



Canadian Mental  
Health Association  
Ontario



# Nurturing through nature

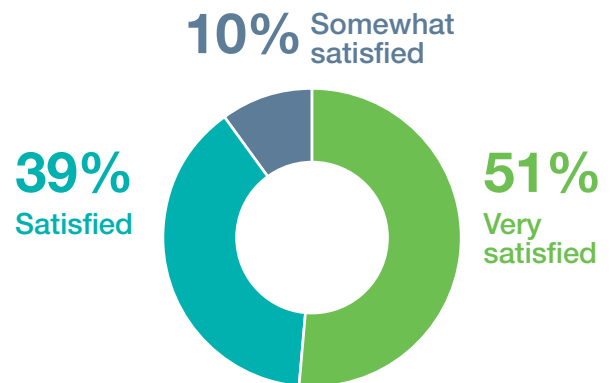
## Youth discover Mood Walks™ benefits

Access to nature has been proven to help with sleep, reduce stress, increase happiness, and promote positive social interactions. That's why the Canadian Mental Health Association, Ontario Division (CMHA Ontario), in partnership with Hike Ontario and Conservation Ontario developed Mood Walks. This province-wide, walking group program uses the healing effects of nature to support mental, physical, and social health.

Since 2013, Mood Walks has focused on adults at risk of experiencing mental health difficulties and social isolation. However, in 2022, a six-month pilot program was introduced to adapt the existing model for adults into a practical program option for youth. The pilot included four CMHA branches and two external partners who ran between May 2022 to December 2022. Participation varied among the agencies, from 2 to 25 participants per walk. Each group was expected to walk weekly, for eight weeks. Some barriers included, inclement weather, scheduling conflicts, and some groups only completed 4 to 6 weeks. The goal of the pilot was to determine the effectiveness of the Mood Walks program model in terms of skill and knowledge-building, changes in physical activities, as well as their connectedness to nature.

## KEY FINDINGS

### Mood Walks Satisfaction



### Would Recommend the Program





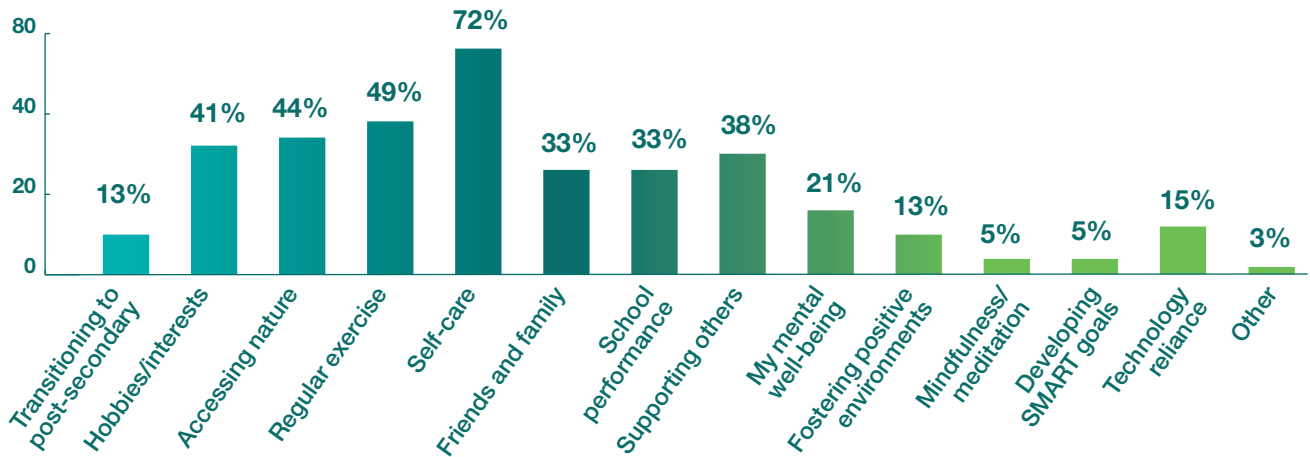
**YOUTH GAINED NEW SKILLS AND KNOWLEDGE THROUGH THIS PROGRAM**

CMHA Ontario saw changes in mood and feelings from various participants after their walks, which emphasizes the benefits of nature or green exercise on mental health. Participants felt almost 50 per cent more energetic (48 per cent), and feelings of stress decreased by 64 per cent. Additionally, feeling gloomy decreased by 77 per cent, and feeling grouchy decreased by 84 per cent.

Mood Walks works for everyone. This pilot project has shown that anyone can benefit from engaging in green exercise, and that youth are interested in and engaged with this type of programming. Additionally, youth participants experienced an increase in knowledge and skills as well as a decrease in negative feelings and moods after being out in nature. Mood Walks is now open to youth participation across Ontario. CMHA Ontario will continue to evaluate the program to ensure Mood Walks meets the needs of all participants.

**Mood Walks provides training and support for community mental health organizations, social service agencies, and partners to lead educational hiking programs by helping to connect to local resources, find volunteers, and explore nearby trails and green spaces.**

**The skills and knowledge gained will help me with...**



**Pre- & Post-Walk Emoji Card Responses**

