

Stop and Smell the Roses



We often talk about the need to pause, breathe, and unplug. One way to do that is to take even one minute to mindfully appreciate the beauty of the world around you—whether it’s a bird in flight or a plant growing in a garden or a sidewalk crack.

In this issue, we continue with our recent theme of hobbies for wellness and include articles on social and environmental wellness

Social Wellness and Hobbies

By Crystal Brandow

Hobbies can strengthen and support many dimensions of wellness. Hobbies, like putting together puzzles or painting, can improve mood and lower stress while supporting intellectual wellness. Walking, hiking, or doing outdoor water sports like kayaking can support physical health while also increasing time spent outside, supporting environmental wellness. These activities can support general well-being, improve mood, and decrease stress levels.

There are many hobbies that you can get involved in – take the time to see what feels best for you! And, many hobbies can contribute to expanding social wellness when we join, participate, or engage with them with others. Social wellness is about developing a sense of connection, belonging, and a well-developed support system.

Meeting a group at a library for a regular chess club or joining a weekly walking group are just two examples of hobbies that can help you develop a sense of connection and belonging and build and expand your support system, while also enhancing other dimensions of wellness.

At Policy Research Associates, Inc. a few staff members came together to record a podcast on how they work to enhance their social wellness. We noticed that the hobbies described as increasing social wellness contribute to other dimensions of wellness, too.

Take, for example, playing volleyball. One person talks about playing volleyball, despite hesitations to join a group with a bunch of strangers, and how this evolved into supporting social wellness by building community with new people, while also contributing to improved physical wellness, with each night of playing consisting of a few hours of physical activity.....Continued on page 2

Policy Research Associates, Inc. (www.prainc.com) is an organization whose mission is to create positive social change through technical assistance, research and training. The podcast is available for download (see page 4).

Social Wellness *continued from page 1*

Playing the bagpipes was another activity discussed on the podcast. This contributes to social wellness, through bonding with fellow performers during weekly practices, as well as to intellectual wellness, through memorizing music and staying skilled at playing. Holding a bag pipe while marching in a parade can be a form of staying active and contribute to physical wellness, too. A pleasant surprise for the speaker was, after getting involved in this group, learning about the opportunity to perform inside gigs and getting paid to play – supporting financial wellness.

Other hobbies shared on the podcast include dancing, quilting, and singing. Each activity, while promoting a sense of connection and belonging while building a support system, also benefitted the speakers in other areas of their lives. And, a couple of the people on the podcast spoke about being an introvert or having social anxiety. Yet, they were able to get involved in hobbies that boosted social interaction, or even pushed themselves to take on leadership roles in social groups to be in more outgoing positions.

When selecting any hobby, it's important to do what makes you feel safe. One speaker described seeking out a welcoming environment and finding people who support you just the way you, which can be a first step to picking up a hobby and supporting wellness.

Knitting *by Pat Nemec*

Over the past few issues of *Words of Wellness*, we have talked about how hobbies can boost our wellness. For me, knitting affects many of the dimensions of wellness! For example, my grandmother knit for me and now I knit for my grandchildren. This intergenerational link feeds my spiritual and emotional wellness.

Intellectual wellness includes recognizing our creative abilities and finding ways to expand our knowledge and skills while discovering the potential for sharing those gifts with others. My intellectual wellness is an important part of knitting for me, as I am always learning new techniques and challenging myself with new patterns or trying to design my own. Like other hobbies, knitting has many informative podcasts and video tutorials available online. Sometimes, I listen to audiobooks while I knit, which also contributes to intellectual wellness.

As a purposeful and productive activity, knitting is part of my occupational wellness. Social wellness is enriched by my conversations about knitting with family, friends, and other knitters who are now no longer strangers. Since knitting is relaxing to me, it's a stress reliever that's good for physical wellness—a benefit confirmed by research on the value of handcrafts and by descriptions of knitting as an active meditation.

The handknitted afghans in my home are good for my environmental wellness. They are warm in the winter, nice to look at, and remind me how much I enjoyed making them. I can't say my financial wellness is always improved by my knitting hobby, but I do make small projects from scraps (free!) and use them as homemade gifts.

Knitting has been a life-long activity and I find I can't *not* do it. If my schedule gets in the way of knitting, I can feel stress building. But all it takes is a few minutes with my knitting needles and a deep breath, and I relax again.



Loving Our Oasis in Space

By Maria Martinez Alonso

I remember seeing a drawing from NASA showing a couple of astronauts in their space suits, helmets off under their arms, resting on the top of a hill overlooking a beautiful valley, a lake in the front, a majestic mountain range in the back. The caption reads, “Earth - Your Oasis in Space. Where the Air is Free and Breathing is Easy” (see page 4). It made me think of all the gifts around us we take for granted and how disconnected our life is from the natural world. We see ourselves *on* Earth, outside of it; it’s there for us to exploit or to be used, not for us to love and respect.

However, many of us, over-urbanized and chronically stressed, are realizing that spending time in Nature feels like going back home; that there is a deep longing inside each one of us for wilderness, for natural environments. We are learning to appreciate, to enjoy, and to experience a sense of wonder that we are here, breathing, at all; that we are part of Planet Earth.

As human beings, we are not separate from Nature, but we seem to forget this in our daily lives. We disconnect from what actually can help us find sanity and balance. When we reconnect and are in tune with the rhythms of the forests, the trees, the mountains, the ocean, a sense of being complete emerges. We feel well, physically safe, at peace. Natural environments invite us to give ourselves time: our muscles relax, our faces soften, our minds start settling down and our hearts touch tranquility. It’s a powerful practice.

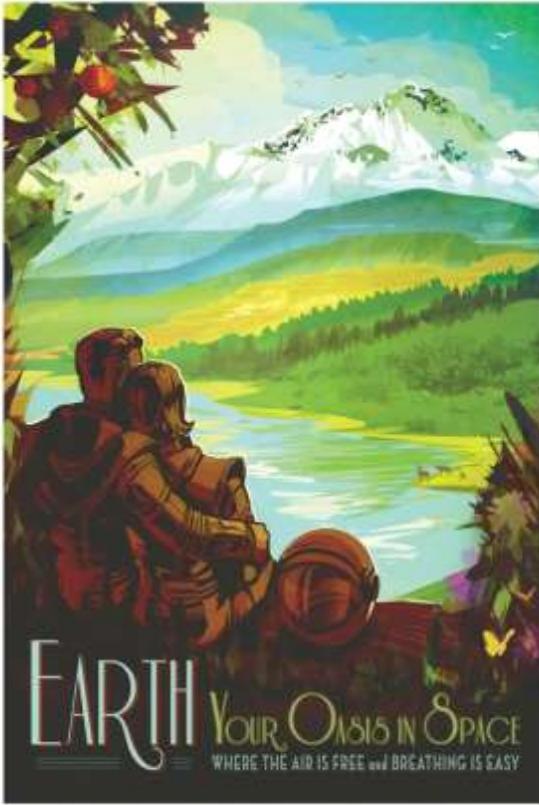
As a self-care strategy, time in nature has a healing effect. Listening to a birdsong, starting a garden, finding a spot in a park and simply sitting there without checking our phones and just noticing seasonal changes, has proven to be highly beneficial for both our mental and physical health.

Nature also is good for our spiritual wellness, transcending our daily worries and the busy-ness of our minds, awakening us to our profound connection with all living things. Researchers note that, when we do physical activities in natural settings instead of artificial environments, we tend to experience less fatigue, less sadness, less anxiety, and less anger. We find relief from the everyday stresses of life and cultivate resilience; positive emotional reactions are triggered because we are genetically hard-wired to affiliate with other forms of life (the “biophilia hypothesis”) and when we don’t, we suffer.

Some say, “Take care of your body. It’s the only place you have to live in.” Well, we also need to take care of the Earth—isn’t it the only place where we can live? Too many of us are disconnected from the land. Realizing this, more and more people in different countries are choosing to relocate closer to natural environments. I’ve been steering myself in this direction over the course of the years. I grew up in a busy European capital city but have gradually replaced buildings and traffic noise with fields, cows and forests in the New Jersey countryside.

Even in the age of “technostress,” our bodies are still adapted to Nature. The discrepancy between the way we live and what our bodies need, keeps our stress levels high and our nervous system constantly stimulated. We take care of ourselves when we reconnect with nature. By enjoying and protecting our environment, we can help future generations live in clean surroundings; access clean air, food, and water; and enjoy the many creatures who live on our planet. By healing the Earth, we take care of ourselves.

When we care, with kindness, for the environment we share with all the other beings on Earth, peace and gratitude will be our most natural emotional response.



Well-Being Resources

You can find a nice collection of resources, including fact sheets, presentations, tips for providers, and infographics, at the Policy Research Associates website.



<https://www.prainc.com/resources/well-being-wellness/>

For example, learn about the science of sleep, workplace wellness, and alternatives to pain management. Find the “Well-Being Playlist,” which includes a series of podcasts on the 8 Dimensions of Wellness. Some of these feature *Words of Wellness* editor, Dr. Peggy Swarbrick. You also can access them through SoundCloud or Apple podcasts, so you can download them and listen on the go—maybe while you’re exercising or engaging in your favorite hobby!

References and Resources

Thanks to Maria Martinez Alonso and Crystal Brandow for their contributions this month. Maria is a Clinical Psychologist and Mindfulness Teacher (mindfulnessawarenessnj.com). Crystal is a Senior Policy Associate at Policy Research Associates, Inc. Illustrations are listed online as free for reuse without attribution, and are from various sources, including pixabay.com

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The rose picture on p. 1 is from the Missouri Botanical Garden in St. Louis, taken by Pat Nemeec.

The PRA, Inc. podcast on Social Wellness is: <https://soundcloud.com/user-983188732/prawell-being-social-wellness>

To learn about the benefits of knitting for physical wellness, see the report at <https://knitforpeace.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/The-Health-Benefits-of-Knitting-Preview.pdf> and also the website <http://www.knitforhealthandwellness.com/> and its companion site <http://www.stitchlinks.com>

For a more philosophical and spiritual angle on knitting, read *The Knitting Sutra: Craft as a Spiritual Practice* (see info at <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/104724/the-knitting-sutra-by-susan-gordon-lydon/9780767916332>)

