

# Little Sprouts encourages big action

— Article by Cathy Kuntz  
Photography by Danielle Giles

It's a rainy Saturday morning in May at Annie Williams Park in Bracebridge. Kids are dressed in raincoats and boots running around the park, jumping in puddles. But these kids also mean business. Families have come to help community volunteers plant trees in the park.

This is the Little Sprouts Eco Club in action. The kids pick up shovels and put on gloves and by the end of the morning they have helped the group plant 40 trees.

The Little Sprouts Eco Club educates and engages children by teaching them positive eco-habits. The group is organized around monthly themes that focus on a specific eco-action, like composting, how to conserve water, recycling and gardening.

"It's fun and interactive," says founder and organizer Christina Hunter. "It's a chance for families to learn together and do something positive."

Christina started the group after attending a Climate Reality workshop with Al Gore. They discussed how to think positively about climate change and ways to bring eco knowledge back to communities.



# Budding ECOLOGISTS

## BUDDING ECOLOGISTS



Eleven moms and their children attended the first official meeting in July 2015. Christina then got the Muskoka Conservancy involved – the organization was thrilled to add a children’s component to their conservation organization.

Little Sprouts is open to all ages, but most children range from four to seven. Anywhere from 20 to 30 children attend each meeting and there’s no fee. The group has 154 parents and grandparents who follow on Facebook and the group is growing.



At each monthly meeting the group shares what they know about the topic and then do a related activity. At the end of the session each child receives a sticker on their Little Sprouts certificate. They also take home a monthly task; an activity related to the theme.

“The kids loved the November theme of Rewilding,” Christina says. “Being in nature is a challenge with all of the TV shows and electronics today. Our goal was to instill a love of nature. We encouraged everyone to stay outside in nature a little longer. Then we set aside a special place in the house where they could set a leaf or a branch from outside.”

Little Sprouts are all about action. They have visited recycling and composting depots, learned how to make healthy juices from fresh ingredients and toured a local greenhouse to learn about growing greens and sprouts.

“The children are curious and want to learn. They take on each task with energy and enthusiasm and are eager to be helpful,” says Hunter. “They get so excited and are proud of what they’re doing. It’s wonderful to see a four year old happy about composting.”

The Little Sprouts meet from 10–11 a.m. on the last Sunday of every month, alternating meetings between Bracebridge and Gravenhurst. In the warmer months, they gather outside in Annie Williams or Gull Lake Park.

“You can come and go as you please. We didn’t want parents to feel this was one more thing they have to commit to.”

Everyone is welcome to join the Little Sprouts Eco Club.

“Cottage kids are welcome. We want grandparents and parents. We want older kids. You can come as a group. You don’t have to be an environmentalist,” says Christina.

She tries to keep each month’s theme a secret. But she did give a hint that June’s meeting would involve a hike somewhere in beautiful Muskoka. It’s clear the kids aren’t the only ones having fun. **LS**



Founder and organizer Christina Hunter, with two enthusiastic “little sprouts”, excited to be outside, enjoying nature.



“The children are curious and want to learn. They get so excited and are proud of what they’re doing.”