

My Story



Prescription for Parks

Frick Park

By Mike Cornell, Nature Educator

"As a child I spent nearly every day in the park walking and biking to school, exploring, and playing."



Take a moment and think back to the first time you felt at home in a natural place. Maybe it was in a yard, at a playground, in the wilderness, or at a national park.

For me it happened in Frick Park, the largest regional park in Pittsburgh, encompassing 644 acres entirely within the city limits. I and many other

Pittsburghers have been lucky enough to grow up with Frick Park in our backyards. As a child I spent nearly every day in the park walking and biking to school, exploring, and playing. I was astounded when I learned that Frick Park draws people in from all over the region and the world.

But I suppose I shouldn't have been surprised. Frick Park has hosted nationally acclaimed educational programs for nearly its entire



Keystone Fund Investment: \$287,000

Local Funds Leveraged: \$254,000

Funded: Conservation management plan, trail construction

existence. Connecting people to nature is the very reason that the park was created. Helen Frick asked her father Henry to give Frick Park to the city so that Pittsburgh's children could play in the woods and learn about nature.

The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy recently completed construction of the new Frick

Environmental Center after the previous building was destroyed in a fire in 2002. The new facility, which is a world leader in sustainable design, houses education programs that serve thousands of people each year. Currently, the programs serve people from three years old through adulthood. Participants come for summer camps, school programs, workshops, natural history courses, and hikes.

Learn more at KeystoneFund.org.

There are very tangible benefits to creating your own connections to nature. There is a large body of evidence that shows that proximity to and use of a high quality park improves people's physical and emotional health. Just 30 minutes a week in a natural space is statistically linked to a 7-9% decrease in blood pressure and related heart disease. The Pittsburgh Parks Conservancy has been a large part of helping people get and stay active in Pittsburgh's fantastic city parks.



Pittsburgh Parks Rx is a toolkit that equips kids (and the adults in kids' lives) in Pittsburgh with ways to have fun and be physically active in the parks. Parks Rx focuses on getting kids into their local parks through connections with their school, community, and healthcare providers. The program emphasizes the importance of outdoor activity in the physical, emotional, and behavioral health of our city's young people. As with all of our programs, the main focus is on having fun in nature while learning. Having fun in the park builds comfort, comfort brings people back, and repeat visits build connections. The point of Parks Rx is for kids to grow up in Pittsburgh's parks so they grow up to be healthy adults who love and value the truly exceptional parks in this city.

It's really great seeing a child's connection to the park and love of nature start to form. At the end of one of our programs, we went around in a circle sharing our favorite thing that we did. Most of the kids said that everything was their favorite part, some said snack, some came up with something original, but one sticks out in particular. He wasn't the quietest in the group,

but definitely wasn't the loudest. After a second of collecting his thoughts, he said that coming into the program, he really wasn't thrilled to be there. He would have been far more comfortable and happy inside. But he had a great time. He learned what he is capable of doing, and he said that after his time with us, that there's nothing he wants more than to be outside in the woods.

We know that everyone's experience is different, and there's no age limit for developing healthy habits and connecting to nature, so we recently created another program along the same lines as Parks Rx. Healthy, Active, and Green is a new series of programs designed specifically for people over 50. As people near and reach retirement is an important time to focus on developing and maintaining a healthy lifestyle, and having a group of people along with you turns something you know you should do into something you know you want to do.

So whether you're three or 103 or anywhere in between, there's something for you, and someone like you in Frick Park. So come out, have fun, and be well.

See you in the park!

Learn more at [KeystoneFund.org](https://www.KeystoneFund.org).