

GICEL *Seedlings* Early Years Nature Day Camp

The Gulf Islands Centre for Ecological Learning (GICEL) *Seedlings* Early Years Nature Day Camp is a week-long outdoor, play-based program (mornings only) which offers young children an opportunity to explore, learn and grow together in nature. It takes place every summer on a secluded private property (the coordinator's home-place on Mayne Island) that provides both field and forest environments for the children's outdoor adventures.

The emphasis is on social, affectionate, play-based and creative learning, with a focus on sensory experiences in nature: listening, looking, touching, tasting, singing, laughing, digging, climbing, running, swinging, building, eating, sharing, story-telling, painting, sculpting, and - did we mention? – playing! We warn everyone beforehand that the children will get *Very Dirty!* And they do... We all make new friends and greet old ones with joy, sing songs, paint rocks and sticks and add to the wall-mural. We read books and tell stories, paint faces (and arms and legs and other bits), build and decorate a woodland fort, eat frequent snacks, explore the garden, play games in the field and make expeditions into the forest.

Everyone has a lovely time.

The camp has become so popular with families both on and off-island that many now plan their summer vacations around the camp's schedule.

Our staff consists of three experienced adult Early Childhood Educators (including the coordinator) plus five—six junior leaders from 12-18 years old, plus volunteers and guest-artists/specialists. The junior staff and volunteers are generally themselves graduates of GICEL's Summer Earth Education Programs (SEEP) day-camps, who are continuing to build their own leadership skills—another focus of the GICEL programs. Our ratio of staff to children allows the children freedom to make themselves at home in the meadows, fields and forests of the *Seedlings* world.

We are happily mentoring a generation of future environmentalists, healthy young human beings with a profound and joyful connection to Nature.

Tina Farmilo
Seedlings Coordinator
E.C.E., M.Ed.