

The Great Outdoors

BY Maayan Jaffe

Bye, bye iPads and Game Boys. Hello, earthworms and squirrels and stones.

A new lunch 'n' learn initiative at the Rosenbloom Owings Mills JCC Stoler Early Childhood Education Center is taking kids out of their classrooms and into the great outdoors. The concept is not a new one for the JCC, which has had a longtime focus on derech erez, teaching respect for self, others and the environment, and on learning experiences that assist and empower children on a path to greater health and well-being. However, this newest program, which started Sept. 3 and is being run in conjunction with the Pearlstone Center, takes hands-on learning to a whole new (muddy) level.

Ilene Meister, ECE director, said the program is meant to further the relationship between children and nature.

"We learn and receive so much from nature on a daily basis that it's important for children to have a closer and more direct relationship with the natural world," said Elisheva Stark, who is facilitating activities.

Last class, said Stark, students learned about earthworms.

"We dug for earthworms and then examined them in a magnifying glass. We learned about how worms are less active during the day and more active at night and then played a game to show that," she said.

One of the biggest benefits of the lunch 'n' learn is that it offers the children the opportunity to spend more time outdoors, something research shows that modern little ones don't do enough.

Said Stark: "Hopefully the activities and programming that this class runs will help the children build a personal connection with the natural world and foster an enjoyment of the outdoors that will continue to grow with them once class is over."

— *Photos by David Stuck*

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