

OUTDOOR FAMILY LEISURE: A STRENGTHS-BASED  
CASE STUDY OF EAST SCARBOROUGH, TORONTO,  
ONTARIO

by  
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VANCOUVER ISLAND  
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**OUTDOOR FAMILY LEISURE: A STRENGTHS-BASED CASE STUDY OF EAST  
SCARBOROUGH, TORONTO, ONTARIO**

**By**

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Presented as part of the requirement for the degree of Master of Arts in Sustainable Leisure  
Management within the Department of Recreation and Tourism Management at Vancouver  
Island University

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## DECLARATION

This thesis is a product of my own work and is not the result of anything done in collaboration.



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I agree that this Thesis may be available for reference and photocopying, at the discretion of the University.



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**THESIS EXAMINATION COMMITTEE SIGNATURE PAGE**

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Department of Recreation & Tourism Management for acceptance, the thesis titled “Outdoor Family Leisure: A strengths-based Case Study of East Scarborough, Toronto, Ontario” submitted by Liane R. O’Keefe in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Sustainable Leisure Management.



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## ABSTRACT

Despite benefits to wellbeing, empirical research has shown that outdoor leisure experiences are declining (Pergams & Zaradic, 2008). Within a Western context, declining outdoor leisure has been linked to physical and psychological illness in children (Gray, 2011; McCurdy, Winterbottom, Mehta, & Roberts, 2010) and the family has been described as an important influence on children's outdoor leisure experiences and preferences (Beets, Cardinal, & Alderman, 2010). When children are exposed to outdoor activities, they are likely to develop a preference for spending time outdoors (Cheng & Monroe, 2012). However, in the leisure studies literature, research has predominantly focused on constraints to outdoor leisure participation. Using an exploratory case study methodology and deductive analysis, this study was developed to investigate what enables families to participate in outdoor family leisure and, thus, influence the outdoor leisure practices of their children. Drawing on a strengths-based perspective, the findings broadened understandings of the perceptions, experiences, and facilitators of outdoor family leisure in Ward 43 of Toronto, Ontario. Notably, outdoor family leisure was predominantly purposive and participation was facilitated by a variety of intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural influences. The findings of this study, while exploratory in nature, suggested that it might be worthwhile for researchers and practitioners to make use of strengths-based perspective to investigate the context-specific leisure facilitators that influence outdoor family leisure practices, preferences and participation.

## **DEDICATION**

This thesis is dedicated to those individuals who love the outdoors and nurture a connection to the natural world in others. May we continue to create opportunities for future generations to experience the special magic that is discovering the outdoors.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the result of so many who have supported and guided me throughout this process, which has included giving me a much needed reality checks and encouragement every now and again. I cannot adequately express my gratitude to everyone who has helped me along this journey. And it has been a journey! I want to begin by thanking Aggie Weighill, my VIU supervisor, for her insight, guidance, and dedication to this thesis from day one. Thank-you for our weekly Skype chats that kept me on track and for all of your support – Deep Bay was the perfect place to finish writing this thesis. I am also forever grateful to Maureen Harrington, my co-supervisor at Griffith University in Australia, for her dedication to the thesis process, her continuous feedback, and sharing her knowledge and valuable insight into family leisure and qualitative research throughout the development, execution, and writing of this thesis. I am thankful to Charlene Shannon, my external supervisor at the University of New Brunswick, for her critical feedback and insight, which have been integral in my growth as a researcher and in the production of this thesis. I wish to express my deepest appreciation to the twenty-six study participants who generously gave of their time and shared their knowledge and experiences with me through the course of my research. This research was possible because of all of you.

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## CONTENTS

Declaration.....	ii
Signature Page.....	iii
Abstract.....	iv
Dedication.....	v
Acknowledgements.....	vi
Table of Contents.....	viii
List of Appendices.....	xii
List of Tables.....	xiii
List of Figures.....	xiv
Chapter One: Introduction.....	1
Family Leisure.....	2
Human-Nature Disconnection.....	4
A Strengths-Based Perspective.....	6
Context.....	9
Toronto, Ontario, Canada.....	9
Scarborough and East Scarborough.....	11
Summary.....	12
Thesis Outline.....	13
Chapter Two: Literature Review.....	14
Leisure.....	14
Family.....	15
Family Leisure.....	16

Purposive family leisure.....	17
Gender dynamics of family leisure.....	18
Family leisure challenges.....	20
Outdoor Family Leisure.....	21
Declining outdoor leisure.....	21
Leisure Participation.....	22
Constraints.....	23
Constraint negotiation.....	24
Facilitators of leisure.....	26
Strengths-based approach.....	30
Gaps in the Literature.....	31
Research Questions.....	32
Chapter Three: Methods.....	33
Methodology.....	33
Methods.....	34
Focus groups.....	34
In-depth semi-structured interviews.....	36
Study Participant Sampling.....	37
Focus group sampling.....	37
Semi-structured interview sampling.....	38
Research Participants.....	39
Service provider employees.....	39
Caregivers.....	39

Data Analysis.....	42
About the Researcher.....	44
Chapter Four: Results.....	46
Perceptions and Experiences of Outdoor Family Leisure.....	46
Understandings of leisure.....	46
The prevalence of a deficits perspective.....	49
Children’s ages.....	51
Financial resources.....	53
Non-monetary resources.....	54
Purposive leisure.....	55
Spending time with family.....	56
Outdoor family leisure is for the child.....	57
Benefits of sharing outdoor experiences.....	58
Outdoor family leisure was work.....	61
Facilitators of Outdoor Family Leisure.....	62
Intrapersonal and interpersonal facilitators.....	63
Focus on the child.....	63
Other individuals.....	64
Social relationships.....	65
Structural facilitators.....	66
Organizations and institutions.....	66
Programs.....	68
Methods of communication.....	70

Partnerships.....	71
Funding.....	73
Location.....	74
Cultural diversity.....	75
Seasonality.....	76
A cultural connection to nature.....	78
Summary.....	79
Chapter Five: Discussion.....	80
Using a Strengths-Based Perspective.....	81
Family Leisure in an Outdoor Context.....	85
Facilitators of Outdoor Family Leisure.....	88
Conclusion.....	91
Limitations of the Study.....	92
Areas for Future Research.....	93
Final Thoughts.....	94
References.....	95

**LIST OF APPENDICES**

Appendix A: Focus group questions.....	119
Appendix B: Semi-structured interview questions.....	121
Appendix C: Focus group recruitment poster.....	123
Appendix D: Sample interviewee recruitment email.....	124

**LIST OF TABLES**

Table 1: Description of service provider employees who participated in semi-structured interviews.....40

Table 2: Description of Caregivers who Participated in a Focus Groups.....41

**LIST OF FIGURES**

Figure 1: The four districts recognized by the City of Toronto.....	10
Figure 2: The City of Toronto divided into its 44 municipal geo-political wards.....	10
Figure 3: Toronto municipal Ward 43 (outlined in blue) and surrounding environs.....	12
Figure 4: Adapted from Raymore (2002). The nested levels at which leisure facilitators (and constraints) occur.....	28

## Chapter One: Introduction

Outdoor family leisure (OFL), conceptualized as at least one parent or guardian participating in an open-air activity with one or more children, has not received much attention in the leisure studies literature. However, with growing concerns about physical inactivity (Active Healthy Kids Canada [AHKC], 2014; ParticipACTION, 2014) and a detachment from nature (Louv, 2008), it is important to develop an understanding of how families engage in OFL. The literature has characterized current youth lifestyles as detached from nature (Louv, 2008) and increasingly indoor and sedentary (Fjortoft, 2001), which has been linked to physical and psychological illness, such as obesity and attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (Gray, 2011; McCurdy, Winterbottom, Mehta, & Roberts, 2010). Given the role of family in a child's development (Kleiber, 1999; Scott & Willits, 1998; Shannon, 2006; Shannon & Shaw, 2008), including their development of leisure practices (Beets, Cardinal, & Alderman, 2010), it follows that there is a need to explore current practices of OFL.

The prevailing literature suggests that children in urban centres are particularly challenged in accessing natural areas (McCurdy et al., 2010) for reasons that include: a) dwindling natural spaces from urban and suburban sprawl (Louv, 2008); b) air pollution (Bryant-Stephens, 2009); c) perceived safety (Carver, Timperio, & Crawford, 2008); d) traffic congestion (Davison & Lawson, 2006; Mullan, 2003); e) lack of shade provision (Anderson, Jackson, Egger, Chapman, & Rock, 2014); and f) decreased walkability to safe outdoor spaces (Strife & Downey, 2009). Thus, learning how urban families perceive, experience, access and participate in outdoor leisure is important to understand how to facilitate urban OFL.

Using an exploratory case study, this study aims to explore the gap in the literature on OFL to inform practitioners and add to the literature on how families experience and perceive OFL

and the factors that facilitate participation. By drawing on existing research on family leisure and human-nature disconnection, this study uses a strengths-based perspective to identify community and family strengths, gifts, talents, skills, capabilities and interests (Goldman & Schmalz, 2005) to better understand OFL practices and participation.

### **Family Leisure**

It is widely accepted that parents play a critical role in the development of their children's moral and social values, and influence positive behaviours in their children (Anderssen & Wold, 1992; Harrington, 2006; Mactavish & Schleien, 2004; Maher, 2005; Shaw, 2001; Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Taylor, Baranowski, & Sallis, 1994; Wells, Widmer, & McCoy, 2004). Contemporary discourse on parenthood has described parents as accountable for the growth, development, and overall success of their children (Coakley, 2006; Shaw, 2008), which is evident in tangible and intangible parental behaviours that influence and contribute to the development of the leisure practices of their children (Beets et al., 2010). However, current family lifestyles and practices, such as hyper-parenting, have been associated with negative outcomes including increased sedentary behaviours (Frost & Brown, 2009). Parents are an influential force on their children's leisure and, with greater emphasis on the role of the parent to provide outcomes to children through family leisure, contemporary family leisure practices, preferences, and outcomes require attention.

Parents value family leisure (Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003), which is often purposive in that it is planned and participated in with specific goals or outcomes in mind (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Researchers have explored the purposive characteristics and resultant outcomes of family leisure (Freeman & Zabriskie, 2002; Kelly, 1997; Shaw, 1992; Smith, 1997; Zabriskie, 2001) that include: a) increased communication skills (Huff, Widmar,

McCoy, & Hill, 2003); b) problem-solving efficacy (Wells et al., 2004); c) development of life and social skills (Mactavish & Schleien, 2004); d) healthy lifestyles and values education (Shaw & Dawson, 2001); and e) experiential learning opportunities (Hallman & Benbow, 2007). Family cohesion and adaptability, satisfaction with family life, and overall family functioning has also been linked to family leisure (Agate, Zabriskie, & Eggett, 2007; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2001; Zabriskie & Freeman, 2004; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003). Family leisure purposively benefits both the family and the individual; however, there is little empirical investigation into the nature of OFL. It is also necessary to consider the influence of class, ethnicity, religion and other social and cultural constructs on OFL (Harrington, 2013), which have been found to impact engagement in family leisure (e.g., Amesty, 2003).

Constraints are factors (i.e., resources, circumstances, or influences) that “limit the formation of leisure preferences and/or to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure” (Jackson, 2000, p. 62). Constraints may be understood to influence family leisure participation at the intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural level (Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Raymore, 2002). At the interpersonal level, Thompson et al. (2009) suggested that the most common barriers to family leisure were the different ages and interests of children and timing challenges inherent to living busy lives. Barriers may also be influenced by culture; amongst Hispanic families, physical activity was constrained by structural, interpersonal and intrapersonal deficits in education, time, literacy and social support, as well as fear and social class (Amesty, 2003). Constraints to family leisure, however, may be overcome or negotiated to enable modified participation (Crawford, Jackson, & Godbey, 1991; Jackson, Crawford & Godbey, 1993); however, this limits an understanding of OFL participation to the presence, absence or negotiation of constraints, which may not fully explain participation (Raymore, 2002).

Given the diversity of family forms (e.g., two-parent families with children, single parent families, blended families, gay and lesbian parents, etc.), it is likely that families have different leisure strengths, preferences, and experiences (Belcher, Peckuonis, & Deforge, 2011). Thus, family leisure practices do not always reflect the presence of constraints or the inability to negotiate constraints (Raymore, 2002). Rather, leisure facilitators are resources, circumstances, or influences that enable the development of leisure preferences and encourage or enhance leisure participation, which vary between individuals and influence leisure behaviours (Raymore, 2002). Leisure facilitators are not the opposite of constraints, but are the factors that explain leisure participation. Although still a relatively new area of research, leisure facilitators supports a strengths-based, contextual understanding of how family leisure is accessed and experienced, and how preferences are developed, particularly through the recognition that constraints are not entirely negative or restrictive (Shogan, 2002).

### **Human-Nature Disconnection**

Outdoor play, defined as self-chosen, self-directed, intrinsically motivated and non-stressful activities, is crucial in a child's development (Gray, 2009); however, outdoor recreation is declining globally (Pergams & Zaradic, 2008) and Canadian youth are no exception. Leatherdale and Ahmed (2011) found that 50.9% of Canadian youth spent an average of 7.8 ( $\pm$  2.3) hours per day in front of a screen, exceeding the two hours recommended by the Canadian Sedentary Behaviour Guidelines (Canadian Society for Exercise Physiology, 2012). Time spent outdoors has been described as a major predictor of youth physical activity (Baranowski, Thompson, DuRaunt, Baranowski, & Puhl, 1993) and thus, declining physical activity can be linked to increasing time indoors. Supporting this, AHKC (2014) found that only 7% of 5 to 11 year-olds met the Canadian Physical Activity Guidelines of 60 minutes a day of moderate to vigorous

physical activity. Research has indicated an indoor, sedentary lifestyle can lead to an increasing frequency of health ailments in youth, such as obesity and obesity-related diseases and mental health issues (Gray, 2011; McCurdy et al., 2010; Thomas, Conrad, Casler, & Goodman, 2006). As a result of these health risks, researchers (cf. Olshansky et al., 2005) have suggested that current and future generations of youth may have a shorter lifespan than their parents.

The literature has also illustrated direct health benefits of the outdoors, such as decreased symptoms of ADHD after play in natural, green settings (Kaplan, 1995; McCurdy et al, 2010; Taylor, Kuo, & Sullivan, 2001). Both active and inactive outdoor play provides children with developmental, cognitive, emotional, and physical benefits, such as motor skill development, an increased ability to concentrate, reduced stress and aggression levels, and a reduced risk of obesity (Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008; Faber Taylor, & Kuo, 2006; Fjortoft, 2001; Kellert, 2005; Louv, 2008; Wells & Evans, 2003; White, 2004). Children benefit physically and psychologically when they spend time outdoors, and are more likely to develop a lifelong preference for outdoor leisure (Cheng & Monroe, 2012); a preference which they ultimately pass on to their offspring.

Despite these benefits, more recent studies have shown that children's experiences in nature are rapidly declining (Chawla, 2006; Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2006; Louv, 2008; Wells & Lekies, 2006). Structural and interpersonal constraints to leisure participation have been identified as the culprit (Amesty, 2003; Dowdell, Gray & Malone, 2011; Kimbell, Schuhmann, & Brown, 2009; Townsend, 2006; Thompson et al., 2009; Wells & Evans, 2003). Researchers have also suggested that the values of nature may not be taught at home (Verboom, van Kralingen, & Meier, 2004), and that there is a limited understanding of outdoor leisure socialization in out-of-school time (Jago & Baranowski, 2004; van Sluijs, McMinn, & Griffin, 2007). Parents serve as

gatekeepers to children's physical activity (Welk, Wood, & Morss, 2003; Wen, Kite, Merom, & Rissel, 2009) and likely, their outdoor leisure socialization, which necessitates an exploration of the influences within the family and their socio-cultural environment that facilitate outdoor leisure experiences.

Time spent outdoors and family leisure benefits the family and the individual; however, there is limited empirical study of parents' perceptions on the importance, frequency and nature of OFL. There is a need to better understand family perspectives on and experiences of the outdoors and leisure time. Both physically active and inactive forms of OFL should be considered as there are benefits derived from both. This study explores facilitators of OFL and, in doing so, contributes to broadening understandings of OFL practices and engagement.

### **A Strengths-Based Perspective**

Strength-based approaches to community and organizational development encompass a range of approaches and techniques including asset-based community development (ABCD), appreciative inquiry (AI), solution-focused therapy, endogenous development, and community economic development (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). These approaches identify and build upon strengths, skills, knowledge and capacities for development, which creates a better understanding of the community or organization and how to best serve its people and achieve goals (Goldman & Schmalz, 2005). Research has demonstrated how these types of approaches, such as a focus on character strengths, increases the likelihood of achieving goals (Linley, Nielsen, Wood, Gillett, & Biswas-Diener, 2010). For example, a strengths-based approach to rural tourism research identified positive outcomes, prevented problems, and contributed to tourism sustainability (Nyaupane & Poudel, 2012). A strengths-based approach to outdoor and adventure education also supported the talents and skills of youth to achieve positive personal

growth outcomes (Passarelli, Hall, & Anderson, 2010). Guided by the initial stages of both ABCD and AI, a strengths-based perspective can be considered an epistemological standpoint that draws on the philosophy of these practices to engage individuals and explore experiences to discover strengths, capacities and abilities within the context being studied (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, 1996).

In contrast to strengths-based perspectives, dominant approaches to community or organizational development use a deficiency or problem-oriented perspective. A deficit-based lens considers gaps between current and desired circumstances, and how to 'fix' these needs or problems through intervention strategies (Cooperrider, Whitney, & Stavros, 2008). However, the focus on weaknesses, needs, constraints, and inabilities, can discourage rather than enable development and growth (Goldman & Schmalz, 2005; Jackson et al., 2003). Research within the family context has historically focused on problems and weaknesses (DeFrain & Asay, 2007). These deficit approaches cause the devaluation of local or internal capacity and negatively impact a sense of community and fragment efforts to provide solutions (Goldman & Schmalz, 2005; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996).

A strength-based approach avoids these adverse effects. When individuals are involved in a strengths-based approach they inform the basis for policies and action to be developed, which ultimately leads to long-lasting resolutions and strong and healthy communities (Rans & Green, 2005). In comparison to a traditional deficits approach, some have argued that a strengths-based approach is superficial (Reason & Bradbury, 2001). However, strengths-based approaches and perspectives do not ignore problems, but purposefully focus on possibilities to achieve critical, context-specific understandings and, thus, create meaningful and sustainable change.

Beaulieu (2002) recommended that the best way to address the challenges of any community is to accurately assess their available resources, and suggested exposing and expanding the knowledge and skills existing within the community. Two potential capacity- and strengths-focused practices for exploring the existing strengths within a community are asset-based community development (ABCD) and appreciative inquiry (AI). ABCD looks to the talents and gifts of individuals, the capacities of citizens' organizations and groups, the assets of local institutions, and the resources of physical space in the community (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). Kretzmann and McKnight (1993) identified the basis of ABCD as mapping local capacities and assets to explore and identify the strengths within a community. The basis of ABCD is largely grounded in the theory and philosophy of AI, and assumes that strengths and capacities exist within every community and must be uncovered, acknowledged and utilized to achieve success (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Similar to ABCD, the initial phase of AI focuses on storytelling where participants describe their assets or strengths, best practices and positive outcomes of what has been and what is (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). The initial phase of ABCD and AI creates a more nuanced understanding of the unique context in which a community or organization finds itself (Michael, 2005).

While both ABCD and AI have been described as research methods or processes (Cowling, 2001, 2004; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), they have also been used as theories, fields of knowledge and philosophies (Grant & Humphries, 2006; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Michael, 2005; van der Haar & Hosking, 2004). Using the philosophy of ABCD and AI as an epistemological perspective may be particularly useful when exploring the phenomena of human-nature disconnectedness and physical inactivity of today's youth, which have typically been considered using a problem or deficit-oriented lens. As evidenced within the

theories of AI and ABCD, the deficits lens can leave families stuck in a needs or deficiency mind frame associated with traditional problem-solving approaches (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Grant & Humphries, 2006; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993).

While social work with families has benefited from recognizing that all families have strengths (DeFrain & Asay, 2007), this strengths-based, appreciative perspective has not been utilized in understanding OFL. Thus, the strengths-based epistemologies of AI and ABCD offer a new lens through which to explore families' resources, strengths and capacities that facilitate OFL, and build upon these factors to affect OFL participation (Kretzmann & McKnight, 1996).

### **Context**

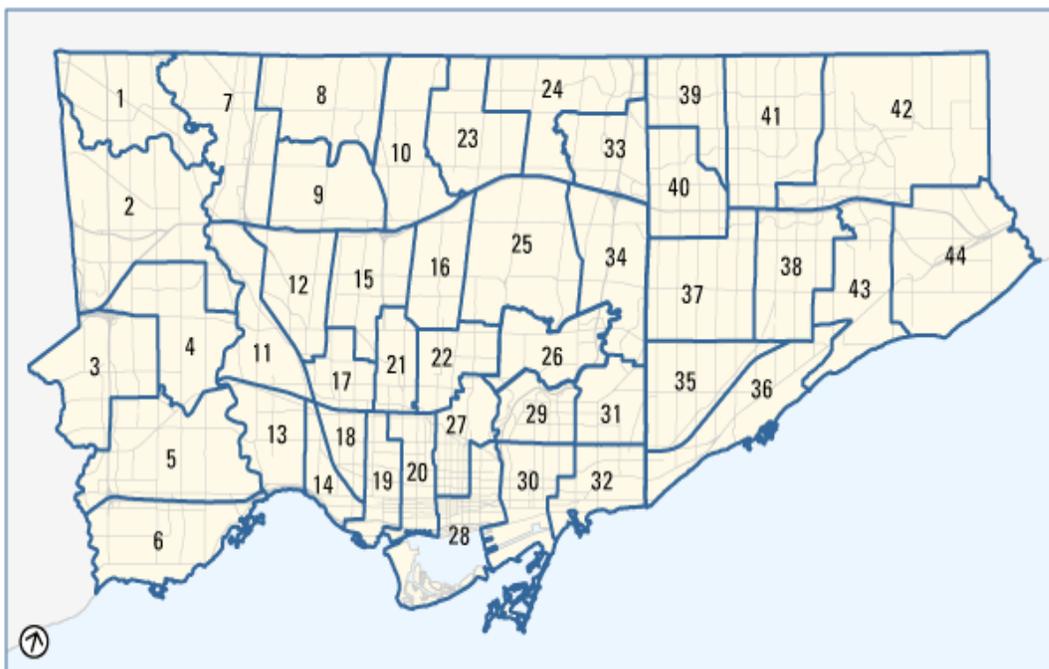
This study employed an exploratory case study methodology to understand contemporary practices, experiences and preferences of OFL within municipal Ward 43 of the City of Toronto, Ontario, Canada. The following is an overview of The City of Toronto, the Scarborough district, and Ward 43, which is located in Scarborough.

**Toronto, Ontario, Canada.** Toronto is the capital of Ontario, Canada and experiences four seasons – spring, summer, autumn, and winter – which makes a variety of leisure experiences available. Toronto is Canada's largest city with a population of over 2.6 million (Statistics Canada, 2011) and is considered one of the most multicultural cities in the world. In 1998, the new City of Toronto was formed when six municipalities – East York, North York, Scarborough, York, Etobicoke and the former City of Toronto – were amalgamated. While the city has a single municipal government, the City and residents still recognize and refer to these distinct municipalities within the city (Figure 1; City of Toronto, 2014a). Municipally, Toronto is subdivided into 44 geo-political wards (Figure 2). Within each ward there are many smaller heterogeneous neighbourhoods that may extend across ward boundaries. The City of Toronto

continues to provide reports on its municipalities, wards and neighbourhoods (City of Toronto 2014a, 2014b, 2014c), possibly in recognition of the ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic diversity of its residents within and between wards.



*Figure 1.* The City of Toronto divided into the four districts recognized by the City of Toronto (City of Toronto, 2014a)



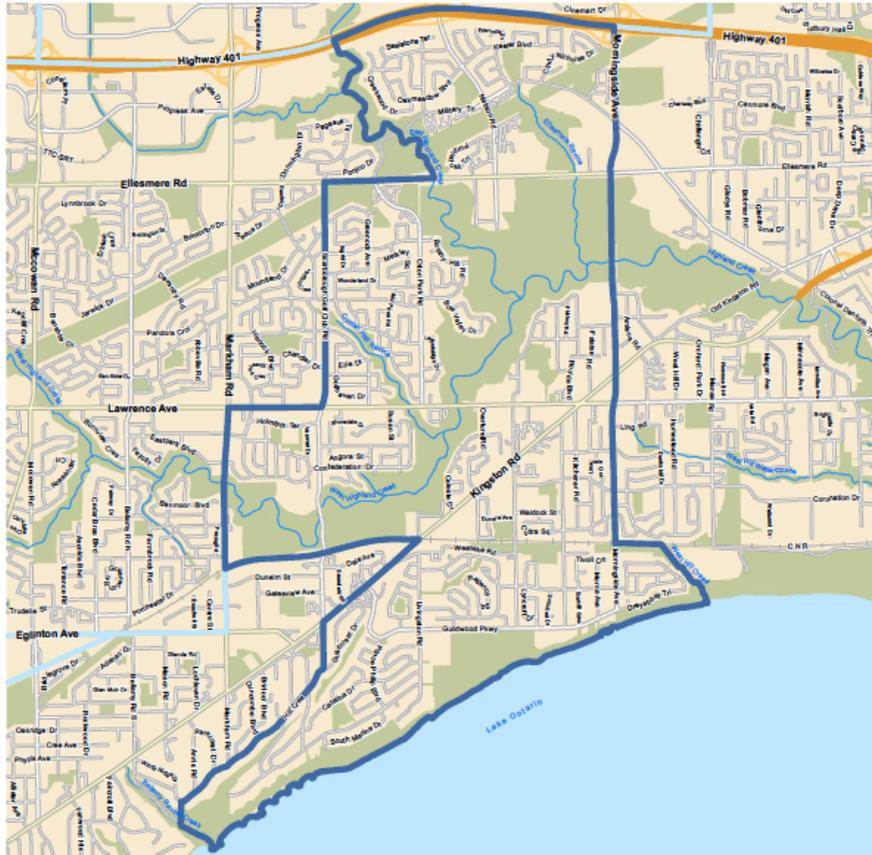
*Figure 2.* The City of Toronto divided into its 44 municipal geo-political wards. Scarborough is made up of wards 35 through 44 (City of Toronto, 2014c).

**Scarborough and East Scarborough.** Scarborough, a former municipality of and current district within the City of Toronto, contains 10 of Toronto's 44 geo-political municipal wards, and comprises the most eastern part of the city of Toronto. Scarborough is home to 625,930 individuals (City of Toronto, 2014d). Compared to Toronto as a whole, Scarborough has a lower population density, and a greater percentage of individuals who were: a) born outside of Canada; b) new immigrants; and c) and visible minorities (City of Toronto, 2014d). The three most eastern wards of the city are wards 42, 43 and 44, which collectively make up East Scarborough.

The study focused on Ward 43 (Figure 3) because it offered a rich diversity to explore the contextual leisure facilitators of OFL, while offering the opportunity to inform programming development in this area (see Toronto Sports Council, 2015). Ward 43 is ethnically, socioeconomically, and culturally heterogeneous. Ward 43 has a population of 55,130 with 50.8% of individuals born outside of Canada, and with India, the Philippines, and Sri Lanka representing the top three immigrant countries of birth (City of Toronto, 2014c). In Ward 43, 46.2% of residents live in some form of apartment building (City of Toronto, 2014c). In comparison to the City of Toronto as a whole, Ward 43 is characterized by a higher percentage of children and youth aged 0 to 19 years; a lower proportion of adults, particularly aged 30 to 39; a higher proportion of low income residents; a similar percent of recent and total immigrants; and a higher proportion of visible minorities (Toronto Public Health, 2013).

Ward 43 is part of the Highland Creek watershed, borders Lake Ontario along its southern edge, and contains important green space, parks and river systems within its borders. Ward 43 includes more than 20 different park and green areas including Morningside Park, which covers 214.2 hectares, and Guildwood Park, which covers 36 hectares. Ward 43 is connected by a public transportation system of buses, but does not have direct access to the streetcars or

subways that service most of the City of Toronto, and is rated low to medium-low for walkability (Toronto Public Health, 2012). That is, there were opportunities and challenges that could influence OFL in Ward 43, which complemented a strengths-based perspective to understand why and how families participate in OFL.



*Figure 3.* Toronto municipal Ward 43 (outlined in blue) and surrounding environs. Green represents parks or natural areas. (City of Toronto, 2014c).

## Summary

Spending time outdoors is linked to an array of health benefits and family leisure has the potential to bring children outdoors where they can be physically active while developing long-term values for outdoor leisure. OFL participation could help address issues of increasing

childhood sedentary behaviour and create opportunities for children to develop lifelong skills and healthy habits. However, it remains unclear whether outdoor experiences and values are provided at home. Despite parents' ability to influence their children's long-term values (Kleiber, 1999), little attention has been given to the nature, perceptions and experiences of OFL. A wealth of literature has documented reasons for declining outdoor leisure (e.g., Louv, 2008) and presents an opportunity to explore the factors that facilitate outdoor leisure participation.

Rather than take a traditional approach to the phenomenon of OFL and focus on leisure constraints, this case study used a strengths-based perspective to engage families and practitioners, and explore experiences of OFL in Ward 43 of Toronto, Ontario. By doing so, this study aimed to highlight strengths and opportunities that exist within the East Scarborough community and celebrate successes that can, in turn, be built upon to create opportunities to engage families in OFL. Using an exploratory case study methodology and qualitative mixed methods, this study used a strengths-based perspective to explore perspectives and experiences of OFL, and the facilitators that encourage or enable OFL participation.

### **Thesis Outline**

This thesis is divided into five chapters: 1) introduction; 2) literature review, which details the concepts and phenomena that support this study, and states research goals and questions that guide this study; 3) methods, which describes the study methodology and the qualitative methods used for data collection; 4) results, which presents an overview of the research participants, the data analysis, and the findings of the study; and 5) discussion, which presents an examination of the results in relation to the current body of literature that was first described in the literature review. The thesis concludes with a description of study limitations and areas for future research.

## Chapter Two: Literature Review

This chapter details the rationale for using a strengths-based perspective to explore perspectives, experiences, and preferences of outdoor family leisure (OFL), and the facilitators that encourage or enable OFL participation. Five primary areas are conceptualized for the purpose of this study: a) Western concepts of leisure; b) family; c) family leisure; d) outdoor family leisure; and e) leisure participation. The following section discusses the existing literature related to these concepts, summarizes the gaps in OFL knowledge, and explains how this study aims to address this gap in the literature.

### Leisure

Within a Western context, leisure may be intuitively understood, but is not easily defined. Although free time is a required precondition to develop the skills, knowledge, and preferences to pursue leisure, free time does not necessarily imply leisure time. Rather, leisure can be conceptualized as activities – sedentary and active, indoor and outdoor – that are intrinsically valuable and chosen for their own sake (Sager, 2013). Leisure can be understood as non-obligatory and as a form of self-determination and self-expression (Shaw, 2006). Western leisure patterns have been described as “frequently home-based, passive and restricted to easily accessible experiences” (Mundy, 1998, p. 2).

Whether individual or unit-based, the components of “leisure” typically include perceived freedom, intrinsic motivation, and enjoyment (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Shaw, 1985). Rojek (2005) acknowledged the complexity of leisure activities – they may be both valued for their own sake and as a means to an end – and argued that there are three forms of leisure: a) leisure as surplus time after life’s necessities have been met, which differentiates between work and non-work; b) leisure as a state of mind wherein space and time are consciously used for personal

enjoyment and enrichment; and c) leisure as a functional activity used to achieve socially-defined ends, like social integration or health and wellbeing. Recognition of this leisure diversity suggests that leisure may be valued and practiced in different ways (Shaw, 1997). However, multicultural values and practices of leisure in a Western context are not well documented (Stodolska & Walker, 2007) and may have particular significance in the family context where the individual's preferences, perceptions and experiences could affect family leisure.

### **Family**

Within the Western world, conventional definitions of family have common themes of “economic cooperation, a heterosexual union of an adult male and female with recognized rights and obligation, children, and possibly a common residence” (Peters, 1999, p. 56). Contemporary Western concepts of family, however, include a variety of family forms including traditional two-parent heterosexual families with children, single parent families, blended families, extended family, same-sex parent families, divorced or separated families, married and unmarried couples, non-resident parent families, etc. Restated, as family forms change or become more complex, a common definition of family becomes ambiguous and thus family can be understood in many ways.

The complexities of factors that affect, influence and define Western families have been studied using concepts and theoretical perspectives including, but not limited to, gender (e.g., Shaw, 2008, 2010), family systems (e.g., Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003; Zabriskie & Ward, 2013), and social ecology (e.g., Payne, 2010; Walsh, 2012). Thus, family leisure is complex and requires consideration of context, perspective, and the different experiences and meanings of leisure and family for each individual (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Ferree, 2010; Shaw, 1997; Turtiainen, Karvonen, & Rahkonen, 2007). Notably, each individual affects the family as a

whole, and the family affects each individual (White & Klein, 2008); individual family members have different strengths and exert different influences on one another and the overall experience of family life.

Within a Western context, where individualization and privatization predominate, parents are seen as responsible for their children's upbringing and ensuring their preparedness for adulthood (Coakley, 2006; Ginsburg, 2007; Shaw, 2008). The emphasis on the responsibilities of the parent puts pressure on parents to behave or act in socially approved ways in order to be considered a "good parent" (Coakley, 2006; Wall, 2005). As a result, parents assume greater control over their children's activities (Ginsburg, 2007; Rosenfield & Wise, 2001; Shaw, 2010). The phenomenon of increased parental responsibility and vigilance has been referred to as *hyperparenting, helicopter parenting, and paranoid parenting* (Furedi, 2002; Honoré, 2008; Lipka, 2007).

### **Family Leisure**

Family leisure or family recreation refers to the family unit participating in leisure activities together (Horning, 2005). Although defining family may present a challenge, this does not imply that family or family leisure is unimportant or insignificant (Pronovost, 1998; Shaw, 2001). Family leisure has been studied from many conceptual and theoretical perspectives, including gender (Beets & Foley, 2008; Brustad, 1996; Kay, 2003; Shannon & Shaw, 2008; Shaw, 2001; Shaw & Dawson, 2003), constraints (Amesty, 2003; Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Shaw & Dawson, 2003; van der Burgt & Gustafson, 2013), socio-economic status (Harrington, 2002, 2014), values (Beets, Vogel, Chapman, Pitetti, & Cardinal, 2007; Benish-Weisman, Levy & Knafo, 2013; Green & Chalip, 1998; Kimiecik & Horn, 1998), and family functioning (Christenson, Zabriskie, Eggett, & Freeman, 2006; Zabriskie & McCormick, 2003).

A substantial amount of family leisure research focuses on outcomes of family leisure for both the family unit and the individual. Some benefits include encouraging family cohesion (Lee, Graefe, & Burns, 2006), teaching children about healthy lifestyles and values (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), creating experiential learning opportunities for children (Hallman & Benbow, 2007), and the development of life-long skills (Mactavish & Schleien, 2004). Of these outcomes, it can be argued that one of the most important is the impact on children's early education, which can influence health and fitness. However, it has been suggested that community institutions and organizations, such as schools or recreation providers, are also in a position to be primary influences on children's leisure socialisation (Mundy, 1998), which could influence family leisure behaviour through interpersonal relationships.

Although early research suggested that family leisure provides benefits for both the family and the individual (Mannell & Kleiber, 1997; Rapoport & Rapoport, 1975), it has been argued that these components of leisure may not be present during family leisure (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). The family leisure experience can vary between family members and may be controversial or contradictory for some participants (Shaw, 1997). This is particularly true within feminist research where family leisure has been described as "semi-leisure" or work for mothers (Freysinger, 1994; Horna, 1989; Shaw, 1992; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Consequently, family leisure is complex, and both similar and unique, when compared to individuals' leisure.

***Purposive family leisure.*** Shaw and Dawson (2001) recognized the impact of leisure on children and identified that contemporary family leisure is purposive in that it is planned by parents and participated in with specific goals or outcomes in mind. Specifically, parents have two goals for family leisure: to strengthen the family as a bonded unit, and to provide opportunities for children to learn life-long values (Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Purposive family

leisure could be considered to be predominantly functional leisure (Rojek, 2005). In this way, parents use leisure as a means of instilling personal and perceived values and attitudes in their children (Green & Chalip, 1998; Tam & Lee, 2010; Zeijl, te Poel, du Bois-Reymond, Ravesloot, & Meulman, 2000) that influence, to an extent, the adults that they become (Kleiber, 1999). Parents thus play a crucial role in children's development of attitudes, social and moral values, and behaviour, and influence children's long-term values of leisure (Kleiber, 1999; Scott & Willits, 1998; Shannon, 2006; Shannon & Shaw, 2008).

***Gender dynamics of family leisure.*** While parents typically share similar values (Rohan & Zanna, 1996), they may socialize different values in their children (Tam & Lee, 2010). Parents take on different gendered roles during family leisure (Harrington, 2005; Shaw, 2001, 2008) and create opportunities for value creation and promotion in their offspring. Thus, different choices, practices, and experiences of family leisure reflect the life-long values and morals that each parent wishes to instil in their children (Harrington, 2005), and what is deemed to be a good parent (Trussell & Shaw, 2012). To appreciate parental influence on family leisure and socialisation requires understanding gendered aspects of parenthood, which have been used to explain family leisure preferences and participation (Beets et al., 2007).

Traditional gender roles portray fathers as the *male breadwinner* and mothers as responsible for the upbringing of their offspring. However, recent decades have seen a convergence in these roles (Taylor, Parker, Morin, Cohn, & Wang, 2013). Fathers are now seen as and expected to be “providers of material, emotional or informational support to children and mothers” (Dette-Hagenmeyer, Erzinger, & Reichle, 2014, p. 130). Modern fatherhood has been conceptualized as “involved fatherhood” and emphasizes the nurturing and emotional father-child bonds as well as a more egalitarian approach to traditional family roles (Taylor et al., 2013). This attention to

fatherhood is reflected in the growing body of research about today's fathers (e.g., Buswell, Zabriskie, Lundberg, & Hawkins, 2012; Craig, 2006; Hofferth, 2003; Latshaw, 2011; Shaw, 2008; Such, 2006; Yeung, Sandberg, Davis-Keane, & Hofferth, 2001) and the increase in current parenting practices like stay-at home or full-time fathers and paternity leave (Latshaw, 2011). Overall, today's fathers are more involved with their children, place an increased emphasis on the role of leisure in teaching children values (Shaw, 2008), and may sacrifice personal leisure time in order to spend time with their children (McGill, 2014). In family leisure in particular, father's involvement is distinct in both informal and organized sporting contexts (Coakley, 2006; Trussell & Shaw, 2012), which allows fathers to foster children's development in and through family leisure. However, there is the need to understand how fatherhood involvement varies based on socio-demographics (Buswell et al., 2012).

Despite involved fatherhood, the different roles that parents assume may reinforce traditional gender ideologies and hide inequalities in family leisure (Shaw, 2008; Trussell & Shaw, 2012). Mothers continue to be the ones who organize family leisure (Shaw, 2001; Trussell & Shaw, 2012) and will "often make decisions about what, when, where, how and with whom leisure opportunities and experiences will take place" (Shannon & Shaw, 2008, p. 3). Mothers, as opposed to fathers, have, consequently, identified issues of time stress and fatigue when planning and participating in children's leisure (Trussell & Shaw, 2012). However, this does not indicate that only mothers influence the values and morals that parents instill in their children. Mothers often focus on the interpersonal and psychological benefits of family leisure, whereas fathers emphasize instrumental values (Harrington, 2005). Fathers value developing strong bonds with their children (Gatrell, 2006), but do not engage in the same intensive parenting practices of mothers and, overall, their family involvement is typically less than mothers (Craig, 2006; Fox,

2001). It follows that both parents may contribute different values and strengths, and use different resources, to engage in family leisure.

***Family leisure challenges.*** While family leisure may be beneficial, achieving these outcomes can present challenges when faced with realities of family life (Shaw, 2001). Much of the literature has focused on constraints or challenges of engaging in family leisure (Amesty, 2003; Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Harrington, 2002; Louv, 2008; Shaw, 2010). Family leisure presents many challenges, including finding appropriate joint activities, and may result in both positive and negative outcomes, which suggests that family leisure is innately contradictory in nature (Shaw, 1997, 2001, 2008; Shaw & Dawson, 2003). This indicates that before any socioeconomic, class or gender differences are considered, parents may already experience difficulties and challenges in organizing and facilitating family leisure experiences. This may lead to different choices for family leisure depending on how families address these and other challenges, like class, as evident in the different leisure practices of middle compared to lower income families (Harrington, 2002, 2014).

Acknowledging these inherent familial differences, Shaw (2001) argued that, “it does not seem appropriate for recreation or family professionals to presume to know what is best for particular families” (p. 60). It has also been suggested that research be used to help parents navigate leisure options, lobby for the recreation programs and facilities families would like, and allow practitioners to discover how to facilitate positive family leisure experiences (Flett, Moore, Pfeiffer, Belonga, & Navarre, 2010; Shaw, 2001; Shaw & Dawson, 2003). Additionally, Tam and Lee (2010) recognized that it is important to consider whether parents are aware of and draw on other socialization agents (e.g., grandparents, community associations, etc.). Shaw (2008) identified that there is a need to increase the diversity of family leisure research, and to better

understand family leisure in the context of this diversity (e.g., including more low-income families, families with different cultural backgrounds, etc.) to understand the relevance of the findings from current studies to different population groups. As the removal of barriers does not always lead to participation (Cohen et al., 2010; Raymore, 2002), a strengths-based perspective could allow for an understanding of facilitators that create the space for leisure participation.

### **Outdoor Family Leisure**

The outdoors, defined as open-air spaces, has been a valued and popular site for leisure participation in a Western context (Louv, 2008). Outdoor leisure is defined as activities that occur in open-air areas, and includes both physically active and inactive activities, such as reading on a park bench, playing road hockey, or hiking through the woods. Considering this, OFL is conceptualized as when the family – at least one parent or guardian and one or more children – participates in open-air leisure activities together, regardless of activity level. Whether active or inactive, outdoor leisure has benefits to wellbeing, such as increased resilience (Wells & Evans, 2003), attention restoration (Kaplan, 1995), and the development of advanced motor skills, like coordination and agility (Fjortoft, 2001). While it is understood that spending time outdoors is likely to lead to a preference to spend more time outdoors, bolstering benefits to children's physical and psychological health (Cheng & Monroe, 2012), OFL practices have not been well documented.

***Declining outdoor leisure.*** Outdoor recreation is declining globally (Pergams & Zaradic, 2008) as leisure engagement shifts from active, outdoor leisure to sedentary and indoor leisure (Fjortoft, 2001). Sedentary, indoor leisure is linked to the rise in emotional, psychological and physical detriment in today's youth (Gray, 2011; Louv, 2008; McCurdy et al., 2010). Notably, Wells and Evans (2003) explained that societal and cultural changes and influences, such as a

reliance on technology and increasing urbanization, limit outdoor leisure.

Challenges associated with the decline in outdoor leisure include the closure or redesign of community parks to address fear of injury and lawsuits (Frost, 2012), and increased urbanization (Dowdell et al., 2011; Kimbell et al., 2009; Townsend, 2006). Apprehension about the outdoors, often promulgated by mass media, has created a culture of fear amongst parents that, when combined with other challenges, leads to decreases in children's unscheduled, unstructured outdoor leisure and increases in formal, structured forms of adult-directed activity (Carver et al., 2008; Frost, 2012; Gray, 2011; Veitch, Bagley, Ball, & Salmon, 2006). There are many challenges that influence a family's outdoor leisure choices; however, the reasons why a family chooses to go outdoors have not been investigated. While Kuo (2013) created a list of nine broad recommendations to increase outdoor exposure and leisure time, and acknowledged that it may not be enough to simply have green space nearby, the recommendations did not elaborate on context-specific facilitators that may already exist to encourage outdoor leisure at the local level.

### **Leisure Participation**

Leisure participation provides insight into an individual's leisure preferences, experiences and (non) participation. However, understanding OFL participation from a strengths-based perspective needs to be considered in light of how leisure participation discourse has evolved. The following subsections discuss three dominant theories to understand what influences leisure participation – constraints, constraint negotiation, and facilitators – and explain why this study used leisure facilitators to understand OFL participation in lieu of constraints and constraint negotiation. In particular, it is argued that a focus on leisure facilitators creates the opportunity to understand OFL from a strengths perspective. Notably, all theories recognize the presence of *factors* that influence leisure participation. Factors represent a range of tangible and intangible

characteristics (i.e., resources, circumstances, or influences) in each family member's psychological, physical, and sociocultural environments that impact family leisure behaviour and experiences by enabling, inhibiting, or necessitating action (Stokols, 1996).

**Constraints.** Leisure constraints research developed to draw attention to the subjective nature of leisure, and to facilitate an understanding about the factors that influence why people do not participate in desired leisure activities (Jackson, 1988). Leisure constraints are conceptualized as “factors that are assumed by researchers and/or perceived or experienced by individuals to limit the formation of leisure preferences and/or to inhibit or prohibit participation and enjoyment in leisure” (Jackson, 2000, p. 62). Leisure constraints acknowledge that there might be a broad range of reasons for, or explanations of, constrained leisure and non-participation.

Crawford and Godbey (1987) identified three types of factors that constrain leisure—intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural—to help researchers better comprehend the relationships between constraints, preferences, and participation. They described intrapersonal constraints as barriers experienced at the individual psychological level that affect leisure preferences and are able to change over time as psychological states and attributes alter. Interpersonal constraints, possibly impacted by intrapersonal constraints, result from interactions between individuals or the relationship between individuals' characteristics and affect leisure preferences and participation. Structural constraints “represent constraints as they are commonly conceptualized, as intervening factors between leisure preference and participation” (p. 124). Structural constraints may also include challenges associated with season, climate, work obligations, availability of opportunity, and “reference group” (p. 124) attitudes concerning different activities (Crawford & Godbey, 1987).

Henderson, Stalnaker, and Taylor (1988) argued that leisure constraints not only intervene between preference and participation, but they also influence individuals' preferences — they identified these as *antecedent* constraints and defined them as limiting influences that shape preference and affect the quality of enjoyment. In summary, constraints may work on multiple levels to influence leisure preferences and behaviours. However, leisure constraints offer no basis for understanding the formation of constraints other than to explain they interfere with an individual's participation in certain forms of leisure (Samdahl, 2005). Constraints theory does not advance an understanding of what enables participation, as the presence, absence or removal of constraints does not necessarily lead to participation (Jackson, 2000; Raymore, 2002; Shogan, 2002). Rather, as Samdahl (2005) argued, an understanding of leisure participation in relation to constraints overlooks how the socio-cultural context shapes leisure pursuits. That is, leisure constraints theory does not consider successful leisure participation. This theory does not fit well within a strengths-based perspective as it focuses on what is deficient and does not support this study's aim to understand participation.

**Constraint negotiation.** Constraint negotiation evolved from constraint theory and recognizes that individuals may be able to overcome or negotiate constraints in order to participate in leisure (Jackson et al., 1993). While this offers one theoretical basis for considering participation, it still presents a one-sided understanding of leisure participation as it suggests that participation occurs in relation to the presence, absence, or negotiation of constraining factors. This fails to recognize that: a) constraints may not influence participation; and b) that a focus on constraint negotiation assumes that the “constrained” individual should want to participate in a particular leisure activity.

The conceptual model introduced by Crawford and Godbey (1987) became the foundation

for the organization of constraints into a hierarchical model (Crawford et al., 1991), and resulted in the theoretical exploration of the concept of “leisure constraints negotiation” (Jackson et al., 1993, p. 2). The hierarchical model was further modified (Jackson et al., 1993) to include leisure constraints negotiation following findings that leisure participation can occur even in the presence of constraints (Kay & Jackson, 1991; Shaw, Bonen, & McKay, 1991). Crawford et al. (1991) used the hierarchical model to suggest that leisure behaviour depends upon the absence or successful negotiation of constraints in a given order: intrapersonal then interpersonal then structural constraints.

Constraint negotiation is categorised into cognitive strategies (e.g., changing leisure aspirations) and behavioural strategies (e.g., modifying use of time or acquiring skills; Jackson et al., 1993). Fundamentally, constraint negotiation is based on the idea that despite experiencing constraints, individuals find ways to participate in and enjoy leisure, even if such participation and enjoyment differ from what it would have been in the absence of constraints (Jackson et al., 1993). These same theories may be applied to OFL negotiation strategies; however, constraint negotiation represents a focus on the needs and problems of OFL participation and is based on the preconceived notion that OFL is something families should want to participate in.

While constraint negotiation is useful to understand the context in which individuals experience and negotiate leisure constraints (Amesty, 2003; Samdahl & Jekubovich, 1997; Shaw, 1994; Stodolska & Walker, 2007), it is inherently problem-based and does not allow for a broader exploration or understanding of a leisure phenomenon. For example, a researcher may be interested in how an individual negotiates constraints to playing basketball, but this implies that the individual should want to participate in basketball. Consequently, if a person does not have this leisure preference, then they will not employ negotiation strategies to participate, and their

non-participation becomes an antecedent constraint (Henderson et al., 1988), thus diminishing the individual's leisure preferences and experiences by exploring participation solely in relation to constraints. That is, constraint negotiation does not allow for a strengths-based understanding of leisure participation. Rather, it prevents individuals from giving voice to their own preferences, which is an issue this study recognizes and aims to overcome.

Without appreciating the full context in which leisure patterns, preferences and behaviours occur, research using constraints negotiation theory can only provide a partial, researcher-determined understanding of leisure behaviour. The constraints-based focus may reveal capacities and techniques to negotiate constraints, but it assumes that participation and leisure preferences only happen in relation to constraints, and is inherently more challenging. Rather strengths, capacities, best practices, and assets may facilitate leisure preferences and participation regardless of the presence or absence of constraints. Thus, constraint negotiation does not offer the best opportunities to understand OFL for reasons described below.

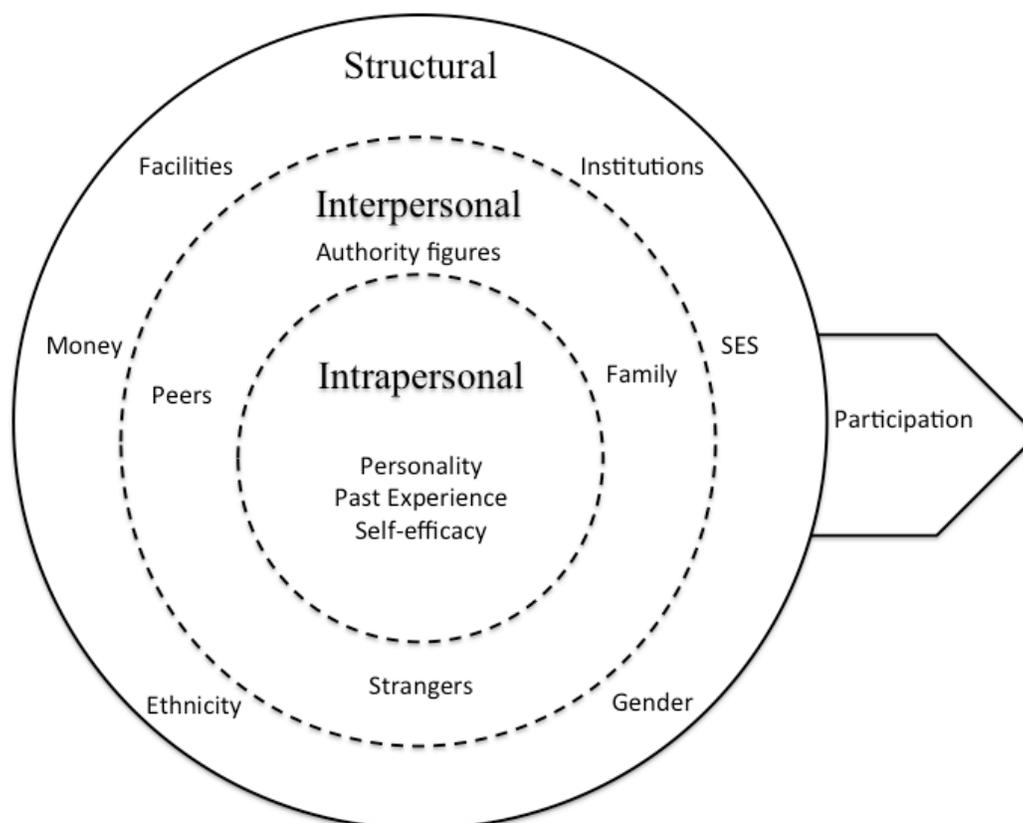
**Facilitators of leisure.** An alternate approach that appreciates the detailed context in which leisure participation occurs and how it is experienced, regardless of constraints, is leisure facilitators. Leisure facilitators allow individuals to give voice to their leisure behaviours, experiences, and preferences while simultaneously shifting the focus to understand larger trends of leisure participation within a community (Shores, Scott, & Floyd, 2007). The concept of leisure facilitators fits well within a strengths-based perspective because it focuses on what is possible and recognizes that the absence or removal of constraints might not explain participation (Raymore, 2002). In other words, leisure participation is better understood through facilitators because it recognizes the leisure enabling aspect of factors whereas a focus on leisure constraints solely recognizes factors as limiting, restricting, and repressing.

Leisure facilitators can be conceptualized as factors – resources, circumstances, or influences – that enable participation and consider the glass “half full” (Raymore, 2002, p. 39) when approaching how leisure participation is encouraged. Using Jackson’s (2000) definition of leisure constraints, Raymore (2002) defined leisure facilitators as “factors that are assumed by the researcher and perceived by individuals to enable or promote the formation of leisure preferences and to encourage or enhance participation” (p. 39). However, it is incorrect to assume that *facilitator* is the opposite of *constraint*; leisure facilitators are not in direct opposition to constraints, but rather explain participation, which is what this study aimed to explore. Shogan (2002) adopted a similar approach and argued that leisure constraints may not be wholly restricting. Thereby, a focus on facilitators provides an opportunity to understand how families use internal and external resources to enable their leisure participation.

In order to conceptualize facilitators fully, it is necessary to distinguish between facilitators and benefits. Benefits include positive responses or perceived advantages *resulting from* participation whereas facilitators are factors to *start and continue* participation (Williams, Smith, & Papathomas, 2014). For example, the anticipation of benefits (an intrapersonal facilitator), not the perceived benefits themselves, is the factor that facilitates participation (Kehn & Kroll, 2009). However, facilitators are more than motivation; they are a “condition that exists, whether internal to the individual, in relation to another individual, or to some societal structure that enables participation” (Raymore, 2002, p. 43), thus suggesting that there are a variety of facilitators that influence participation in a leisure activity with different resultant experiences.

Drawing on the leisure constraints model (Crawford et al., 1991), Raymore (2002) suggested that there are three types of facilitators: intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural, with intrapersonal facilitators only understood within the contextual influences of interpersonal and

structural facilitators (Figure 4). Intrapersonal facilitators represent an individual's internal characteristics or beliefs that positively influence or enhance leisure participation and preference formation (Raymore, 2002). This may include “personal values, relaxation-related recreation, challenge seeking, perceived competence and skills, personal enjoyment, social learning and past experience” (Kim et al., 2011, p.393).



*Figure 4.* Adapted from Raymore (2002). The nested levels at which leisure facilitators (and constraints) occur, which recognizes the importance of context in leisure participation.

Raymore further defined interpersonal facilitators as individuals and groups external to the individual (or group), and structural facilitators as “those social and physical institutions, organizations or belief systems of a society that operate external to the individual” (p.43), which both positively influence or enhance leisure participation and preference formation. Given

Crawford & Godbey's (1987) description of structural leisure constraints, structural leisure facilitators may also include influences like season, climate, availability of opportunities, and cultural attitudes about the appropriateness of activities. An individual or group of individuals are subject a variety of factors that positively influence leisure participation, which can be explored as a strengths-based understanding of participation. The nested model of intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural facilitators that influence leisure participation proposed by Raymore (2002) drew on Bronfenbrenner's (1979, 1992) model of social ecological theory (SET). SET recognises that the physical and social environments influence a variety of leisure behaviours through the dynamic interplay between and within individuals, groups, and their environments by promoting, discouraging, and occasionally necessitating action (Loundsbury & Mitchell, 2009; Stokols, 1992, 1996). The range and relationships of OFL facilitators embedded in a family's individual, socio-cultural and political environments can be understood as multilevel influences that affect and are affected by a family's leisure behaviours (Henderson & Bialeschki, 2005; Loundsbury & Mitchell, 2009; Sallis et al., 2006). Thus, based on SET, the nested model of leisure facilitators (Raymore, 2002) represents the "interrelations between organisms and their environments" (Kaczynski & Henderson, 2007, p. 316) and how these interrelations facilitate leisure participation.

Leisure facilitators have been employed to understand: a) leisure preferences in early adolescence (De Bruyn & Cillessen, 2008); b) urban park use (McDonald & Price, 2009); c) leisure participation of the elderly (Eronen, von Bonsdorff, Rantakokko, & Rantanen, 2014) and those with disabilities (Barr & Shields, 2011; Shields, Synnot, & Burr, 2012; Williams et al., 2014); d) children's play and physical activity (Brockman, Jago, & Fox, 2011; Martínez-Andrés et al., 2012; Stanley, Boshoff, & Dollman, 2012); e) minorities' participation in sport (Heo &

Lee, 2007; Mohamed, Hassan, Weis, Sia, & Wieland, 2014; Ogden & Hilt, 2003); f) family leisure satisfaction (Swinton, Freeman, Zabriskie, & Fields, 2008); g) leisure travel (Silva & Correia, 2008); and h) use of non-motorized transportation (Ahlport, Linnan, Vaughn, Evenson, & Ward, 2008). However, leisure facilitators have not been used to understand the internal and external resources that influence, create, and enhance OFL. Leisure facilitators are a relatively new area of study in leisure research that may deepen the understanding of leisure participation and can benefit the study of OFL.

***Strengths-based approach.*** A strengths-based approach seeks to explore assets, capacities, positive outcomes, and both previous and current successes within a community (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). This approach aligns well with leisure facilitators, which could include influences, resources, and circumstances like community, family or individual strengths, skills, knowledge and capacities or structures (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Kim, Heo, Chun, & Lee, 2011; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993, 1996). Similar to a strengths-based approach (Rans & Green, 2005), it can be argued that an exploration of leisure facilitators offers opportunities to develop existing resources as long-term, sustainable enablers of OFL.

A common critique of strengths-based approaches is that they repress or suppress the negative aspects of a community or organization (Reason & Bradbury, 2001), thus ignoring their needs. However, a strengths-based perspective, including a focus on leisure facilitators, does not ignore problems or issues (Elliott, 1999); rather, this approach creates a more nuanced understanding of the unique contexts in which leisure preferences are influenced and formed (Michael, 2005). A focus on facilitators recognizes that a phenomenon may simultaneously

inhibit and enable (e.g., Heo & Lee, 2007; Shogan, 2002) and seeks to understand what is possible based on the enabling strengths, capacities, influences, resources, and circumstances.

### **Gaps in the Literature**

Within current leisure literature, there has been minimal study of the intersection of outdoor leisure and family leisure, and OFL consequently remains underexplored. The majority of outdoor leisure studies to date have focused on individuals', particularly children's, constrained outdoor leisure, and the benefits of outdoor leisure (Fjortoft, 2001; Frost, 2012; Louv, 2008; McCurdy et al., 2010; White, 2004), with a particular focus on physical activity (Beets et al., 2007; Colabianchi, Maslow, & Swayampakala, 2011; Davison & Lawson, 2006; Edwardson & Gorely, 2010; Flett et al., 2010; Higgins, Gaul, Gibbons, & Van Gyn, 2003). Family leisure to date predominantly focuses on challenges, experiences, and outcomes (Agate et al., 2007; Beets & Foley, 2008; Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Louv, 2008; Shannon & Shaw, 2008, 2010; Shaw & Dawson, 2003).

Outdoor leisure and family leisure studies often approach issues through a deficits lens (see Defrain & Asay, 2007; Frost, 2012; Leatherdale & Ahmed, 2011), which does not necessarily allow for a broader understanding of leisure participation. Therefore, there is the opportunity to use the epistemology of appreciative inquiry and asset-based community development (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993), to understand leisure participation and preferences from a strengths-based perspective. Although a relatively new concept, leisure facilitators (Raymore, 2002) appear to fit well with a strengths-based perspective and can provide insight into OFL experiences. This is particularly topical, as there is a growing concern of increasing physical inactivity and disconnection from nature (ParticipACTION, 2014; Louv, 2008) and, given the influence that family has on a child's lifelong leisure, values, and

behaviours (Beets et al., 2010; Harrington, 2006; Kleiber, 1999; Maher, 2005; Mactavish & Schleien, 2004; Shaw, 2001; Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Taylor et al., 1994; Wells et al., 2004), this study helps understand perceptions, experiences and preferences of OFL.

### **Research Questions**

Using a strengths-based perspective, the study explored the experiences, perceptions, and preferences of outdoor family leisure in East Scarborough. Specifically, this study recruited families in East Scarborough with at least one child 12 years old or younger, and practitioners who work with families in Ward 43 to address three research questions:

- How is outdoor family leisure perceived as a family-based activity?
- How is outdoor family leisure experienced in Ward 43?
- What facilitates family participation in outdoor family leisure in East Scarborough?

### **Chapter Three: Methods**

The purpose of this study was to explore how families experience outdoor family leisure (OFL) and to assess how, and in what ways, leisure facilitators enable families to engage in OFL. Using a strengths-based perspective, this research aims to explore perceptions, values, and experiences of OFL to meet the following objectives: a) to explore how families perceived outdoor family leisure as a family-based activity; b) to explore how outdoor family leisure was experienced in Ward 43; and c) to investigate the outdoor family leisure facilitators in East Scarborough. This chapter details the methodology, research and sampling methods, research participants, and data analysis used to address the study's research questions. The chapter concludes with details about the researcher's relationship to the research.

#### **Methodology**

This study was exploratory in nature and, drawing on Yin (2014), a case study approach was used to emphasize details (McCormick, 2000) and create a nuanced understanding (Flyvbjerg, 2006) of OFL. A case study methodology was particularly useful because it allowed for a focus on "how" and "why" questions (Yin, 2014), which provide insight into participation (Stake, 2005). A case study methodology was used in this study because the phenomenon being investigated and the area where data were collected met the criteria of case study methodology: a) geopolitical boundaries delineated the case study; b) the focus of the study was on a contemporary phenomenon; c) the researcher was unable to modify participants' behaviours; and d) the study aimed to broaden knowledge of the phenomenon (Yin, 2014). Specifically, an instrumental case study was conducted because the case was a tool to support an understanding of something else (i.e. OFL; Stake, 2005). Through containing the study to a single geopolitical ward, it was believed that the well-documented socio-demographic and geographical information

about the area would support a better understanding of OFL facilitators.

## **Methods**

Common to cases studies (Bloor & Wood, 2006; Tellis, 1997), multiple methods were used for data collection because it allowed the researcher to draw on the strengths of both methods and fostered a deeper understanding of OFL (Creswell, 2009). Specifically, this study used qualitative methods – interviews and focus groups – to target responses from specific individuals and, thus, explore the context of OFL. To avoid any ambiguity, the word “activities” was used during data collection when describing the leisure component of outdoor family activities. A research journal was used to record details about each interview and focus group immediately after their conclusion and included items such as distractions, interruptions, details about participants, dominant responses, and comparisons between participant responses. Summary notes, comparisons between focus groups and interviews, and initial data interpretation were also recorded up to two hours after the data collection occurred. Notes were not recorded during the interview or focus group so that the researcher could be fully engaged in the data collection. The combined research methods allowed for a more nuanced understanding of OFL and minimized misperceptions and invalidity of conclusions (Stake, 1995) when exploring how families experienced OFL and how, and in what ways, facilitators allowed families to engage in OFL.

**Focus groups.** Focus groups with caregivers – used to represent the participants that included both parent and grandparent– were conducted between December 2014 and January 2015. Focus groups were chosen for collecting data from caregivers because they provided a social environment where contextually rich, descriptive data could be collected by allowing interaction between participants (Goss, 1996; Kamberelis & Dimitraidis, 2005; Krueger, 1994; Morgan and Krueger, 1993); the aim was to create an environment where complex behaviours

and motivations could be better understood (Morgan, 1996) while ensuring that data collection was both time and cost effective. Focus groups allowed for an exploration of caregivers' perceptions and experiences of OFL and how and why they thought and felt the way that they did (Kitzinger, 1995) while navigating language differences. In this way, focus groups enabled a broad exploration of OFL and allowed the researcher to draw upon respondents' own words when reporting results (Krueger, 1994; Morgan & Krueger, 1993; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990).

Throughout the focus group research process, including during the focus groups, questions were added or modified, particularly when the word "leisure" was used, to ensure that participants were able to respond to the question and to delve deeper into meaning and perceptions when required to better understand what facilitated OFL within the community context (Patton, 2002). The majority of edits to the focus group guide occurred after the initial focus group in response to questions that were unclear, did not motivate discussion, or did not elicit participants to share the information that was being sought. For example, the first focus group question, "Tell me about the things that you do together as a family" solely elicited responses about outdoor activities in the first focus group and was edited to read "Tell me about the things – indoors and outdoors – that you do together with your family" so that caregivers might speak to all family activities. Other edits included adding the definition of outdoor family activities with examples (e.g., outdoor family activities could be anything from sitting outside on a bench, to going for a walk, or attending a child's outdoor sporting event/game), including a statement about letting the researcher know if any questions were unclear, and the editing of questions to better explore OFL experiences from a strengths perspective. In every focus group, questions were added when there was a concern about misunderstanding or misinterpreting participants' responses. At times, questions were reworded to encourage participants' responses,

to motivate conversation, or to explore strengths if participants highlighted deficits in their responses.

Questions were developed using Raymore's (2002) definition of structural, intra- and interpersonal facilitators (Appendix A) with additional probes used as needed within the focus group to foster a deeper understanding of the practices, influences and facilitators of OFL. Questions also focused on differences that arose within and between focus groups to ensure that responses were fully understood and to explore responses that suggested diversity between participants.

**In-depth semi-structured interviews.** Interviews were conducted with service provider employees (SPE) between October and December 2014 and were used because they allowed the researcher to encourage interviewees to speak openly, ask additional questions, and to encourage individuals to give in-depth explanations of responses (Veal, 2012). Interviews were chosen to collect data from SPEs because they allowed for greater in-depth interaction (Kirby, Greaves & Reid, 2006), encouraged trust between the interviewer and interviewee, and provided a safe space where participants could speak openly and candidly about their organizations and share their opinions and experiences with OFL.

SPEs were identified and then interviewed using a question guide and related probes (Appendix B) about OFL practices and perceptions in East Scarborough to ensure that the purpose and objectives of the study were realized. Similar to focus groups, interview questions were developed using Raymore's (2002) leisure facilitators. The questions were open-ended and the length of the interview varied between 45 and 75 minutes. The interviewer adapted the wording, sequence of questions, and the questions themselves throughout each interview in order to explore the "world from the subject's perspective" (Bercovitz, 1996, p. 377). In this way,

interviews were used to explore key informants' perceptions of OFL and understand the context in which OFL occurred.

### **Study Participant Sampling**

Participant sampling was purposeful (Stake, 1995) and targeted participants – parents or guardians and service provider employees – from whom the researcher could learn about how OFL participation is facilitated (Patton, 2002). For focus groups, only parents or guardians were recruited initially as they have a critical role in the development of children's leisure practices (Kleiber, 1999; Scott & Willits, 1998; Shannon, 2006; Shannon & Shaw, 2008). However, an exception was made for three grandparents who showed up to one of the focus groups because I believed they could contribute insight into the role of grandparents (i.e., caregivers) in OFL. Selection criteria required that all caregivers had at least one child or grandchild 12 years old or younger as this is a period when attitudes toward leisure develop and teaching lifelong leisure habit occurs (Higgs, 2010). Service provider employees (SPEs) were recruited because the literature had previously identified that organizations may play a role in children's leisure socialisation (Mundy, 1998).

**Focus group sampling.** Potential participants were sought via recruitment posters (Appendix C) displayed at locations throughout Ward 43, such as grocery store community notice boards, in shop storefronts, coffee shops, daycare centres, and local community organizations. Organizations that displayed these posters included two of the five community service providers that participated in interviews.

During the recruitment period, I spent time in parks in Ward 43 with the intention of inviting parents and guardians to participate in the focus groups; however, naturalistic observation never identified any families when these locations were visited, which suggested that potential

participants were rarely using these areas during the late autumn to early winter recruitment period. The lack of potential participants in parks combined with City of Toronto bylaws that prevent posters displayed in parks led to the decision to not display posters in these locations.

A snowball technique and direct recruitment were also used to invite parents and guardians to participate in focus groups, including at a local community event. In one instance, a focus group was held at a centre during a scheduled children's program and parents were invited to attend the focus group after dropping their child off at the program. Before and after each focus group, caregivers were asked whether they could think of anyone else who would like to participate and were encouraged to invite other caregivers to contact me about attending. Sampling techniques were chosen to attract participants that represented family diversity to thoroughly explore OFL.

**Semi-structured interview sampling.** Potential participants worked at local community organizations that served the Ward 43 community and were able to speak to OFL in East Scarborough. All potential interviewees, except one, were contacted in advance via email (Appendix D) to request their participation in an interview and detail what participation included. Follow up emails or phone calls with additional details were provided if required. In one instance, one interviewee had arranged for her colleague to be interviewed after her interview in order to provide an understanding of the organization from both management and client-facing roles in relation to the interview questions. After the interviews, participants were asked if there was anyone else who the researcher should speak to and based on these suggestions, other individuals were contacted and invited to participate. Two potential participants were identified by participants, one of which joined the study.

## Research Participants

The data included in analysis came from two sources: a) six service provider employees who were employed by organizations that offered leisure opportunities for families in Ward 43; and b) 20 caregivers of children 12 years old or younger, who lived or used facilities and services within Ward 43.

**Service provider employees.** One woman and five men, representing five organizations that work with individuals and families within the case study boundaries, were interviewed. Within this group of participants, there were two directors, two managers, one supervisor, and one community outreach worker. Two organizations targeted different, but specific, communities of individuals, with one located inside of Ward 43 and the other not far outside of the Ward; the third organization was community-based and worked within designated community boundaries that included part of Ward 43; the fourth organization serviced all of the City of Toronto and has ongoing projects in East Scarborough; and the fifth organization was community-based with its head office in Ward 43 (Table 1).

**Caregivers.** The caregiver participants in this study attended one of four focus groups. While women were not specifically targeted, all 20 participants were female and predominantly parents (three grandparents also participated). Some participants spoke about their husbands; however, it was unclear whether caregivers were from two- or single- parent households. Ten participants were members of ethnic minority groups with the remaining participants, including the grandmothers, were members of non-minority ethnic groups. Not all participants lived within Ward 43; however, they were from East Scarborough and made use of Ward 43 facilities, programs or organizations (Table 2). The women's responses also suggested diversity in socioeconomic status; however, this was not confirmed through direct inquiry.

Table 1.

*Description of service provider employees who participated in semi-structured interviews.*

Service provider employee	Male/female	Description of position and organization
1	Male	An executive director of a not-for-profit leisure organization. A Toronto-wide organization with ongoing projects in Ward 43.
2	Female	A manager for a community services hub. Not specifically leisure-oriented, the organization supports resident-led initiatives and acts as a hub for other service providers and programs. Mandated to work within a specific neighbourhood, has a head office in Ward 43.
3	Male	A community outreach worker in the same community backbone organization as SPE 2. Works out of their head office in Ward 43 and within the boundaries mandated by the organization.
4	Male	Manager for the Scarborough location of a Canada-wide organization that offers leisure and training programs for children, youth and families. The head office is located in Ward 43.
5	Male	A supervisor for an organization that offers support services and programs, including leisure programs, and targets a specific ethnic community. The head office is located in Ward 43.
6	Male	An executive director of a multidisciplinary, not-for-profit community organization that offers leisure and support services, and targets a specific ethnic community. The head office is located outside of Ward 43.

Table 2.

*Description of Caregivers who Participated in a Focus Groups.*

Caregiver number	Ethnic minority (Y/N)	Children (number and age)
1	Y	Son and daughter. 3 and five years old.
2	Y	Two sons. 3 and 1 years old.
3	Y	Three sons, one daughter. 26, 23, 19 and 10 years old.
4	Y	Unknown. A 3 year old and a newborn.
5	Y	One daughter, one son. Son is 3 years old.
6	Y	One daughter, 3 years old.
7	Y	Two children, 3 years old and a newborn.
8	Y	Two children, both 3 years old.
9	Y	One son, 3 years old.
10	Y	Two boys, one girl. 14, 12, and 9 years old.
11	Y	Two children, 12 and 11 years old.
12	N	One son, one daughter. 18 and 12 years old.
13	Y	Two children, 10 and 12 years old.
14	N	Two children, 14 and 12 years old.
15**	N	Seven children. Youngest is 7 years old.

16*	N	Daughter who has twins. Ages not provided.
17*	N	Three children. 41, 31 and 29 years old. Grandchildren are 18, 12 and 6 years old.
18*	N	One daughter, 28 years old. Grandchild is 5 months old.
19	N	One son, one daughter. One is 7 years old.
20	N	Two sons. 7 and 18 years old.

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*Note: \* Grandparent participant, \*\* Parent and grandparent participant.*

### **Data Analysis**

Audio recorded data were transcribed into written form and tried to capture features of the conversation, such as emphasis, tone of voice, and pauses, so that data could be studied in detail. Notes from the research journal were compiled and transferred to a digital word file. Journal notes pertaining to specific data sets were added as supplements to these sets. The research journal data was analysed alongside participant data. NVivo data analysis software was used to organize data and to assist with coding. Immersion in the data occurred through listening to the interview and focus group recordings and reading the corresponding transcriptions twice in order to get a sense of the data as a whole.

Data analysis began during data collection and transcription with initial impressions and interpretations recorded in the researcher's journal as recommended by Doody, Slevin, and Taggart (2013). Data analysis was guided by Raymore's (2002) framework of leisure facilitators and the epistemology of strengths-based approaches that strengths and capacities exist within

every community (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003). Data analysis focused on identifying experiences, perceptions, and facilitators of OFL through constant comparison (Charmaz, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) between data and the precepts of leisure facilitators (Raymore, 2002). Although originally used in grounded theory methodology, constant comparison is useful to analyse many types of data (Leech & Onwuegbuzie, 2008).

Initially, line-by-line open coding (Doody et al., 2013) was employed to explore data meanings, separate data into initial codes, establish analytic direction, and reduce the likelihood of researcher bias (Charmaz, 2008). This stage was inclusive of both strength-based and deficit-based perspectives. Simultaneously, questioning was used to probe deeper into the data, stimulate thinking, and guide analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) with a particular focus on context to explore: a) what was going on; b) how participants defined the situation; and c) how and why particular actions occurred.

Once initial open coding was completed, axial coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Glaser & Strauss, 1967) was used to continually compare coded data to one another and to Raymore's (2002) definitions of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural facilitators. In doing so, data analysis moved beyond the initial codes to create thematic categories and subcategories by searching out similarities, differences and relationships between codes (Charmaz, 2008; Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Uncoded data were also reviewed to assess their relevance to the themes that were developed. The final step of data analysis was comparing and contrasting themes that were developed to understand the relationships between and within thematic categories, thus further refining categories into well-defined themes and reducing overlap (Corbin & Strauss, 2008).

Data analysis resulted in five themes that addressed the three research questions. The first two research questions were answered by three similar themes that described the case study

context in which OFL occurred and the activities participated in, and are presented together. The third research question was addressed with two dominant themes about the strengths that facilitate OFL. The following chapter describes the themes that emerged from data analysis.

### **About the Researcher**

I am a Caucasian female of European descent with two sisters who grew up in a middle-class neighbourhood in Mississauga, Ontario, which shares a border with the City of Toronto. While growing up, the safety of the neighbourhood was never a concern to me. Both of my parents were born in the province of Quebec, spent time outdoors as children, and encouraged me to spend time outdoors as a child. Growing up, I experienced a variety of different individual, group and family outdoor leisure regardless of the time of year. Outdoor leisure was not strictly outdoor family leisure for me although my parents were the main reason for planned outdoor family activities, like camping.

Although some have characterized my generation as disconnected from nature (e.g., Louv, 2008), this was not my experience. Technology was limited and the outdoors was the main source of entertainment in my childhood. I was rarely in organized sports; tee-ball was the only sport that I was ever enrolled in and that was when I was eight years old. My father taught me how to engage in different sports, but structured, scheduled forms of sports or physical activity were not overly represented in my childhood. My outdoor activities have changed as I have aged, but spending time outdoors always remained important to me.

My love of the natural world led to an undergraduate degree in biology and continues to drive my current leisure habits. As an adult, I am not “sporty” – in the past ten years, the I have only been on an ultimate Frisbee sports team and have taken tennis lessons – but, I do consider myself to be outdoorsy. I value the outdoors and will make the effort to get outside. As someone

who plans on having a family in the future, I believe that getting outdoors and sharing a love of the natural world with my children will be an integral part of raising the children.

My personal values stem from outdoor childhood experiences; I feel connected to nature and believe that it is an integral component of everyday life. I believe that children should have outdoor experiences to awaken their senses, spark their imaginations, and to develop a sense of connection and appreciation of the natural world around them. However, I also recognize that people may have had different childhood experiences. My connection to nature is what inspired this study, particularly after I noticed a decline in children's outdoor leisure in my childhood neighbourhood. My childhood experiences, shaped in many ways by my parents, connect me to the natural world and influence my reasons for valuing the importance of getting outdoors, which helped shape and drive this study on outdoor family leisure.

## **Chapter Four: Results**

Themes that were developed deductively through the data analysis were explored in relation to understandings of outdoor leisure, family leisure, Raymore's (2002) model of leisure facilitators, and the use of a strengths-based epistemology. The following results describe the context, characteristics, and the facilitators of outdoor family leisure (OFL) that emerged from the themes. In particular, the results suggest that OFL was predominantly purposive leisure facilitated by intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural influences within the family and community contexts. This chapter is divided into three categories, which represent the overarching themes that developed from the data analysis: a) perceptions and experiences of outdoor family leisure; b) facilitators of outdoor family leisure; and c) a summary of the study results.

### **Perceptions and Experiences of Outdoor Family Leisure**

The lived experiences of participants were reflected in the way that outdoor family activities and reasons for participation were described, which resulted in three subthemes: understandings of leisure; the pervasiveness of a deficits perspective; and purposive leisure. These subthemes also represented the outdoor activities that families engaged in and addressed the first two research questions on perceptions and experiences of OFL. That is, the subjective understandings and constructions of leisure influenced how participants spoke about OFL, which was characterized as predominantly purposive and was frequently described using a deficits perspective.

**Understandings of leisure.** How study participants spoke about leisure was linked to psychological, physical, sociocultural, and political contexts in which participants were situated, and how leisure was experienced and learned within these contexts. The context of OFL was

reflected in the diverse outdoor family activities and reasons for participation described by participants, which suggested that OFL was valued and practiced in different ways. In this study, intrapersonal understandings and experiences of leisure meant that activities not traditionally understood as leisure could be OFL. For example, necessary activities, like walking the children to school or going to the grocery store, could, at times, be OFL for some participants because these were understood as activities when when parents could also spend time with their children:

*And being aware when you are doing that [spending time together as a family]; when you go to the grocery store or are with your children, be aware that this can be your family time and how do you want to use it? (SPE 6)*

*Oh absolutely [having a dog gets the family outdoors together]. Because you have to at least once a day because he needs a walk so...The kids do it [walk the dog most of the time]. I join them the odd time...like last night, we all went actually [to spend time together].*

(Caregiver 14)

The same activity, like walking the dog, may not have always been OFL, but could be when the effort was made to get outside together as a family. Whether or not an obligatory activity was experienced as OFL depended on the individuals involved and the caregiver's state of mind about the activity.

Cultural influences, such as coming from a predominantly farming community, impacted what activities participants understood to be OFL; OFL practices were reflective of the physical and sociocultural contexts in which leisure preferences were formed. For example, one Caucasian parent, who grew up in an urban environment perceived, her backyard as an ideal location for OFL, but did not perceive gardening as a leisure activity that she would engage in with her family. In contrast, one organization that worked closely with immigrants identified that

the local community gardens were in high demand by newcomers and immigrant families because of their backgrounds:

*I have a very big backyard so we [the family] spend a lot of time there.... There's a gazebo out there and a little garden. No gardening though [with the family]; I don't like gardening. (Caregiver 10)*

*Everyone wants to garden here... That will make people go out. We [the organization] can only give 50 plots. Fifty small plots and we have another 200 on the waiting list. Many come from farming communities, mostly newcomers; they love gardening. (SPE 3)*

Sociocultural contexts also influenced on how families understood OFL and how they engaged in OFL. If immigrant families came from a culture where the woods were not safe, they may not consider a local park to be a safe or acceptable space for OFL:

*So, I don't know if there is that whole notion of pass by all the woods and we don't go there. 'Cause I know with Caribbean folk, Caribbean people, the woods is like the jungle. I mean, my mother taught me we don't go in the woods; we don't go in the woods in Guyana. So why am I going to go in the woods in Canada? ... So, I'm wondering if this whole notion of going to a place set aside for a few to engage in the outdoors is still something relatively, sort of, culturally challenging, for lack of a better word. (SPE 4)*

OFL included a wide range of possible activities and experiences that were made possible through the contexts in which leisure was learned and experienced. Thus, the results suggested that individual experiences and understandings of leisure require consideration in order to better understand what constitutes OFL and the strengths that facilitate OFL engagement.

The connectedness of gender and OFL that participants described affected how OFL was understood and practiced. All caregivers were female which, based on how messages about the

gender roles of family and family leisure were interpreted and practiced, meant that caregivers predominantly focused more on the child's or the rest of the family's leisure preferences over their individual leisure preferences; the family and the children came first. Thus, OFL was understood to be opportunities to contribute to the growth, wellbeing, and development of children and the family:

*I think that, as a mother, what I give to that boy [during our time spent together], it will reflect on me and on his ability in life, what I want him to be.... You have to maintain that parent love and respect.... I feel that family is important and that they should learn to respect people, respect their neighbours and themselves so I give them everything because I believe, when I die, I believe they should remember me in a good, positive way; the role model of the mother. (Caregiver 7)*

OFL was, consequently, frequently understood as separate from individual leisure and was for the child or family as there was little focus by the female caregivers' on their personal enjoyment of the outdoors; intrapersonal motivations for OFL engagement were altruistic.

Understandings of leisure derived from the contexts and lived experiences in which leisure practices and preferences were shaped, impacted how caregivers engaged in and with OFL. As a result, a variety of OFL practices, understandings, and experiences of OFL are possible between individuals and within families.

**The prevalence of a deficits perspective.** During data collection, it was difficult for both the participants and the researcher to maintain a strengths-based perspective. Respondents frequently used a traditional deficits lens when responding to questions from the researcher, which affected how the researcher framed follow-up and probing questions. The impact of this tendency was

revealed during data analysis when themes were analyzed and deficits-based responses appeared frequently.

The pervasiveness of a problems-based focus reflected the contexts and lived reality of participants, which influenced how OFL was described and experienced. Although participants engaged in OFL and opportunities for OFL engagement were identified, participants' responses were predominantly problem-oriented; the deficits perspective was prevalent within both individuals and organizations. When speaking about the community, service provider employees (SPE) and caregivers described outdoor leisure deficits, which made OFL participation challenging:

*Well everything's complex.... People, if they are worried about shelter, food, income, any of those things, then they're not thinking about well how do I get my exercise in? (SPE 2)*

*If the families know how to do [outdoor family leisure], what they're allowed to do it and where they can do it... I would think that the knowledge is very limited. (SPE 1)*

*So outdoor family leisure time would become very very restricted because of the living conditions of most of the population that we serve [low income or living in poverty]...*

*Then you have physical space.... there are very few outdoor activity spaces that are safe and well-maintained and managed for people to go out and have outdoor activities... Then we have the notion of safety. Whether it is actual issues of safety or perceived issues of safety, that's also a factor that would limit, in my view, the possibility of a lot of people having outdoor family time and leisure and physical activity.... (SPE 6)*

This pervasive deficits perspective suggested a culturally-ingrained tendency to focus on problems. At a structural level, for instance, SPEs highlighted that funding was project based and

focused on outcomes (i.e., identifying and fixing deficits), which negatively impacted OFL participation as the emphasis was on indoor physical activity programmes:

*Now CHCs and community health centres as a sector across Ontario have started to adopt this community index of wellbeing, or the CIW, as a way of engaging communities, but also measuring outcomes [so the organizational focus is on addressing deficits]. (SPE 6)*

*I realise the physical activity and outdoors is not promoted as much right now [because it is not usually a part of organizations' mandate]. (SPE 3)*

*There is now also what we call some free [community] centres and Scarborough just has just got some free centres opening this September. Again, that's structured programming and it's mostly indoor-based programming. (SPE 1)*

It was difficult to pinpoint from where this deficits perspective was perpetuated; however, it is likely that service and programming provision is dictated by policies that focus on community problems, providing solutions, and measuring outcomes within budget restrictions. The deficits perspective maintained the impression that OFL participation was difficult or challenging, which was reinforced by the participants' focus on intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural challenges, that included children's age, financial resources, and the need for non-monetary resources to engage in OFL.

**Children's ages.** Caregivers described participating in outdoor family activities with young children and reported that having multiple children of different ages shaped OFL participation. Children's ages influenced caregivers' perceptions of what OFL activities were available and how families participated in OFL; family leisure changed or was restricted based on children's age, which could be interpreted as an influential interpersonal challenge to OFL:

*That is, [you can only participate in the family program] if you have a child [within the eligible 0 to 6] age...I mean I see some of these programs [that the family would like to participate in] and it's kind of like, I can't do that [because her children are 9, 12, and 14 years old]. (Caregiver 10)*

*So, like for me, of all the winters in my life this one has been the hardest because I have a newborn. I can't just say hey, newborn, let's go out... and then you have a toddler who wants to go outside [which makes it difficult to plan and participate in OFL].*

(Caregiver 4)

Children's ages were perceived as a complex challenge that needed to be overcome or negotiated in order to engage in OFL. While age did not necessarily prevent OFL, caregivers understood OFL from a deficits perspective with regards to age differences and OFL engagement.

The propensity to focus on deficits meant that caregivers believed that as children age, there are fewer available options for OFL, rather than opportunities to discover new OFL preferences and experiences. For example, one caregiver, who had a teenaged son and a seven-year-old, explained how she anticipated that her youngest son would no longer want to participate in certain outdoor activities with her when he is older:

*I would do that [Christmas tree lighting] now because my kid is only seven, but I don't think I'd do that when he's older. I don't think he'd be interested. (Caregiver 15)*

Similarly, another caregiver, with a young son and six adult children, believed that outdoor family activities could only decrease as her children got older:

*People lose interest [in family events] you know what I mean? They don't want to do things or their kids get too old and they just want to do their own thing [so families stop spending time together]. (Caregiver 20)*

The challenges of children's ages, and thus the pervasiveness of a deficits perspective, were evident at interpersonal, intrapersonal, and structural levels. Based on, for example, personal preferences, program availability, and the consideration of all family members when planning OFL, caregivers were conscious of how children's ages negatively affected participation.

**Financial resources.** Opportunities for OFL were described as good or bad, accessible or inaccessible based on the cost of participation. Participants focused on and identified that free activities were good, accessible options for OFL, which highlighted the belief amongst participants that there were financial concerns that affected OFL. Viewing the cost of OFL as a problem resulted in caregivers feeling like they had to prioritize work over leisure and that OFL participation would be restrained, difficult, or impossible:

*But, actually, everything is expensive now, the gas is expensive; the less we spend is the better way.... Right now, I'd rather work now than take the time off. I want to make money instead of taking a day off. If you have money, you can do anything you want, but if you miss it [work], you cannot get [it] back. (Caregiver 11)*

*The concept of leisure is always a challenge because leisure is emotionally and psychologically connected to financial wellbeing; people who are well-to-do financially are the ones who have leisure because they can go away, they can have some fun time.*

(SPE 6)

*Why would you want to go [to an outdoor event or activity]... you don't have money or you don't know what the cost is.... Why would you even try because you already figured out that there are so many [financial] barriers? (SPE 5)*

The focus on financial challenges meant that opportunities for leisure subsidies, free OFL, or resident-led initiatives were frequently overlooked in participants' initial responses; OFL

facilitators were described when prompted by the researcher, but the reflex focus of participants was on financial constraints to OFL participation. The focus on financial challenges may have resulted from an individual's social economic status (SES) and perceptions of the costs of leisure, individual experiences or understanding of leisure, and community and organizational influences on what outdoor leisure is possible for families of low SES.

*Non-monetary resources.* While participants did not explicitly define the concept of resources, this was expressed through the deficits in non-monetary requirements or opportunities to participate in OFL. The pervasiveness of the deficits perspective was reflected in the list of problems that participants described when speaking about OFL. Deficient non-monetary community resources that participants focused on included tangible resources, like community garden plots, mentioned previously, or outdoor skating rinks:

*So gardening is another thing that will make people go out.... And we can only give 50 plots. Fifty small plots and we have another 200 on the waiting list. (SPE 3)*

*Well, hockey is an outdoor sport, but it's played indoors [in the community] ... We have an indoor rink, but no outdoor rink. (Caregiver 10)*

While the absence of outdoor structural resources for OFL could be linked to the lack of monetary resources to build these facilities, they were also linked to a lack of physical space or a lack of interest by the City to build these locally.

Participants also spoke about intangible resource deficiencies that affected OFL participation at the intrapersonal and interpersonal levels, which included time, motivation, skills, culture, and knowledge of outdoor locations:

*We talked about physical literacy and being able to throw around a ball or whatever.*

*There are a lot of parents who don't have those skills themselves [which inhibits outdoor family leisure participation]. (SPE 1)*

*And I think that's the difference between rural and urban: urban folks are just so urban that for them they feel comfortable indoors as opposed to outdoors kind of thing. (SPE 4)*

*Yeah, we go with the family to the park near the apartment. We go there. I don't know any other.... I look [online for outdoor family activities and locations], but I cannot find it; I want to [go outside with my family]. (Caregiver 1)*

Participants believed that they personally or the local community did not have the non-monetary resources to participate in OFL. For SPEs, deficiencies in local OFL resources were an influence that discouraged OFL engagement. Notably, despite the focus on the perceived disadvantages of non-monetary resource deficits of an individual or the community, participants also identified previous and current successes and opportunities for OFL when probed by the researcher. Thus, it is possible that the deficits perspective perpetuated the perception that OFL participation was limited by non-monetary intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural challenges.

**Purposive leisure.** Caregivers' experiences and perceptions of OFL was that it was purposive; participants attached intrapersonal, cultural, or socially-define goals, outcomes or purpose to their decisions to participate in OFL. Caregivers connected their role in their children's growth, development and wellbeing to OFL participation, which suggested that OFL was purposive in that it was frequently planned and participated in for predetermined reasons. This was particularly evident in caregivers' decisions to participate in OFL to spend time with family, to focus on the child, and to share their outdoor experiences. These purposeful reasons were supported by the description that OFL was "work," which suggested that families –

motivated by internal and external supporting factors – put in time and effort to enable OFL participation in order to achieve the goals and outcomes listed above despite the challenges identified in the pervasiveness of a deficits perspective.

***Spending time with family.*** As illustrated by the quotes below, OFL was more about purposefully spending time with family than participation in the activity. Outdoor public spaces and outdoor programs, events, and activities were spaces where families could spend time together. Time spent with family was valued; it was important for caregivers to take the time to bond with family and foster the value of “family” in children:

*It's not about the activity; it's just about spending time with the family. I think that's probably true for most people; what you're doing is inconsequential. (Caregiver 14)*

*I think it's important to spend time together doing stuff [as a family]... So you have to force them sometimes to get outside, but it's to...spend time bonding together. (Caregiver 12)*

Further, caregivers indicated they desired more options and opportunities for OFL, which suggested that families experienced OFL as “good” for family time and purposefully looked to spend time together. This was obvious in the popularity of a new outdoor space, created based on community feedback, that was described as a place where families had begun to congregate in order to spend time together:

*People congregate around the [sports pad] now [that it's been built] and they're just dropping in and playing sports on the sports pad now that the space is available... families, young people, teenagers [all use the area for different activities]. (SPE 2)*

[Families are using the newly built sports pad for outdoor leisure because] *It's not too far, parents can watch their kids, parents can go there with their kids and can engage in*

*activities, but there's not a lot of green space with the apartment complexes [so the sport's pad is a preferred option] ... that encourage socialization and play [amongst families and the sports pad addresses that gap]. (SPE 4)*

*The Nepalese/Bhutanese community organized a Diwali celebration at the community sports pad... The space was a place for the event, but also a space for over a dozen multigenerational families, including families with young children, to spend time together, socialise, and celebrate their culture. (Research journal, October 24, 2014)*

Caregivers chose to purposefully participate in outdoor activities with their children because it allowed them to spend time together regardless of the activity they engaged in. One of the main purposes of OFL was to spend time together with the family, and parents were constantly on the lookout for options and spaces to do so.

***Outdoor family leisure is for the child.*** Participants focused on the outcomes they expected when describing what motivated them to engage in OFL and spoke about enhancing children's wellbeing, providing opportunities, and purposefully supporting children's leisure development by engaging in activities that the children chose. Notably, caregivers often mentioned fun or play alongside their intra- and inter-personal goals in participating in OFL, which included: a) providing health benefits; b) entertaining their children and making them happy; c) providing their children with learning opportunities and experiences; and d) supporting the leisure development of their children by enabling the activities that the children wanted to participate in:

*In the car...you don't get fresh air. So I take him [on a walk] every morning to get the fresh air. (Caregiver 7)*

*That's [getting outside] good for the kids. They need it and they don't get enough in school. (Caregiver 18)*

*It [going outside] is a good thing to do.... It relieves stress, relieve pain, relieve anger; relieve all these things. (Caregiver 7)*

*I really like to teach them too... Even if I go outside, I teach them...For example, if you go to the signal lights, you say look at the signal, it's a red light...You teach them that they need to stop and wait. Green is go and yeah, little things like that I like to do. (Caregiver 8)*

*We do things with the kids. We do it for the kids. We basically just focus everything on the kids; whatever makes them happy. (Caregiver 19)*

Whether these goals that encouraged purposive OFL participation were products of contextual influences on intrapersonal and interpersonal behaviours was unclear, although it appeared that intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural influences, such as a lack of outdoor exposure at school, motivated the goals and outcomes parents desired from OFL.

***Benefits of sharing outdoor experiences.*** Caregivers purposefully participated in OFL to achieve desired outcomes that the outdoors offered both for the individual and the family. For example, parents noted that they achieved a sense of accomplishment from spending time outdoors with their child and were also able to reap the benefits of their children having expended their energy:

*You get a sense of accomplishment when you go outside [for the day with the family] and you're returning home. Like, ah, I've done something for the day. (Caregiver 2)*

*[Parents think] let me just go and take the kids there [to the park], let them burn off some energy, and then when they come home they're quiet, they're tired and I will also have some peace of mind. (SPE 6)*

Caregivers and SPEs broadly recognized that there were benefits to spending time outdoors and caregivers were influenced to purposefully engage in OFL in order to access these anticipated outcomes.

The broader cultural focus on physical inactivity, the negative effects of technology, and an emphasis on outdoor play possibly influenced OFL goals to provide outdoor experiences. Caregivers discussed the challenges of screen time and sedentary behaviours and how sharing outdoor experiences helped navigate the negative effects of these indoor, sedentary activities:

*These things [cellphone and tablets] are very restricted...so it really is go outside and ride your bike [as a family] ... do something [so that they don't spend time inside].*

(Caregiver 13)

*I'm always outside; I don't stay inside... I have a seven year old; I need to keep him entertained [and screen-based activities are not something she wished to use]. I don't have the patience to be dealing with him at home all the time. (Caregiver 15).*

*You go stir crazy...and we need to get out [of the house]. So a lot of times, we'll go for drives and go places and do stuff like that. (Caregiver 10)*

Physical structures, like trampolines or swimming pools, were purchased and/or visited by families because they gave the family something *to do* where they could achieve perceived benefits of spending time outdoors. Of interest, one study participant indicated wanting to ensure her children were safe, often thought of a reason for children remaining indoors, was one reason why she purposefully participated in OFL:

*You know that's another thing about getting outside and doing things: you want to do it with your family. You don't want your kids to go out by themselves, because it is too dangerous now. (Caregiver 10)*

Other benefits of sharing outdoor experiences included sharing space and time together with the family and friends:

*I have a lot of relatives so we plan in the summertime. We plan and we put the schedules [together to find a convenient time]... and we do barbecue at the beach or the park.*

(Caregiver 8)

[The family gets outdoors] *To enjoy the weather, the fresh air, to do stuff like bonding as a family; I think it's important to spend time together doing stuff.* (Caregiver 12)

In addition to the social benefits of the sharing outdoor experiences, caregivers who had enjoyed outdoor experiences in their own youth noted that sharing OFL allowed them to share their childhood leisure experiences with their children and the benefits that they had experienced in their youth:

*After you grow up like that [outdoors], certainly I'm aware of that.... So, we probably make more of an effort to encourage them to go outside [because they want their children to have the same experiences as when they were young].* (Caregiver 14)

*Like, even I grew up every single day going out, so even with my daughter as well it's the same.* (Caregiver 4)

Caregivers chose to purposefully share outdoor experiences with their children through OFL because it allowed them to meet goals they saw as important for their children. The outdoors was viewed as a dynamic space and, through outdoor experiences, caregivers were able to achieve a range of benefits that ranged from teaching, to instilling values, and to sharing themselves with their children.

***Outdoor family leisure was work.*** Participants noted that the preparation for outdoor activities was more time consuming than other forms of leisure. OFL was rarely spontaneous and

caregivers described how participation required time, effort, and planning to accommodate schedules, ensure the participation of all family members, and to navigate commitments to, and the necessity of, paid employment:

*I think families spending time indoors, to the parent...I think there is less planning required [so parents have to put in time and effort to get outdoors]. (SPE 1)*

*But most of the time, with everyone's schedule [you have to plan ahead].... So, you have to try to work that out and then get everyone in that schedule so it tends to be easier [to get outdoors when you plan]. (Caregiver 3)*

*[It is a challenge to get outdoors] because of the time, because of working full time. So it's really hard, but we love getting outdoors as much as we can. (Caregiver 6)*

*You got to remember that when you have more than one kid, you've got to think about other kids at the same time.... But, I've always got the nine year old [and a 14 and 12 year old] and if he doesn't want to do it then it's kind of like, what do I do, right? (Caregiver 10)*

Time constraints were an aspect of participation that caregivers perceived as inherent to OFL and that also required work in order to plan opportunities for OFL. However, the summer was seen as requiring less time commitment while the winter season required greater effort to get outdoors as a family, likely due to weather differences and fewer perceived local winter activity options:

*It [the commitment required to get outdoors as a parent] kind of depends the time of year too: In the summer, [it's easy to get outside] all the time, in the winter, not as much [because it requires a greater time and energy commitment]. (Caregiver 14)*

*Layers, clothing, everything takes longer [when going outside in the winter versus the summer]. (Caregiver 4)*

*Long time [to get ready to go outdoors in the winter]. You have to get ready. Yeah, we have to wait after we start the car for five minutes. (Caregiver 5)*

*If it's snowing, you have to [take the time to] shovel [so that you can get the car out and drive to the toboggan hill or any outdoor event as there are few local winter events within walking distance]. (Caregiver 8)*

Despite the challenges of OFL that participants identified, they did not prevent participation. Caregivers worked purposively to create opportunities for OFL to achieve desired goals and valued outcomes possible for the family and the child. As the deficits that caregivers frequently mentioned when discussing OFL did not prevent participation, this suggests that the benefits of OFL outweighed the time and effort required to plan and participate in OFL. Thus, it could be considered that OFL outcomes were worth the effort required to enable participation.

### **Facilitators of Outdoor Family Leisure**

OFL facilitators are represented by 10 subthemes and are grouped under the broader themes of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural facilitators, as conceptualised by Raymore (2002). The subthemes that emerged under intrapersonal and interpersonal facilitators include: a) child-directed outdoor activities; b) other individuals; and, c) social relationships. Structural facilitators include: a) organizations and institutions, which also included programs and methods of communication; b) partnerships; c) funding; d) location; e) the multicultural community; f) programs; and, g) seasonality.

**Intrapersonal and interpersonal facilitators.** Intrapersonal and interpersonal facilitators represented connections that operated within an individual or between individuals to positively influence OFL participation. Intrapersonal and interpersonal facilitators have been grouped together because the facilitating influence could originate at the intrapersonal level and influence

other family members interpersonally (e.g., a child desiring to do a certain activity and thus influencing the entire family to participate) or vice versa (e.g. a friend of the caregiver believing that getting outdoors is important could influence the caregiver to participate in OFL with their family).

***Focus on the child.*** Participants reported children, children's wellbeing, and children-directed activities as facilitators of OFL. Intrapersonal facilitators were previously highlighted as the purposive outcomes that caregivers identified they desired for their children and the family. In addition, children were interpersonal influences that facilitated OFL through children-directed activities:

*Oh absolutely [we attend the children's sports games]. We're sitting right there cheering them on. (Caregiver 20)*

*For sure [the family would go to an outdoor winter event if the children wanted to] because we would be suffering [because it's cold], but the kids wouldn't... We do things with the kids. We do it for the kids. We basically just focus everything on the kids; whatever makes them happy. (Caregiver 19)*

*And it [a Halloween event] was just something that was thrown on by the community.... And it was a lot of fun and I knew that he wanted to go so I went and it was all outdoors.*

*(Caregiver 10)*

Notably, SPEs described how providing outdoor opportunities to children was one way to affect a child's intrapersonal motivation for OFL:

*We [organizations] need to create the space [to get outdoors] and say just bring your kids, we'll ensure they have fun. And hope that we teach those kids enough that they can go*

*back their parents and say: mom, dad we have to do this... Then, when they get older, they will say oh, I am going to take my child because I did this when I was younger. (SPE 4)*

*We want to start with kids. And through kids you also access their parents.... That way, you interest the parents to be involved. (SPE 3)*

Caregivers wanted to support their children's leisure preferences and development, and organizations were in a position to influence outdoor leisure preferences in youth through programming. The focus on the child was one influence that would, ultimately, facilitate OFL at intrapersonal and interpersonal levels.

**Other individuals.** Individuals external to the caregiver participants and their children, like grandparents, peers, strangers and fathers, were found to be interpersonal facilitators because they motivated and created opportunities for OFL participation:

*My husband goes [outdoors with the kids]; he loves to ice fish and winter fish. It doesn't matter when; he does it all. And the kids get involved. (Caregiver 14)*

*I [a grandmother] get to see them [her daughter and two grandchildren] every day. We do a lot of barbecuing in the backyard, we go to the parks, we go the waterparks. (Caregiver 16)*

*My life revolves around [her friend telling her what they are going to do] regarding stuff like that [getting outdoors as a family]... I don't have those child-mother instincts and so I reflect on her a lot child-wise. But, as for me going alone with the kids? That's not happening [because she won't plan it on her own]. (Caregiver 20)*

*If I was walking along and they [a stranger hosting an event] were like, hey, come in, I'd probably just say oh, yeah, okay...I mean, we've done that before where we've been walking along and they've been doing something...we go and check it out. (Caregiver 10)*

Notably, information transmitted via word of mouth between individuals in the community about opportunities for OFL was reported as a powerful way to influence OFL participation:

*I hear more things [about OFL opportunities] from word of mouth than from those advertisements.... I would remember something more that way than reading it in a newspaper. (Caregiver 10)*

*And then when the kids are in programs and stuff, they hear about a lot of stuff [for the family] and they come home and say mom, I want to do this, I want to do that. (Caregiver 3)*

Both intrapersonal and interpersonal preferences of the *other* individuals facilitated OFL. While individuals exerted interpersonal influences on the leisure activities of the family, it could also be intrapersonal factors – like the desire to spend time with grandchildren, or the desire to share leisure preferences with the children – that influenced OFL. This suggested that at any one time, there could be multiple influences interacting to facilitate OFL.

***Social relationships.*** The prospect of sharing space and time with family and friends was a recurring theme amongst caregivers. The desire to expose their children to opportunities to develop their social skills was an intrapersonal facilitator of OFL for caregivers. Social relationships were also an interpersonal influence to engage in OFL because they provided opportunities for bonding, socialising, networking and connecting with other individuals and families, which participants valued:

*We have close friends and most of our friends have kids... and a bunch of us will go [to the beach every summer], maybe three to four families... And we like doing things like that because it builds a connection...between the kids, the parents and everyone. (Caregiver 3)*

*It's good to socialise and meet other people. (Caregiver 7)*

*I think, honestly, a lot of what these ladies are doing [networking, sharing information, chatting]... I think it's important. (Caregiver 3)*

The value of social relationships was particularly evident in one focus group when participants invited the researcher back to engage in more discussions because they had enjoyed the opportunity to meet fellow parents (that they had seen, but never previously spoken with) while their children were engaged in scheduled programming.

**Structural facilitators.** Structural facilitators were complex and existed in the physical and sociocultural context of the community, and influenced OFL participation directly and indirectly. Structural facilitators of OFL included: a) organizations and institutions, which included subthemes of programs and methods of communication; b) partnerships; c) funding; d) locations; e) cultural diversity; f) climate; and, g) a cultural connection to nature.

**Organizations and institutions.** All participant groups discussed service provider organizations and institutions and the multiple ways in which specific organizations facilitated OFL. In particular, the outdoor nature of activities available and what and how the outdoors was promoted to participants influenced OFL participation. Thus, organizations and institutions had a range of influence on OFL, which affected the family at the interpersonal and intrapersonal levels. For example, OFL participation was connected to the provision of activities, events, and facilities:

*It's usually not just families, but it's usually some type of organization that brings the families together. So it might be a church event, it might just be a community social group that brings families together in a very sort of structured environment. (SPE 4)*

*...Why we go out is because there are things going on in the community. There are more free things, more family-friendly events going around in community that we go to.... When it's a community event, it's a big community event. (Caregiver 19)*

Participants also spoke about a variety of distinct ways in which OFL was facilitated by service provider organizations. SPEs noted that organizations indirectly facilitated OFL by acting as a role model to influence family activities, advocating for outdoor structures or facilities within the community, and providing access to outdoor areas:

*I think that from our perspective, as an organization, would be to facilitate or organize or enable people, families to have some time outdoors.... And get people to do that and sustain that and then the community takes over. (SPE 6)*

*It's a [community association made up of a] group of people who deal with issues on behalf of the community.... They are the ones that have been fighting this whole [lack of a local outdoor] skating rink thing for all these years. (Caregiver 14)*

*We've been able to provide access to outdoor sporting facilities [through a partnership with the local university who have made their facilities available]. There have been a lot of people who have taken advantage of that. (SPE 2)*

Trust building was one role of service provider organizations that was found to be an influential determinant in community participation and OFL engagement. By creating trust between the community and an organization, residents and families are more likely to use the services of the organization, thus placing the organization in a position to influence OFL:

*Most part of my job is creating relationships with people. If people don't trust you then they will not tell you what they have in mind [their ideas on what needs to be done in the*

community to encourage OFL and how to do this].... *So trust building is very important in this [getting people outdoors], more than anything else.* (SPE 3)

*And it [high program attendance] speaks to what people are; they are very comfortable here [at the organization].... but I know it has a lot to do with trust.... It's [participation] about making people feel welcome and they trust us [the organization].* (SPE 5)

Notably, only visible minority participants referred to religious institutions as facilitators of OFL:

*Like religious community centres will have outings. We did that a bunch of times last summer. You'll go to a ranch and then there's a bunch of options once you're there.*

*There's sports, horseback riding, swimming.* (Caregiver 4).

*For example, we go to the park for field trips with the church we go together. We do that as a family.* (Caregiver 11)

This emphasis on religious institutions may reflect the cultural diversity within Ward 43 and where families place their trust for family activities. Organizations and institutions were also able to facilitate OFL participation through programs and methods of communication.

*Programs.* Outdoor programs were offered by organizations, institutions, and resident groups, and directly and indirectly influenced OFL participation. For example, one grandmother described how her OFL was indirectly facilitated because she could cycle with her daughter to baseball practice because it was at a local, easily accessible baseball field:

*So she [the caregiver's daughter] wouldn't be going alone [to baseball practice], we would both jump on our bikes to go to her [local] practice.* (Caregiver 16)

Many caregivers relied on the programs that were offered locally because they gave the family something to do, made more distant locations for OFL accessible, or helped them realise their own vision for OFL within the community:

*Even here [the organization where the focus group took place] in the summer they have programs where they allow you [families] to do like strawberry picking or go to the farm... Every Saturday they plan things.... Yeah, it's such a big help because you don't have to worry about transportation. (Caregiver 2)*

*There's a bunch of different programming, a lot of it resident-led, that we've been able to facilitate happening at the University and it's all been outdoors. (SPE 2)*

SPEs stressed that programming was open to everyone in the community, regardless of need or ethnicity, even if the organization was mandated to targeting a specific ethnic group. Thus, the inclusivity of programs facilitated OFL:

*The reality is that we don't focus on or screen for need when it comes to our programming and we don't screen for income...everyone is welcome... (SPE 2)*

*People come in who are [outside of the target ethnic group] and we're telling them that they're welcome to all of our programs and people are very surprised because they assume that's not the case because we're an [ethnic-specific] agency. (SPE 5)*

The provision of local, outdoor, family-friendly, and inclusive activities and programs were direct facilitators of OFL in Ward 43. Participation depended both on the programs offered locally and on intrapersonal, interpersonal and sociocultural influences that affected OFL practices.

*Methods of communication.* Methods of communication were another attribute of organizations and institutions that influenced their ability to facilitate OFL. The effective

transmission of OFL information and successful response by family members was integral to OFL participation, with caregivers giving particular emphasis to word of mouth:

*No, it's more if it [information about outdoor family activities] comes to our view; we don't go out of our way to find it [and typically hear about it from family and friends].*

(Caregiver 19)

*But at those [community association] meetings they'll always say: oh, and coming up we have...the barbecue. I probably find them the best resource for finding out about things.*

(Caregiver 14)

*I hear more things from word of mouth than from those advertisements because there are people who will read all of that stuff [and share the information with her].... I would remember something more that way than reading it in a newspaper. (Caregiver 10)*

*And then when the kids are in programs and stuff, they hear about a lot of stuff and they come home and say mom, I want to do this, I want to do that. (Caregiver 3)*

SPEs focused predominantly on word of mouth and flyers, and also discussed social media, community centres and outreach workers, although there were discrepancies between organizations about the best method to communicate to residents:

*It's [communication about programs, activities, and event] usually through flyers and outreach one-on-one with people staying at home with kids and then posting posters wherever people are. It's still the way that Scarborough community likes to be outreached to... Like these flyers mean a lot to people. We give them out to people and it helps them remember. (SPE 5)*

*It can't be just flyers, it can't be just email, it can't be just phone calls. It has to be all of those pieces so that we make certain that we hit everybody [when getting information out to the community]. (SPE 4)*

However, only caregivers mentioned newspapers as a method of communication and only SPEs mentioned how the community could communicate back to organizations:

*All participants commented on the local newspaper as a source of information on family-friendly outdoor opportunities in the community. (Research journal, focus group 2)*

*So half of our steering committee is made up of local residents. So, it's about sharing that power and giving people the opportunity to make meaningful decisions [by communicating their needs and wants back to the organization]. (SPE 2)*

*And we do actually get feedback from the young people as to what they'd like to see in terms of programming and services within the club. (SPE 4)*

Effective transmission of information to the community about outdoor programs, events, and activities for families facilitated OFL and was one aspect of the overall facilitating influence of organizations and institutions. The disconnect between several methods of communication suggested that the facilitating effect of organizations and institutions on OFL could be even greater.

**Partnerships.** Partnerships and collaborations between organizations, institutions, and residents in the community were important and facilitated OFL; through collaboration and combining strengths, outdoor spaces were made accessible to Ward 43 residents. For example, an organization may have the people willing or wanting to do something outdoors, but do not have the space for a large gathering. By working with a group that can provide transportation and another that has the outdoor space, a partnership can be formed in order for everyone to engage

in outdoor leisure. SPEs discussed how partnerships in Ward 43 facilitated OFL in three ways: a) providing access and/or transportation to private outdoor recreation sites; b) influencing programming creation and direction; and c) the creation of new outdoor events:

*So, we actually have a relationship with the Glen Rouge Campground [outside of Ward 43, but within East Scarborough].... We bring teaching there, we bring youth there, we bring families there and cultural training there. (SPE 5)*

*Yeah, and that's one of the things I have to say is it's probably one of the better connected communities in terms of organizations in the GTA [Greater Toronto Area, which allows them to create strong partnerships to facilitate OFL within the immediate and greater community]. (SPE 4)*

*The only thing that I can say is that since we have partnered with the University we have ...been able to provide access to outdoor sporting facilities [including transportation]. There have been a lot of people who have taken advantage of that. (SPE 2)*

*We have a very comprehensive community engagement strategy where we want people to get involved in community-building activities.... If they are interested, [my job is] to sit down with them and create structures to support them, to get involved, to do whatever they want to do. (SPE 3)*

The partnerships that SPEs identified were mainly between different organizations; however, it was acknowledged that there are likely other, less formal, community or cultural groups that also form their own partnerships, which might facilitate OFL. Partnerships were not limited to the immediate geographical community or Ward 43 and, thus, the overall facilitating influence of partnerships likely exceeded that described by SPEs.

**Funding.** Participants spoke about funding available for OFL and described it as focused predominantly on sports and physical activity, project-based, and driven by the mandates of the funding bodies, which included the JumpStart, KidSport Canada and Jays Care foundation. These broader policy mandates influenced the provision of free recreation centres and free programming and impacted OFL participation:

*We have a really broad partnership with the University...and we've been able to get funding through that...to bus families and youth from the community to use the University's outdoor sporting facilities. (SPE 2)*

*There is now also what we call some free centres and Scarborough has just got some free centres opening this September.... but, that's another way that providers are offering free programming. (SPE 1)*

*JumpStart funds up to \$300 a year for a kid in more organized sport; KidSport does that as well... And now you have the increase in the Canadian tax credit for physical activity... (SPE 1)*

While the focus of funding was on organized, physical activity, these types of activities could also facilitate OFL if the program were outdoors or if the sporting facility was within walking distance and the parents accompanied their children.

Notably, funding was influenced by policy, as municipal and federal physical activity funding was available for individuals and families, through the City of Toronto's Welcome Policy and the Canadian tax credit for physical activity:

*Anybody with low-income family is entitled to a welcome policy that every year your child is entitled up to 500 dollars in recreational activities, free of charge. (Caregiver 15)*

This suggests that policies for funding do exist to target cultural issues like increasing youth obesity and sedentary in order to promote healthy behaviours and address the physical inactivity in the broader population. However, there was no mention of any funding that specifically supported providing children or families with outdoor experiences.

**Location.** Participants described a variety of outdoor locations and described aspects of locations that facilitated outdoor family activities. Local outdoor sites that offered multiple activity options for the whole family and had desired facilities, such as barbecues, or structures, such as a splash pad, were preferred:

*Oh, we go to the nearby park, like the park by where we live, almost every day especially the summertime or springtime [because it's an easy, local option]. (Caregiver 6)*

*Most people I know, they go to the park. And it's actually, I think, because the park sets them up to succeed because there's a climber there, or there's benches there, or... there's paths there. (SPE 5)*

*So, [organizations can] create the space that is appropriate for people and they will use it. Put a barbecue...and you'll see families going there and preparing meals. (SPE 3)*

*The things [structures you can find outdoors] make a big difference because there are different kinds of selections or options so they get more encouraged [to go to these outdoor locations as a family]. (Caregiver 10)*

Other aspects of location that were not fully defined yet influenced a family's decision to go there, included cleanliness, the perceived beauty of the location, and the attractiveness or appeal of the location:

*I'm not going to go to just anything [any outdoor location or event], it depends on how it appeals to the kids and myself. (Caregiver 13)*

*... it's not just whether they [parks] have it [something to do], it's whether it's maintained, it's whether it's inviting. (Caregiver 10)*

This suggests that outdoor spaces may not be a one-size-fits-all facilitator of OFL and community input is a valuable tool to understand what specifically about a location facilitates OFL. It was not that any outdoor space could not be considered a facilitator of OFL; however, according to SPEs and caregivers, there were aspects of outdoor locations that made them more attractive to potential users.

**Cultural Diversity.** Ward 43 was described by participants as culturally diverse and was viewed as an untapped wealth of opportunity to build community and enable OFL. Organizations identified that they could build on community diversity to enable OFL:

*[A potential local multicultural event could be] the taste of the world... We have people from every walk of life.... I think we'll also have to tap the community and say, hey, what are you looking for? How can we help you...be involved in the outdoors? (SPE 4)*

*The South Asian community wanted to organize this [Diwali celebration] and [the organization] guided them through how to make it happen. Great, all-ages turn out for a Friday afternoon! (Research journal, October 24, 2014)*

Cultural groups, depending on values and preferences, also created OFL opportunities. For example, a group may choose to organize their own sports teams or use their networks to create outdoor events:

*Church community, ethnic community... I have two different identities [that provide opportunities for outdoor family activities]. There's my religious identity, my cultural identity so, for the most ...sometimes it's better just doing it [creating outdoor*

opportunities] *yourself and then getting the word out* [to your communities to encourage participation]. (Caregiver 4)

*I believe some of these people* [in the communities] *organize these* [sports] *leagues because they want to and that's a good thing.... They love experiencing things together, which to me is really good* [to get people outdoors]. (SPE 1)

The cultural diversity within Ward 43 and East Scarborough was a source of existing opportunities for OFL and inspiration to create new opportunities for OFL for individuals, families, and the larger community. Notably, multicultural events were inclusive and events outside of caregivers' own culture were not avoided, but often seen as a unique opportunity for OFL:

*We also do cultural things; we go to the pow-wow* [local outdoor cultural event] *and things like that too. We do the Chinese New Year.* (Caregiver 20)

*Even if I'm not Hindu can I bring my son* [to the events and festivals]? *And go there?*

[Three caregivers in the focus group respond yes and invited her to come]. (Caregiver 7)

Cultural diversity was a multifaceted facilitator of OFL and created opportunities for OFL through its inclusivity and diversity of events and festivals that occurred throughout the year, and by creating a space where families were welcome and could create their own opportunities for OFL.

**Seasonality.** Seasonality was a pervasive theme that made it easy to get outside in summer and affected how OFL was experienced as a resident of Toronto (with four seasons) at the individual, family, and community levels. Most caregivers expressed the belief that there was more to do and more reasons to get outdoors in the summer, which facilitated OFL:

[When] *the weather is nice* [is why we get outside as a family]. *To get out of the house and breathe some fresh air. It all depends on the weather... Weather is the number one reason why we go out or stay in.* (Caregiver 10)

*In the summertime, even if there isn't an event, it's warm so you can just be outside doing anything that comes to mind.* (Caregiver 13)

*In the summer, there is more time* [more daylight hours], *more free time* [to get outside as a family] (Caregiver 11)

Although caregivers emphasized participating in summer outdoor activities, winter activities, like tobogganing, ice-skating, ice hockey, and winter-specific events, were mentioned, and were unique winter opportunities to get outdoors:

*I don't know that there is more to do* [in the summer]. *It's just that it's not cold.... I know that if you start flipping through that paper, there's always an event or something happening every weekend* [in winter], *at least four at a time.* (Caregiver 13)

*...Generally there are things you could do* [in the winter]. *Even though it's cold there's a ton of activities that you can't do in the summer or that you can't do in the spring that are specific to winter only.* (Caregiver 4)

Notably, many participants agreed that families would participate in organized winter outdoor events or activities:

*I think if you were to do a weekend winter festival where they* [families] *can skate, they can snowshoe and you serve hot chocolate and all that stuff, I think people would come out to it.* (SPE 4)

*For sure* [the family would go to an outdoor winter event if the children wanted to] *because we would be suffering* [if it's cold], *but the kids wouldn't.* (Caregiver 19)

Although the weather may, at times, keep families indoors, there were aspects of the different seasons that families enjoyed, including unique activities, which encouraged them to get outdoors and participate in OFL.

***A cultural connection to nature.*** Although not a theme in itself, a connection to nature was described as imbedded within First Nations culture and is included because it was noted that First Nations communities should not be compared to newcomer or immigrant communities. While the researcher was unsuccessful in the recruitment of caregivers from First Nations communities, this group was discussed by one SPE. Thus, the cultural connection to nature was an influence that affected the specifically tailored programs offered by the organization, as well as intrapersonal and interpersonal preferences for participation in outdoor activities:

*Outdoors in the environment things will naturally happen as opposed to sitting in a room where very limited things can happen.... The outdoors environment is spontaneous. I think that's why it's much more important to be outside. Plus, the way that children connect with the nature and the kinds of things that are happening around them.... All those things; that's what sparks conversation, that's what sparks people's imaginations about what to do next or how to carry on with what they're doing. (SPE 5)*

*So, I think Aboriginal people need to be connected to the outdoors and be connected with nature to still feel the ownership of it... And I think being outside...is still really important.... I think it's even more important for people who don't know that it's important...So I think it's our job as an agency to make sure that we promote that sort of thing to people. (SPE 5)*

A cultural connection to nature facilitated OFL through the creation and provision of outdoor programs, festivals, events, and through teaching and partnerships. Although not a theme, a

cultural connection to nature suggested the importance and influence of culture in facilitating OFL.

### **Summary**

The results of this study identified that, in the context of Ward 43, OFL had a variety of different meanings. Although these specific meanings were not sought out based on ethnic, cultural, religious, gender, or other factors, it is important to consider that these factors may have influenced participant responses. Consistent amongst participants, OFL was purposive and was described predominantly through a deficits perspective. The pervasiveness of a deficits perspective reinforced that this is a traditional, culturally ingrained perspective, which influenced how participants described and experienced OFL. However, a strengths perspective revealed that families saw OFL as important, had the desire to participate in OFL, and engaged in OFL.

A range of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural factors influenced OFL behaviours and practices in the study. Reasons for purposive leisure represented intrapersonal motivation and, thus, facilitators of OFL. Interpersonal facilitators represented direct influences on OFL behaviours, while structural facilitators indicated indirect influences on OFL participation and preferences. Although challenging to maintain a strengths perspective, the results of this study suggested that individual, family, and community strengths act to facilitate OFL, and included facilitators such as technology and safety concerns that may not be thought of as enabling OFL.

The results of this study have contributed to understandings of: a) family leisure in an outdoor context; b) the use of a strengths perspective; and c) facilitators of OFL within a community-specific context. The following chapter discusses the results and how they contribute to the literature, explores the implications of the results, and looks at how this study compares to the existing body of knowledge on OFL.

## Chapter Five: Discussion

The purpose of this study was to use a strengths-based perspective to explore the perceptions, experiences, and facilitators of outdoor family leisure (OFL) in Ward 43 of East Scarborough, Toronto, Ontario. OFL was conceptualised as at least one parent or guardian and one or more children participating in outdoor leisure activities together. Outdoor leisure provides physical, emotional, psychological, and developmental outcomes (Berman, Jonides, & Kaplan, 2008; Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2006; Fjortoft, 2001; Kellert, 2005; Louv, 2008; Wells & Evans, 2003; White, 2004); however outdoor leisure experiences are declining globally (Chawla, 2006; Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2006; Louv, 2008; Wells & Lekies, 2006) and are particularly challenging in urban areas (McCurdy et al., 2010). Family leisure is influenced by parents, benefits the family and the individual (Hallman & Benbow, 2007; Mactavish & Schleien, 2004; Shaw & Dawson, 2001), and impacts the development of leisure practices in children (Beets et al., 2010). Thus, parents are in a position to influence children's outdoor leisure by engaging in OFL. Through exposing their children to outdoor leisure experiences, parents increase the likelihood that they will develop a preference for spending time outdoors (Cheng & Monroe, 2012) and will continue to engage in outdoor leisure throughout their life, thus experiencing the benefits of spending time outdoors and likely passing on this preference to their own children in the future.

This chapter discusses the results of this case study and the implications for how OFL is perceived, experienced and facilitated. The challenges to outdoor leisure participation have been discussed previously (e.g., Louv, 2008) and this chapter focuses on the contribution of a strengths-based perspective toward understanding OFL in the context of the existing literature. Drawing on the results of the study, this section is organized in accordance with the theoretical and practical contributions and implications of the findings: a) using a strengths-based

perspective; b) outdoor leisure is family leisure; and c) facilitators of OFL. The discussion concludes with a look at limitations of the study, suggestions for future research, and final thoughts.

### **Using a Strengths-Based Perspective**

Paradoxically, it was challenging to use a strengths-based perspective in the case study to investigate facilitators of OFL. The deficits perspective frequently used in this study to describe OFL was culturally ingrained in the researcher and in the community studied. Using a strengths-based perspective, however, encouraged awareness of when a deficits lens was used during data collection, which created opportunities for the researcher to reframe questions when required and purposefully seek out strengths, capacities, and successes for OFL engagement. Notably, a strengths-based perspective complemented the exploration of leisure facilitators (Raymore, 2002) and revealed factors within participants' environments that enabled and promoted OFL, which adds a new dimension to the existing literature on the challenges of outdoor leisure participation. Through exposing strengths, capacities, and successes, the results of this study showed that local opportunities to engage families in OFL already exist within the community's and individuals' strengths, which supports the basis of strengths-based approaches (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005; Mathie & Cunningham, 2003; Watkins & Mohr, 2001). This study complements previous research that suggests that a strengths-based perspective may be a foundation on which strong and healthy communities are built (Goldman & Schmalz, 2005; Rans & Green, 2005).

Dominant approaches to understanding leisure practices in the literature have identified that outdoor leisure participation is particularly challenging within an urban environment (McCurdy et al., 2010). However, the literature has also identified that family leisure requires consideration

of the context in which family leisure occurs (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Ferree, 2010; Shaw, 1997; Turtiainen et al., 2007). The strengths-based perspective used in this study made it possible to consider the local context and highlighted the importance of context by demonstrating that, despite previously identified constraints to urban outdoor leisure, OFL occurs and is facilitated in an urban environment; urban residence did not preclude outdoor childhood experiences, positive perceptions of the outdoors, or local opportunities for engaging in OFL. That is, the context-specific facilitators, not the challenges or constraints, identified by participants in this study explained OFL participation as the existing literature has suggested (Raymore, 2002) and identified opportunities to influence participation as opposed to focusing solely on problems associated with declining outdoor recreation.

A strengths-based perspective highlighted opportunities as opposed to deficits or challenges of OFL. In particular, using a strengths-based perspective suggested that, in this study, the family is one site where outdoor leisure occurs and is facilitated. By understanding OFL practices from a strengths perspective, it is possible to understand how to facilitate OFL within a family or community. While facilitators of OFL were not explicitly explored in relation to differences between families in this study (e.g., culture, socioeconomic status, etc.), the variety of community and family-specific facilitators that were revealed suggest that OFL facilitators are linked to the physical, sociocultural, and political contexts of a family. The relationship between context and participation suggest that there are context-specific solutions to OFL participation; this reflects the different leisure strengths, preferences, and experiences of family members (Belcher et al., 2011) and the influence of an individual's environments in shaping leisure behaviours (Samdahl, 2005) identified in the literature. Shaw (2001) suggested that broad solutions, such as those suggested by Kuo (2013), may not be the most effective to address

family leisure challenges and this study supports that solutions are context-specific and that a strengths-based perspective is useful to identify local, context-specific solutions to OFL participation. With the recommendation that research support practitioners and an understanding of how to positively influence family leisure experiences (Flett et al., 2010; Shaw, 2001; Shaw & Dawson, 2003), a strengths-based approach could be employed to do so, and would support a better understanding of OFL within the community and how to best achieve goals for participation and engagement (Goldman & Schmalz, 2005).

The results of the study suggest that to understand OFL participation it is necessary to appreciate: a) the context that shapes a family's understandings of outdoor leisure; and b) the leisure facilitators that produce outdoor leisure. The different facilitators and practices of OFL identified in this study reflected the diversity of the community and participants, and suggest that definitions of OFL may vary, thus requiring a nuanced understanding of what constitutes outdoor leisure. In particular, with increasing immigration to Canada and diversity between and within families, and as children's outdoor leisure becomes more adult-directed, structured, and formal (Carver, Timperio & Crawford, 2008; Frost, 2012; Gray, 2011; Veitch et al., 2006), it is necessary to consider whether definitions and practices of outdoor leisure may vary widely and no longer resemble traditional Western ideas of outdoor leisure. This study provides support that a strengths perspective allows for a nuanced understanding of the case study context (Michael, 2005) and can help identify local definitions of OFL. Thus, this study argues that it is necessary to consider how, similar to family leisure, OFL may be valued, experienced, and practiced in different ways (Shaw, 1997).

Using a strengths-based perspective is worthwhile for researchers and practitioners to adopt because, contrary to some arguments (c.f., Reason & Bradbury, 2001) and as evidenced in the

results of this study, it does not ignore problems, but purposefully navigates deficits to identify opportunities for OFL within the community. The purposeful navigation of deficits to discover facilitators is a key attribute of a strengths-based epistemology as the literature has shown that factors may both inhibit and enable leisure participation (Shogan, 2002) and, through the identification of facilitators, a strengths-based perspective can provide context-specific solutions and identify opportunities. That is, this study provides evidence that it is not enough to solely explore constraints to leisure participation because it does not offer a complete understanding of leisure preferences and participation (Raymore, 2002); understanding participation using a strengths-based perspective adds to the literature on OFL participation.

This study has also contributed to the literature on nature disconnection, which innately focuses on deficits (i.e., the gap between people and the outdoors). It can be argued that, as a result of this deficits focus, the literature has not fully explored outdoor leisure participation because reasons for participation remain underexplored. With the growing concern of physical inactivity in youth (AHKC, 2014; ParticipACTION, 2013), it is worthwhile exploring what facilitates OFL as opposed to focusing on the deficits that need to be overcome in order to potentially encourage families to participate in OFL, particularly when the removal of constraints does not always lead to participation (Raymore, 2002; Shogan, 2002). However, the results of this study suggest that it is not necessary to ignore the challenges to OFL when exploring strengths and capacities; rather, it can be recognized that challenges exist alongside factors that facilitate OFL and the exploration of strengths may add both breadth and depth to an understanding of how to positively influence OFL participation.

As parents influence their children's development and long-term values of leisure (Kleiber, 1999; Scott & Willits, 1998; Shannon, 2006; Shannon & Shaw, 2008), it should be considered

what encourages families to engage in and expose their children to beneficial activities or experiences, like OFL. As evidenced in this study, a strengths-based perspective exposes opportunities, successes, and experiences that positively influenced OFL practices within the community and, thus, also can provide opportunities to support children's leisure development (Beets et al., 2010). For example, this study identified that flyers and word of mouth were powerful methods of communication to facilitate OFL within the community and that opportunities existed to also use newspaper advertisements and to make the community aware of how they could influence programming offered by local organizations. By building and capitalizing on community strengths identified through a strengths-based investigation, the results of this study support Beaulieu's (2002) argument that exposing context-specific strengths and successes help address challenges within a community, and can also promote healthy behaviours and effect change (Mathie & Cunningham, 2003).

### **Family Leisure in an Outdoor Context**

The results of this study contribute to the literature on family leisure by exploring how outdoor and family leisure are experienced simultaneously in Ward 43 of Scarborough, Ontario. Considering the benefits of outdoor leisure (e.g., Louv, 2008) and the influence of family on lifelong leisure habits (Beets et al., 2010; Kleiber, 1999), exploring OFL practices and participation can contribute to an understanding of how to address issues surrounding the contemporary phenomenon of nature disconnection. Notably, the results of this study suggest that OFL is the same as other forms of leisure for women who are in caregiving roles where an ethic of care (Gilligan, 1982) dominates and women *work* to create positive leisure experiences for family members (Henderson & Allen, 1991; Miller & Brown, 2005; Shaw, 1992). Similarly, the goals of family leisure described by Shaw and Dawson (2001) do not change in the outdoor

context; caregivers expressed the desire to engage in OFL for the family and to support their children's development. While some goals of OFL were outdoor-specific, such as parents sharing their childhood experiences with their own children, not all goals necessitated an outdoor context to be achieved, which suggests that the outdoors was both a site for and positive influence on family leisure participation.

Supporting that OFL was family leisure in an outdoor context was that OFL was participated in purposively; the specific goals and meanings of OFL participation in this study reflect the purposive nature of family leisure (Beets et al., 2010; Shaw & Dawson, 2001). Beyond the purposive goals and outcomes that parents desired from OFL, the all-female caregivers also identified challenges and spoke about how OFL participation was work, which supports previous work by Shaw (1992, 2008) that describes purposive family leisure as worthwhile work, particularly for the mother. Thus, outdoor family activities may be one way that parents engage in family leisure to connect with their children, contribute to the development of their children's leisure preferences and practices (Beets et al., 2010) and influence their children's values and behaviours (Anderssen & Wold, 1992; Harrington, 2006; Maher, 2005; Mactavish & Schleien, 2004; Shaw, 2001; Shaw & Dawson, 2001; Taylor, Baranowski, & Sallis, 1994; Wells, Widmer, & McCoy, 2004). The outdoor context can, therefore, be considered to be a facilitator of the goals and outcomes that parents desire for their children through family leisure. Influencing current OFL practices could contribute to outdoor leisure preferences in children (Beets et al., 2010) and influence OFL participation as the children grow up and have families of their own (Cheng & Monroe, 2012).

Caregivers' emphasis on engaging in OFL to benefit and support their children's development was similar to previous research that identified that parents feel pressure to act in

socially approved ways to be a *good parent* (Coakley, 2006; Ginsburg, 2007; Shaw, 2008) and reflected contemporary discourse on parenthood (Harrington, 2005; Shannon & Shaw, 2008; Shaw, 2001, 2008; Trussel & Shaw, 2012). While the desire to be a good parent has seen an emphasis on organized sport participation (e.g., Trussell & Shaw, 2012), the results of this study suggest that OFL may not be participated in for the specific benefits offered from outdoor play, but from broader, desirable sociocultural outcomes. When asked to discuss what encourages or motivates families to engage in OFL, caregivers spoke broadly about the outdoors being “good” for their children; one parent identified that the outdoors relieved stress and anxiety, and one service provider employee (SPE) thought parents would enjoy the tiring-out effects of outdoors. However, there was little discussion around the specific developmental, cognitive, emotional, and physical benefits offered by outdoor play (e.g., Berman et al., 2008; Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2006; Louv, 2008).

With the increase in parent-directed activities (Carver et al., 2008; Frost, 2012; Welk et al., 2003; Wen et al., 2009) and Western leisure patterns (Mundy, 1998), it is important to consider what motivates families to get outdoors. In particular, OFL should be considered a vital subset of family leisure that can provide insight into the complexities of family leisure participation. With the emphasis on the child and being a good parent, but little reference to the specific benefits of outdoor play, there may be a possibility to provide greater education around the outcomes of outdoor play to encourage OFL practices and participation. However, education should be broad because the results of the study support previous research that recognized that leisure socialisers extend beyond the home (Mundy, 1998; Tam & Lee, 2010).

As parents assume greater control over their children’s activities (Ginsburg, 2007; Rosenfield & Wise, 2001; Shaw, 2010), the results of this study suggest that it is necessary to

consider what motivates families to participate in OFL. Motivations for OFL are worth consideration because, given that OFL is family leisure in an outdoor context, this study supports that OFL can influence positive outcomes of family leisure such as teaching kids about healthy lifestyles and values (Shaw & Dawson, 2001), such as getting outdoors, or creating learning opportunities for children (Hallman & Benbow, 2007), such as learning how to navigate an urban environment safely. With differences in leisure strengths, preferences, and experiences within and between families (Belcher et al., 2011) and differences in OFL practices noted by participants in this study, OFL, similar to family leisure (Harrington, 2013; Shaw, 2008), requires exploration and consideration of how diversity in sociocultural constructs and contexts impact OFL practices, experiences, and preferences.

### **Facilitators of Outdoor Family Leisure**

While a majority of the literature on leisure participation has focused on constraints (Crawford & Godbey, 1987) or constraint negotiation (Jackson et al., 1993), little empirical research has focused on facilitators to leisure participation. This study contributes to the literature on family leisure and leisure facilitators by exploring OFL facilitators and is meaningful because the results support the argument that the absence of constraints does not necessarily lead to participation (Raymore, 2002). For example, in this study, participants described challenges of OFL; however, all participants spoke about specific motivations and reasons for participating in OFL independent of the associated challenges of OFL. The results of this study also support previous research that has demonstrated that factors, typically thought of as constraints, may both inhibit and enable participation (Bavinton, 2007; Heo & Lee, 2007; Kleiber, McGuire, Ayber-Damali, & Norman, 2008; Shogan, 2002). Several influences in this study – namely, a concern for children’s safety, technology, climate and strangers – were

described as facilitators of OFL, but had been previously identified by researchers as challenges of outdoor leisure (e.g., Louv, 2008). This study, therefore, supports that leisure facilitators can add to a more holistic understanding of participation (Raymore, 2002).

Exploring OFL facilitators did not ignore challenges of the case study as some have claimed (c.f., Reason & Bradbury, 2001), but supported the argument that a focus on facilitators provided a nuanced understanding of the community and family contexts (Michael, 2005) in which OFL was practiced and preferences developed. For example, this study identified that caregivers are aware of and draw on other leisure socialisation agents, like organizations, to support OFL participation, as some researchers have postulated (Mundy, 1998; Tam & Lee, 2010). Although the literature has focused on outdoor and family leisure participation, the results of this study are consistent with the argument that the predominant focus on constraints in the literature does not offer a complete understanding of leisure participation (Raymore, 2002), and show that it is worthwhile to explore reasons and/or motivation *for* participation and preferences because “constraints and facilitators are not alternative explanations of participation” (p. 48). That is, the results of this study reinforce that, similar to family leisure (Shaw, 1997, 2001, 2008; Shaw & Dawson, 2003), OFL participation is complex and a focus on facilitators helps understand the complexities of family leisure participation. The complexity of OFL and the multilevel OFL facilitators echoes the recommendation in the literature that family leisure research consider context, perspective, and the different experiences and meanings of leisure for the family and the individual (Bianchi & Milkie, 2010; Ferree, 2010; Shaw, 1997; Turtiainen et al., 2007).

The intrapersonal, interpersonal and structural OFL facilitators identified in this study are consistent with the existing literature that suggests that an individual’s environments influence their leisure preferences and behaviours (Amesty, 2003; Stokols, 1996). Notably, the

environments in which OFL participation was facilitated included interactions with individuals and the broader sociocultural and political contexts, which underscores that the family affects and is affected by individuals in the family (White & Klein, 2008) and by interactions and interrelationships in the individuals' environments (Kaczynski & Henderson, 2007). These context-specific interactions meant that factors that had previously been identified as structural constraints to leisure participation in the prevailing literature, such as gender, ethnicity, and religion (Amesty, 2003; Crawford & Godbey, 1987; Louv, 2008; Raymore et al., 1993; Shaw, 2010; Shaw & Dawson, 2003) could be facilitators. Thus, this study reinforces that participation requires consideration of how the sociocultural context shapes leisure pursuits and participation (Samdahl, 2005). However, while the current study highlighted how facilitators influenced OFL participation, unlike previous studies (c.f., Henderson & Bialeschki, 2005; Loundsbury & Mitchell, 2009; Sallis et al., 2006), there was less evidence in this study of how families affect OFL facilitators. Possible evidence of families' ability to affect facilitators in this study was through feedback to and engagement with service providers about desired programs, services, and facilities.

The facilitators of OFL identified in this study aligned with Raymore's (2002) model and definition of leisure facilitators – intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural – and offer one method for researchers and practitioners to explore how to facilitate OFL through existing practices, experiences, and influences. An exploration on context-specific facilitators may also address concerns in the literature that practitioners avoid presuming what is best for families (Shaw, 1997). Although not explicitly explored, it is likely that there are other influences leisure participation beyond those identified by this study, such as gender (Shaw, 1997, 2010) and socioeconomic status (Kelly, 1999), that may also facilitate OFL participation. Thus, the results

of this study support previous literature that leisure may be valued and practiced in different ways (Shaw, 1997) and may be influenced by multi-cultural values and practices of leisure (Stodolska & Walker, 2007). The identification of facilitators in this study can be used to develop local tangible, effective strategies to engage families in OFL and suggests that a focus on facilitators may similarly identify opportunities to address other community challenges.

### **Conclusion**

Outdoor family leisure is a vital element of family leisure. With increasing concerns about physical inactivity, research into OFL can help better understand the influences shaping children's outdoor leisure habits and preferences, and investigate how to affect outdoor leisure participation. Considering the influence of parents and other leisure socialization agents on the leisure development of children (Beets et al., 2010; Mundy, 1998; Tam & Lee, 2010) and the important benefits of outdoor leisure (e.g., Berman et al., 2008; Faber Taylor & Kuo, 2006; Kaplan, 1995; Louv, 2008; White, 2004), research would benefit from investigation into the leisure facilitators that positively influence OFL participation.

Caregivers' desire to engage in OFL and local organizations' provision of family-friendly outdoor leisure opportunities suggest that there is a demand for outdoor leisure and OFL, and that it is worth considering whether contemporary definitions and practice of outdoor leisure are changing. With more than half the population of Ward 43 born outside of Canada and a large percentage of individuals living in apartment buildings, it is possible that Western practices and understanding of OFL no longer predominate. Thus, it is important to explore what OFL means and how it is practiced in consideration of cultural and other forms of diversity. The current study has provided a unique opportunity to use a strengths-based perspective in combination with leisure facilitators to explore the conditions that enable OFL participation in order to

provide a more comprehensive picture of OFL experiences, perceptions, and preferences from both caregivers' and service providers' perspectives. Greater research into OFL is required and should focus on the intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural contexts in which OFL participation occurs and build strategies for engagement based on the existing OFL facilitators.

### **Limitations of the Study**

As a case study, the findings are not meant to be generalizable (Stake, 2005); there are, nevertheless important limitations to the interpretations of the findings. Data collection was conducted during late autumn and winter in Scarborough, Ontario, Canada when colder winter weather persists. During this time, personal observations indicated a notable decrease in the number of individuals seen outside compared to the summer and early autumn. Similarly, it was noted by the researcher throughout data collection that participants were more likely to focus on the current climate (i.e., winter) and how this affected outdoor family activities as opposed to commenting on year-round activities. While this gave valuable insight into winter OFL, had data collection occurred in the summer, results may have been different.

During focus group participant recruitment, more posters were distributed in the lower half of Ward 43, as there were a greater number of agencies and organizations that were able and willing to display posters. Consequently, the majority of individuals who participated in the study responded to these posters and the results should be considered as only representative of those individuals who participated in the focus groups. That is, focus group participants did not necessarily represent a cross-section of the different family types and experiences within the study area.

It is not possible to discern whether there were themes that varied between or within different focus groups as participants were treated as a whole. All caregiver participants were female,

which did not provide any insight into how fathers and male guardians perceive and experience outdoor family leisure. Similarly, participants were not asked for age, social economic status, culture, or ethnicity and the study cannot comment on how facilitators may vary with these characteristics.

Lastly, three of the five organizations were located in the southern half of Ward 43 and the majority of service provider employees were male. Each organization has its own mandate, programs and procedures, which in combination with location and gender, likely influenced experiences and perceptions of outdoor family leisure. Two additional organizations that operate within Ward 43 could have added to the discussion, but were unable to do so because of scheduling conflicts.

### **Areas for Future Research**

This thesis provided a general exploration of the perceptions, experiences and facilitators of OFL by using a strengths-based perspective. Future research would benefit from using a strengths-based perspective to understand the intricate influences on OFL like gender, ethnicity, class, region, policy and other social and cultural constructs that could influence OFL, particularly as these have been identified as influences on family leisure (Beets & Foley, 2008; Brustad, 1996; Craig, 2006; Harrington, 2002, 2005, 2013; Kay, 2003; Shannon & Shaw, 2008; Shaw, 2001, 2008, 2010; Shaw & Dawson, 2003). That is, it is worthwhile developing an understanding of how OFL preferences, perceptions and experiences may vary between and within structural influences.

Other questions have also arisen through the process of data collection, analysis and reflecting on what it all means. As this study was conducted in an urban context, it would be worth investigating the facilitators of OFL that exist within a rural context. Furthermore,

developing a more nuanced understanding of OFL in a variety of contexts is worth pursuing. This includes understanding OFL from a First Nations perspective as well as from the perspectives of different communities worldwide, including regional differences in OFL (e.g., southern versus northern Canada). Finally, it was noted that Raymore (2002) used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) social ecological theory to create her model of leisure facilitators. However, strengths, capacities, and successes of communities may also be described as community capital (e.g., Roseland, 2012). Thus, there may be several frameworks that can guide a strengths-based understanding of OFL practices and future research may wish to investigate the usefulness of these frameworks to understand the context of OFL.

### **Final Thoughts**

This thesis research has highlighted the value of a strengths-based approach, and has contributed to broadening understandings of experiences, perceptions and facilitators of outdoor family leisure. As researchers and practitioners are tasked with studying the growing physical inactivity or nature disconnection of Canadians, it is important to consider what facilitates families to get outside. Notably, researchers and practitioners do not necessarily have control over the community context in a study, but they do have control over how they approach the study. The findings of this study, while exploratory in nature, suggest that a strengths-based perspective may be considered to be a *muscle* that is worthwhile for researchers and practitioners to make use of to investigate the context-specific leisure facilitators that influence OFL practices, preferences and participation.

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## Appendix A

### Focus Group Questions

Before beginning, participants will be reminded about the need to respect one another's opinions and that anything discussed within the focus group session should remain confidential.

Definitions of "leisure", "family leisure" and "outdoor" will also be discussed. As an icebreaker, each individual will be asked to introduce themselves and share the memory of one of their favourite activities as a child. To make individuals feel comfortable, the following question will be asked in a conversational manner with additional probes as required.

1. Tell me about the things that you do together as a family.
  - What do you do together outdoors specifically?
2. Why do you choose to spend time outdoors as a family?
  - Do you make specific plans to spend time outdoors?
  - Are there any specific outdoor events that you go to?
  - How do you find out about opportunities to get outside?
3. How do your choices for outdoor family activities change with the four seasons?
  - Do you make specific plans to spend time outdoors?
  - Are there any specific outdoor events that you go to?
  - How do you find out about opportunities to get outside?
4. What outdoor spaces, if any, do you spend time at with your family?
  - What is it about these spaces that make you want to spend time there?
  - Are there specific parks that you will go to as a family?
5. What makes it easy for you to spend time outside as a family?
  - What is the easiest way for you to spend time outdoors as a family?
  - Are there any necessary activities (e.g., going to the grocery store) that take you outside as a family?
    - What types of activities or events make it easy to get outside as a family?
6. Can you tell me about any outdoor facilities, like skating rinks or sports fields or tennis courts, in your community that encourage you to get outside?

- does the presence of these facilities influence your decision to go outside with your family?
7. Can you tell me about any organizations or groups that you know of that offer opportunities to get outside as a family?
    - What types of programs do they offer?
    - What types of events do they offer?
  8. Is there anything else that you would like to share about your outdoor family activities and opportunities to get outside in your community?

## **Appendix B**

### **Semi-Structured Interview Questions**

Definition of outdoor family leisure: the family unit (at least one parent/guardian and one child) participating in open-air leisure activities together, regardless of activity level.

Specifically, these are activities that occur in open-air areas, and may include both physically active and inactive activities, such as reading on a park bench, going for a walk down a city street, or hiking through the woods.

1. Do you see a difference between spending time inside or outside as a family?
2. Why do you believe that families might choose to spend time together outdoors?
3. Why do you believe that families might choose to spend time together inside?
4. What types of activities do you believe are typical for families in East Scarborough (Ward 43)? (How does this vary by season?)
5. How common do you believe outdoor family leisure is in East Scarborough?
6. What are outdoor activities available to families in East Scarborough?
7. What challenges might families experience in East Scarborough in participating in outdoor family leisure?
8. How would families in East Scarborough learn about opportunities to get outdoors within the community?

#### **Outdoor Leisure Enablers**

1. What might help families participate in outdoor family leisure?
2. Can you tell me about any organizations (your organization) within the East Scarborough community that encourages/helps families to spend time outdoors?

3. Can you tell me about any festivals, events, associations that you know of or have attended/used that involve getting outdoors?
4. What facilities exist within East Scarborough that might encourage family outdoor leisure participation?
5. Does any funding exist within East Scarborough that could help families participate in outdoor family leisure?
6. Is there anything that exists within the community that you would like to highlight that would be beneficial to helping families get outdoors?
7. Is there anything that you would like to add about outdoor family leisure in East Scarborough?

## Appendix C

### Focus Group Recruitment Poster



### **Volunteers Needed to Participate in Discussions about Outdoor Family Activities**

**Criteria:**

- Parent(s) or guardian(s) with at least 1 child under the age of 12
- Resident of East Scarborough

**Participation:**

You will be asked to participate in a discussion with other parents and guardians about time spent outdoors and the activities that you participate in as a family.

**Time Requirement:**

The small group discussion will last between 1.5-2hrs. Refreshments are provided.

**Date, Location & Time:**

The Location (Address):  
Date and Time

Please call or email to confirm your attendance.

Contact Liane O'Keefe (researcher) to confirm or for more information:

Liane O'Keefe  
647-270-8992 (Available 8am to 8pm Monday-Sunday)  
[Liane.OKeefe@gmail.com](mailto:Liane.OKeefe@gmail.com)

## Appendix D

### Sample Interviewee Recruitment Email

[Date here]

Dear (insert contact name here),

My name is Liane O'Keefe and I am completing my Master of Arts in Sustainable Leisure Management at Vancouver Island University in Nanaimo, British Columbia. I am doing a research project entitled "Facilitators of outdoor family leisure: A strengths-based case study", and am looking for key individuals to participate in interviews as part of my research.

I am not looking for information on programs, organizations, events, funding and/or facilities that are available to families that encourage them to get outside within East Scarborough. This could be anything from an annual outdoor soccer game to an organization that does trips in Rouge River park (or further afield). What I am looking for information about is anything existing within the community that may enable outdoor family leisure, which I define as at least one parent participating with at least one child in open-air leisure activities together, regardless of physical activity level. That is, it could include, for example, a picnic, an annual outdoor event, parents watching their child play at an outdoor sports game, or a mother accompanying her child to the park.

This study will look at the current context of family outdoor leisure and how resources, organizations and structures may encourage or enable outdoor family leisure participation in East Scarborough. Specifically, the interview seeks to explore perspectives on how and why families participate in outdoor family activities, and to understand how the supporting elements that exist within the East Scarborough community might influence family outdoor leisure participation. In this way, this study aims to contribute information about how families currently experience outdoor family leisure to inform the East Scarborough Multi-Sport Collaborative.

I believe that you are someone who can contribute to my research and I would appreciate your participation in an interview at a time and place convenient to you. The length of the interview is not set, but typically lasts about one hour. If you would like any more information about this, I would appreciate the opportunity to answer any questions you may have about my research and your potential participation in an interview. I will be conducting interviews between October 8th and 26th. If you are interested in participating please let me know what date and time works best for you. If the weeks suggested do not work for you please do suggest an alternate date. If you feel like you may not be the best candidate for an interview, but know someone that is suitable, please do let me know so that I can contact them.

Thank you for your time.

Best regards,

Liane O'Keefe

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