



PRESS RELEASE  
Embargoed Friday, March 11 2005

### **The great outdoors**

The concept of ‘nature kindergartens’, where young children spend all day outside whatever the weather, will be introduced to a Scottish audience of early education and childcare professionals today (Friday, March 11).

The ‘nature kindergarten’ model, which is common in many Scandinavian countries, could help improve the health and fitness of our nation’s children, provide a stimulating learning environment and encourage in children a life-long love of the outdoors.

At the Children in Scotland conference **A sense of time, a sense of place**, speaker Anders Farstad, who runs his own nature kindergarten in Norway, will encourage Scotland to develop the model here.

At Hval Gaard, Anders’ kindergarten, young children are outside or sitting on reindeer hinds around an open fire in a small log cabin whatever the weather – even in below-freezing temperatures. They are encouraged to charge about, climb trees, they learn how to use tools, including axes to chop wood, and they light fires and cook fresh food over them – often the fish they caught whilst out fishing in the kindergarten’s own fishing boat.

Anders’ said: “In Norway we have a long tradition of nature as a place for recreation. Being close to the natural elements is highly valued. In a pedagogic view nature gives us a lot of freedom. There are no walls or regulations to shut us in. So the children don’t have to shout or fight to gain a bit of space or attention from the grown-ups.

“We have a generation of children who are less fit than previous generations. I see quite clearly that children who attend nature kindergartens are generally much fitter and get ill less often than children who attend indoor kindergartens. They are also good at practical problem-solving and co-operation and have good coping skills.”

He has also noticed that it has a particularly positive impact on those children who have been displaying behavioural problems, particularly boys.

He added: “I believe it is because it is easier for them to re-channel their energies outside – they can charge about and climb trees.”

Most of the activities that children take part in at Hval Gaard would be considered ‘high risk’ here in Scotland. However, Anders takes the attitude that children must learn about risk in order to know how to avoid danger.

Bronwen Cohen, chief executive of Children in Scotland, said: “Our recent study visit to Norway as part of Children in Scotland’s Growing Up in Rural Scotland programme, highlighted a more relaxed approach in Norway, which reflects a simpler structure of services where staff get to know children better.

“The Norwegian approach should prompt us to ask how we can find ways here in Scotland to enable children to engage more fully with their outdoor environment and take full advantage of the natural resources which our country possesses in abundance.”

### **Notes for editors**

1. The conference *A sense of time, a sense of place: meeting the needs of the whole child in rural Scotland* is a national conference examining early years policies and services for children growing up in rural communities. It will be held at the Peebles Hydro, Scottish Borders
2. Additional information on the issue of ‘nature kindergartens’ can be found in the article ‘The Great Outdoors’, in the March edition of the Children in Scotland magazine.
3. Some photographs are available on request. See contact details below.
4. Children in Scotland is the national agency for voluntary, statutory and professional organisations and individuals working with children and their families in Scotland. It exists to identify and promote the interests of children and their families and to ensure that relevant policies, services and provisions are of the best possible quality and able to meet the needs of a diverse society.
5. For further details contact Nicola Pay on 0131 2222419 or 07793 588672