

PRESENTER BIOGRAPHIES

**John Henderson, Executive Director
Parks RX (Keynote Speaker), Washington D.C.**

John Henderson, Executive Director of Park Rx America, is a Certified Parks and Recreation Executive, attorney, and city planner with over 25 years of experience in parks and recreation at the Chicago Park District and the Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission. John earned a Juris Doctor degree from The John Marshall Law School, a Bachelor's in Community Planning from the University of Cincinnati, a Certificate in Public Performance Measurement from Rutgers University, and certificates in Public Health Fundamentals and Human Health and Nature from the Epley Institute at Indiana University. John has been an instructor at the Park and Recreation Directors School and served as Chair of the Commission for Accreditation of Park and Recreation Agencies.

**Naomi Sachs, Professor
University of Maryland**

Naomi Sachs, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture at the University of Maryland and Founding Director of the Therapeutic Landscapes Network (www.healinglandscapes.org). She has published and presented nationally and internationally on the positive role of nature in human health. Naomi is co-author with Clare Cooper Marcus of the book *Therapeutic Landscapes: An Evidence-Based Approach to Designing Healing Gardens and Restorative Outdoor Spaces*. She is Co-Editor of the peer-reviewed journal, *Health Environments Research & Design*.

**Sarah Carlson, Founder and Director
Brooklyn Nature Days, NYC, NY**

Sarah is a Bank Street Graduate with an M.S. Ed. in Early Childhood Elementary Education, and has taught in a variety of public and private school settings in New York and New Jersey for the past 21 years. She is the 2018 recipient of the Margaret O'Neill Early Childhood Nature Educator Award for her work with Brooklyn Nature Days. Sarah is certified as a Forest School Kindergarten Teacher through Cedarsong Nature School and is currently pursuing her New York Master Naturalist Certification through Cornell University's Cooperative Extension Program. She currently serves on the Board of the Eastern Regional Association of Forest and Nature Schools (ERAFANS). Sarah holds Permanent Teaching Certification in both New York and New Jersey. She is inspired by children's authenticity, energy, and expression and is rooted in the idea that we are always learning through experience, reflection, and finding the magic in day to day moments. Sarah believes strongly in the freedom, health, and creativity that ample time in nature can provide.

**Rose Brusaffer, PhD
Backyard Basecamp/BLISS Meadows**

Rose is a Baltimore native who started working in nature-based ECE in 2011. She believes connecting children to nature is a means of building a sustainable future. Her research and professional interests include ecological literacy, nature play and natural play spaces, and ecological worldviews. She conducted research as a forest school teacher at [Wild Haven Forest Preschool & Childcare](#) in Baltimore, MD and serves as an Environmental Education Programs Specialist with [Backyard Basecamp](#), whose

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mission is “inspiring Black, Indigenous, and all People of Color (BIPOC) across Baltimore City to find nature where they are and empowering them to explore further.”

Jason Lee, Director of Environmental Education

First Baptist Church of Clarendon Child Development Center, Alexandria, VA

Jason grew up in Arlington, VA with an urban landscape in his front yard and a forest in his backyard. He feels lucky to have grown up in the best of both worlds and to have the anchor of the natural world to fall back on during tough times. Jason has been an early childhood educator for over twenty years working in a variety of teaching and administrative positions. Five years ago, Jason began a journey into nature-based early childhood education and with it came a growing appreciation for the magic that happens in outdoor settings. Jason is a certified Nature-Based Teacher (level 2) through the Eastern Region Association of Forest and Nature Schools. He earned a Bachelors in Elementary Education and is currently pursuing a master’s degree in Curriculum Design. Jason is the Environmental Education Director at a preschool in Arlington, VA. Most importantly, he is a husband and father to two young children, ages three and five years old.

Amanda Knight, Early Childhood Health Outdoors (ECHO) Senior Design Coordinator

National Wildlife Federation (NWF)

Amanda Knight is a landscape designer who is experienced in working with communities to create engaging outdoor spaces for young children. Through ECHO, she currently collaborates with stakeholders and community members across the country to help schools, child care centers, public parks, neighborhood spaces, and most recently a children’s museum reimagine and improve the quality of their outdoor spaces as well as encourage children’s connection with the natural world. ECHO enhances nature play and learning wherever young children spend their time, with the vision that every young child experiences nature daily for the health of our kids, communities, and planet. Amanda joined the National Wildlife Federation in June 2018 after receiving a B.S. in Landscape Architecture from the Ohio State University, where her design research and capstone focused on children and their relationship to the natural and built environment. Outside of ECHO, she mentors high school students through ACE Mentor Program of Colorado, volunteers as a designer for Green Schoolyards America, and serves as a board member for the Jane Silverstein Ries Foundation.

Liz Houston, Early Childhood Health Outdoors (ECHO) Partnerships Manager

National Wildlife Federation (NWF)

Liz Houston has three decades of experience in management, strategic planning, resource development, communication, and community engagement. She currently helps facilitate local and statewide partnerships to help scale the ECHO program nationally. ECHO enhances nature play and learning wherever young children spend their time, with the vision that every young child experiences nature daily for the health of our kids, communities, and planet. Previously, Liz managed the statewide advocacy network for the Colorado Children’s Campaign, and was a fundraiser at the Denver Art Museum, the National Sports Center for the Disabled, and Colorado School of Mines. Most recently, Liz served as Executive Director of Colorado’s Early Childhood Council Leadership Alliance.

University of Maryland Department of Landscape Architecture

Lauren Gray, Graduate Student

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After earning her Bachelor's degree in Music Performance, Lauren went on to start her Master's in Landscape Architecture at the University of Maryland. For her thesis research, Lauren is exploring the intersection of soundscapes and the landscape in the urban park setting.

Alison Jones, Graduate Student

Alison has a background in art history, painting, and sustainable residential design. She is interested in how we perceive the environment through all of our senses and how this knowledge can be applied to the design of restorative public landscapes.

Emma Podietz, Graduate Student

Emma is a third year Master of Landscape Architecture student at the University of Maryland. Her thesis focuses on the integration of vegetation dynamics theory into long term design of public parks.

Christopher Samoray, Graduate Student

With a background in science communication and marine biology, Chris' work in landscape architecture supports his interdisciplinary interests. For his thesis, Chris is studying climate change issues related to coastal management and user experience in shoreline parks and public spaces.

Dr. Byoung-Suk Kweon, Associate Professor, University of Maryland

Dr. Kweon is an associate professor in the Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture at the University of Maryland. She is also a registered landscape architect and a member of the Maryland Nature Play Space Workgroup.

Brenda Iraola, Supervisor for the Park Development Division at Maryland-National Capital Park and Planning Commission

Brenda leads the Landscape Architecture Section with over 29 years of experience in planning and landscape architecture, 23 years with the Maryland-National Capital Park & Planning Commission (M-NCPPC) and six years with an engineering firm expanding her practical knowledge of the built environment. With her knowledge of environmental based planning, she plans park development, works with consultants, and supervises staff to produce code compliant projects for functional park facility design. Strategic coordination with the community residents and elected officials is an important part of her design process to achieve successful project implementation. Brenda has worked on a variety of private sector and public sector projects to develop designs solutions to site problems. She is most proud of her efforts for the Park Development Division, where she focuses on delivering excellence in design within the park system. She has promoted the initiative to design custom playgrounds so that the citizens of Prince George's County can experience a unique play environment similar to that of Disney World. She and her staff use the design process to turn site problems into design assets. Several of her projects have been published in magazine articles and she has received awards and recognition for her unique "imagination playground" design initiative. Brenda is a licensed landscape architect in Maryland and is certified for SHA and MDE Erosion and Sediment Ctrl. and Playground Safety Inspector. She is a member of ASLA, NRPA, and MRPA. Brenda taught planting design as a Graduate Teaching Assistant at Kansas State University and held educational classes at the University of Maryland on construction and road design.

Ali Culhane

Coordinator, Get2Green

Ali Culhane is the Coordinator for Get2Green, the environmental stewardship program for Fairfax County Public Schools. As Coordinator, she supports school-based and division-wide environmental stewardship initiatives around such topics as native wildlife habitat, sustainable food, energy

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conservation, and waste reduction. She works between facilities, instructional services, and food services with the goal of maximizing equitable access to environmental and outdoor education for students. She holds a B.A. in Environmental and Sustainability Studies from George Mason University.

Hilary Roberts-King, Executive Director

Downtown Baltimore Child Care Center (DBCCC)

Hilary lives in Baltimore, Maryland, and is the Executive Director of Downtown Baltimore Child Care, Inc and an author of "Families, Schools and Children: Building Partnerships for Educating Children." She has made multiple contributions to the field of early childhood education as a public school teacher, a teacher-educator, a leader, and in service to diverse communities.

Michelle Byron, Our Backyard NYC

Growing up in rural northeastern Pennsylvania, Michelle played outside unsupervised every day. Her backyard was key to so much in her life. It's where she first explored nature, began studying plants and animals, learned to cooperatively play, and escaped into nature's solace.

After working as a paralegal in NYC for a decade, she became a mother. Then she discovered her true mission in life: to help city folks see, feel, hear, and connect to nature and all its benefits.

Michelle earned a master's degree in Environmental Education and Interpretation from the University of Wisconsin. Her thesis was "Adapting the European Model of Forest Kindergarten to Urban Areas." Michelle has written and co-written several e-book chapters about environmental education for Cornell University's Civic Ecology Lab.

Michelle designed and led indoor and outdoor education programs in state parks and national recreational and historical sites, public and private schools, summer camps, and a YM-YWHA. Plus she operated a forest and garden preschool co-op in a Manhattan community garden and Central Park. She is a homeschool teacher and director of the newly created OurBackyard.nyc, providing classes to help children and families become comfortable in nature and use city parks like their own backyards. Nature-based preschools, inclusive education, birdwatching, and gardening are her passions.

Nancy Striniste, Founder and Principal Designer

EarlySpace, LLC

Nancy Striniste, founder and principal designer at EarlySpace, LLC, has a unique background as both a landscape designer and an early childhood educator. She has worked with families, schools, childcare centers, municipalities and organizations to create sustainably designed natural play and learning spaces and to teach teachers and others about how to use the outdoors for play and learning.

Ms. Striniste is the author of *Nature Play at Home: Creating Outdoor Spaces that Connect Children to the Natural World*. She teaches at Antioch University New England in their Nature-based Early Childhood Education Graduate Program, serves on the Nature Play Work Group of the Maryland Partnership for Children and Nature, and on the Leadership Team of NoVA Outside. She is a certified Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional.

Mary Hardcastle, Director

Carrie Murray Nature Center, Baltimore City Recreation and Parks

Mary Hardcastle is the Director of the Carrie Murray Nature Center, a facility of Baltimore City

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Recreation and Parks. Mary has been a longtime advocate for re-connecting children with nature. She is currently on the core team of Baltimore's Cities Connecting Children to Nature Initiative supported by the National League of Cities and the Children & Nature Network (C&NN). She is a member of C&NN's national Grassroots Leadership and has presented at state and national conferences. Mary draws on an undergraduate degree in Botany and an M.F.A. in Interdisciplinary Studies using the performance arts to encourage an integration of ecology and place-based education, sustainability, and social justice. Mary is an avid gardener, the mother of two nature loving young adults, and enjoys hiking and biking in the amazing natural places throughout Baltimore City and across Maryland.