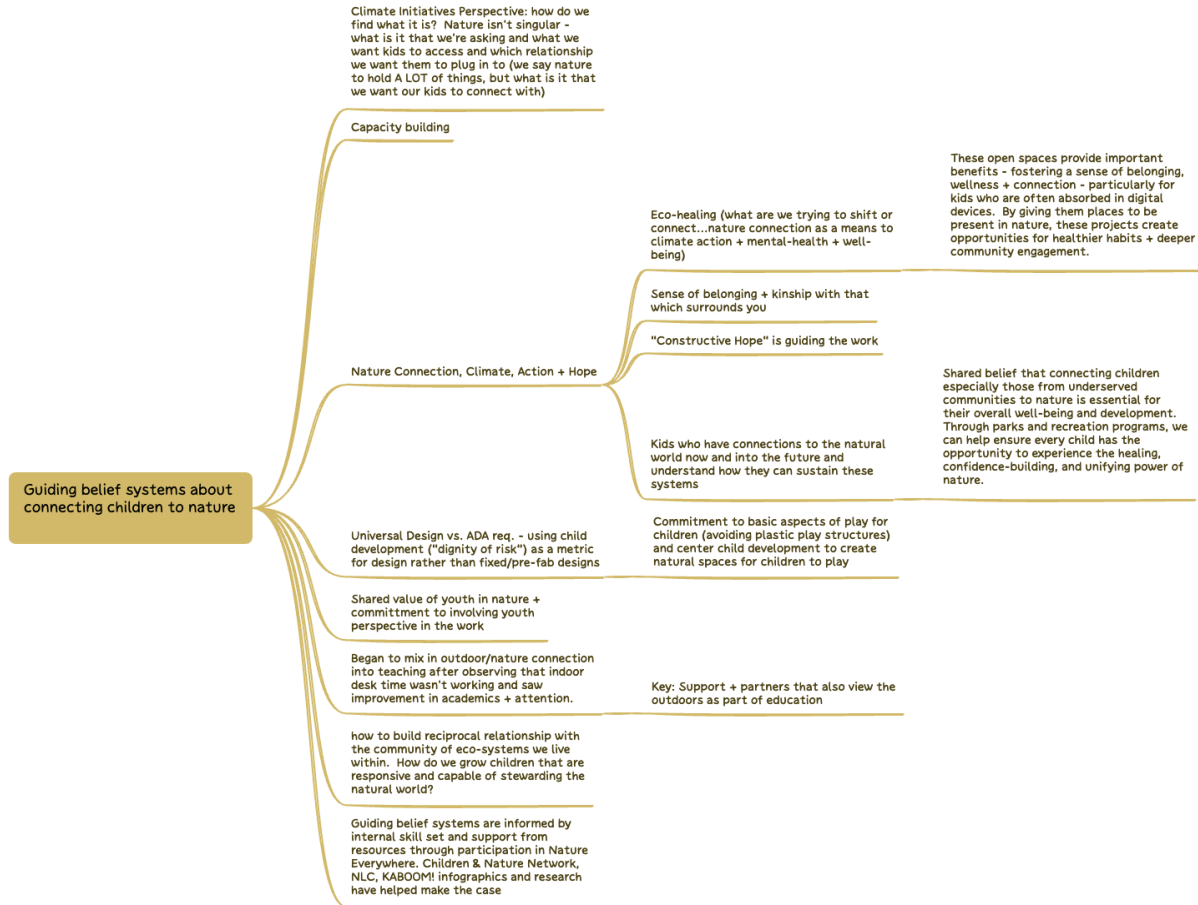
<https://bouldercolorado.gov/services/youth-and-family-servicesyouth-services-initiative-ysi>

Thorne Nature Experience

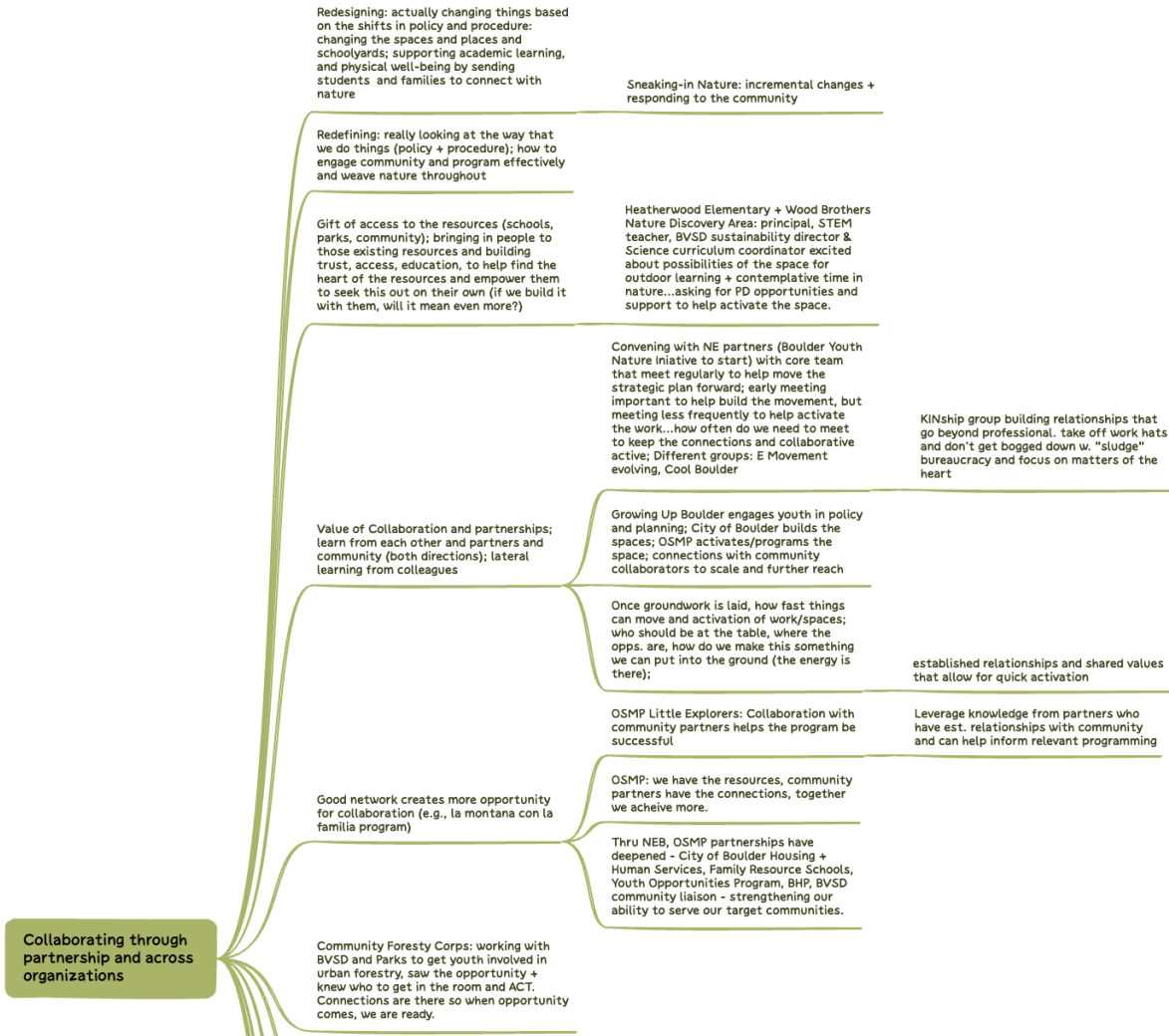
<https://www.thornenature.org/>

Appendix B – Sections of the Ripple Effects Map

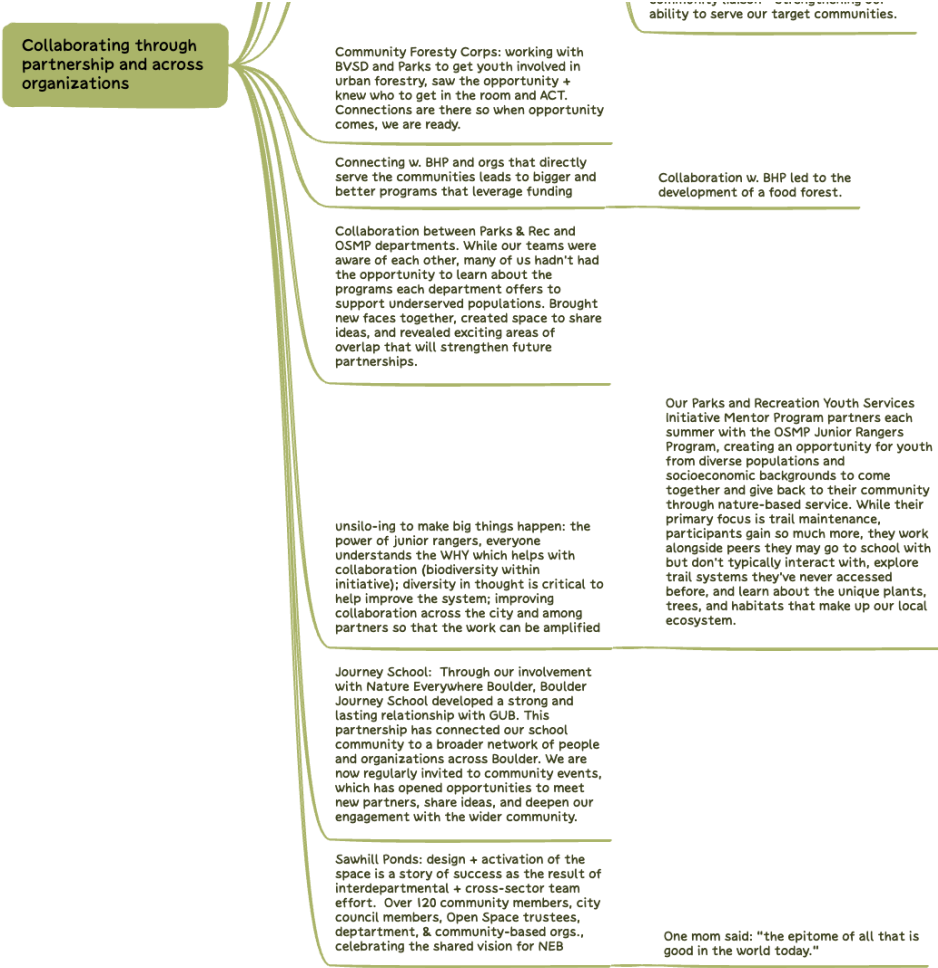
Guiding belief systems about connecting children to nature



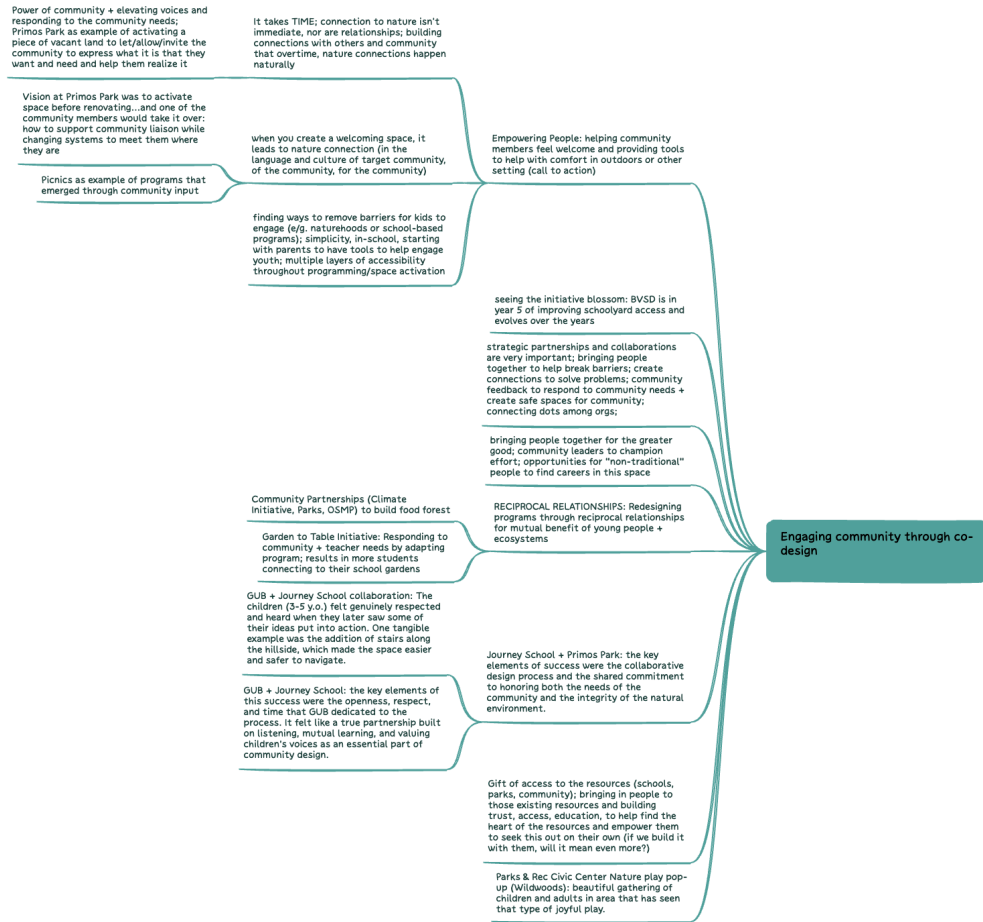
Collaborating through partnership and across organizations



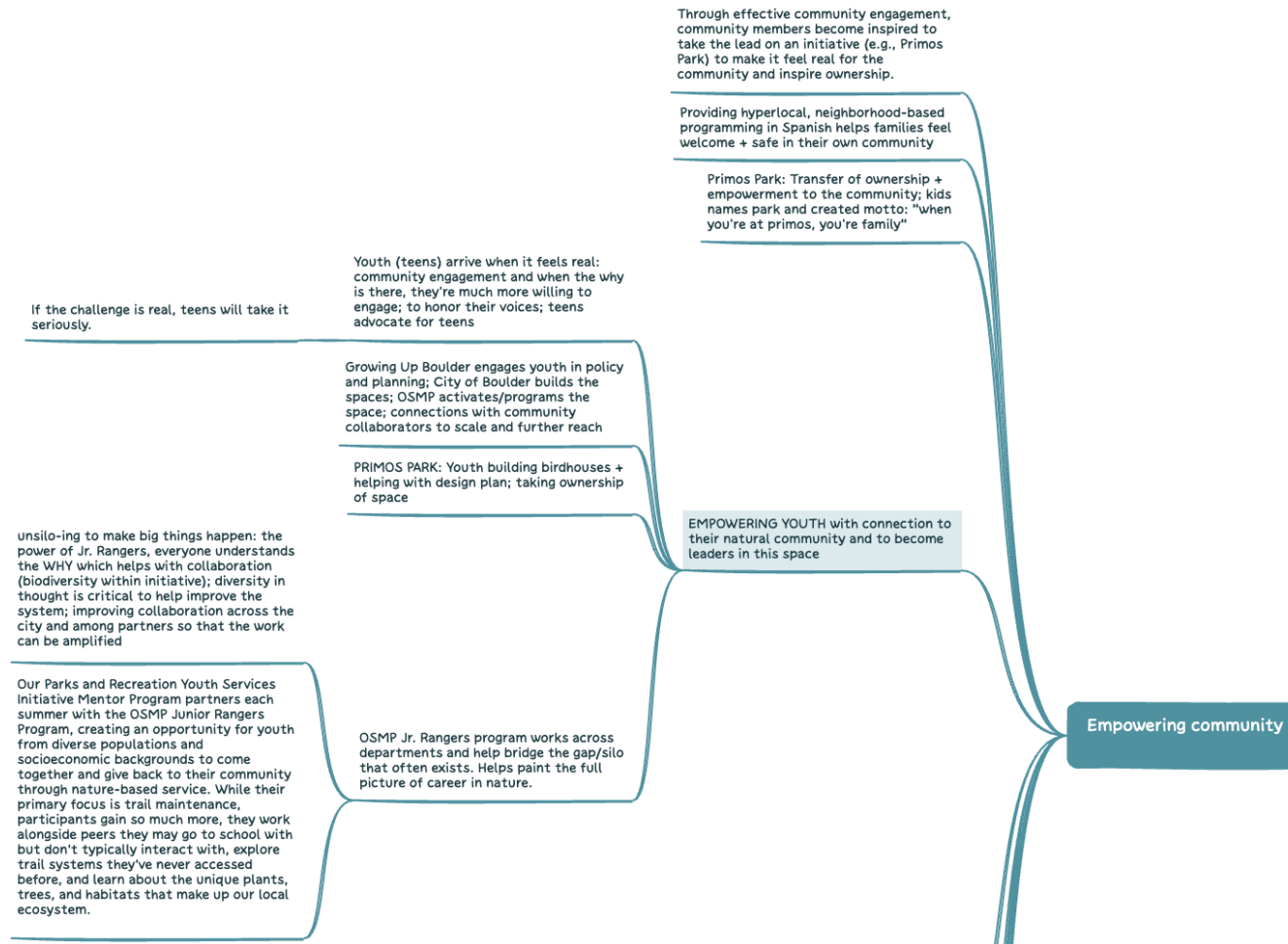
Collaborating through partnership and across organizations continued



Engaging community through co-design



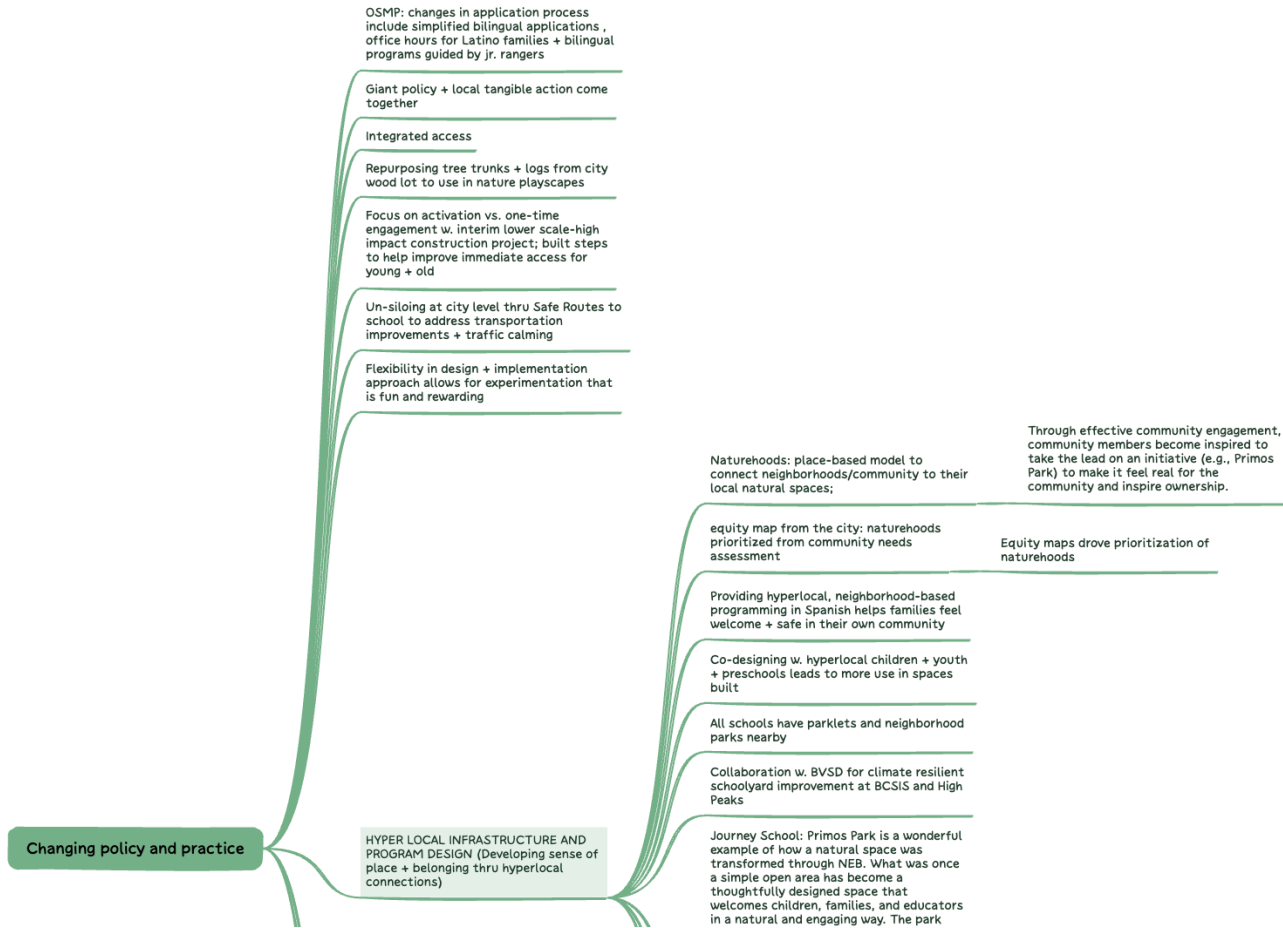
Empowering community



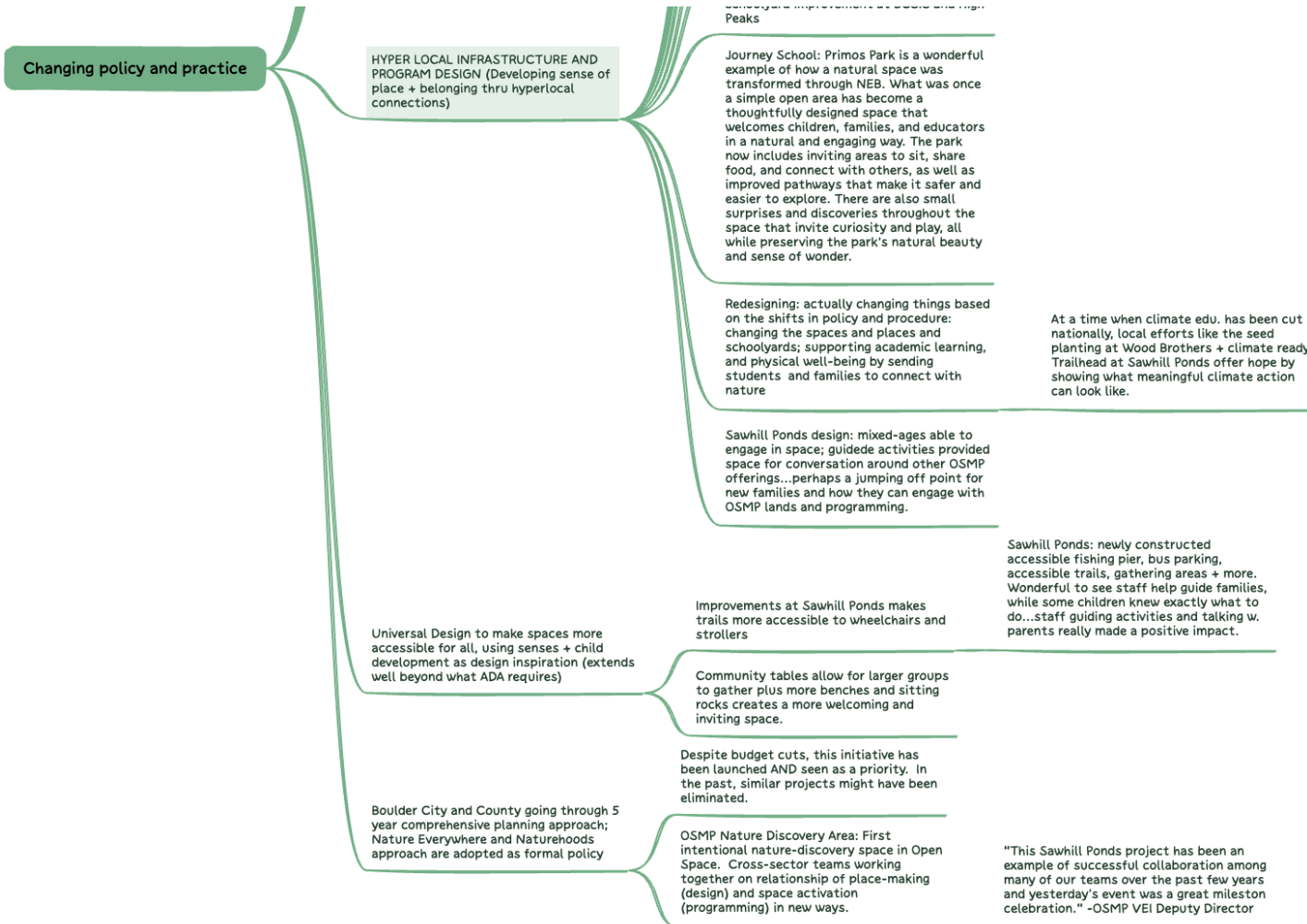
Empowering community cont'd



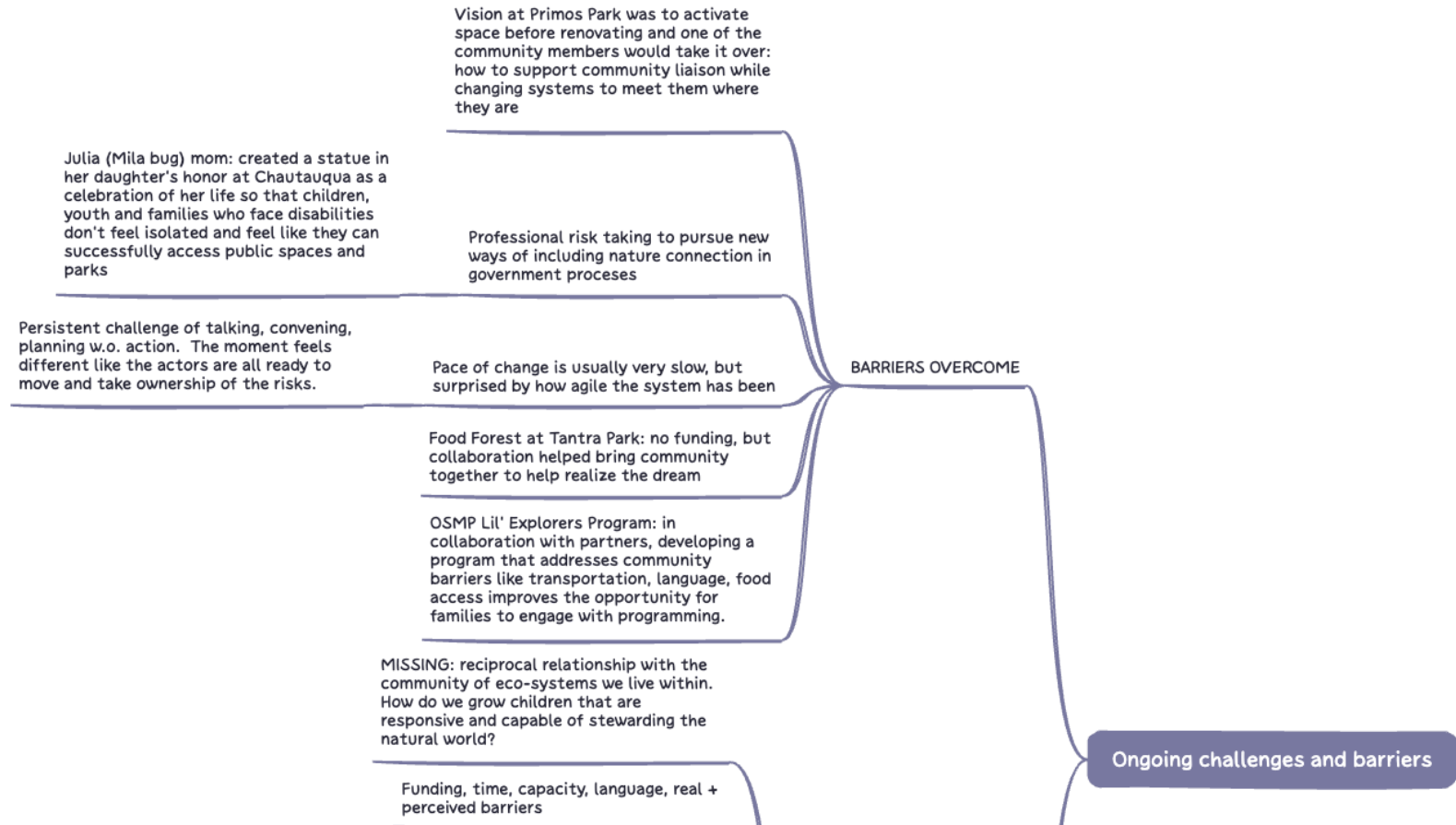
Changing policy and practice



Changing policy and practice cont'd



Ongoing challenges and barriers



Ongoing challenges and barriers continued

