

Sparking Heroes' Memories: Your Generosity Brings Joy to Elder Veterans

The Nature Connection made a happy return to the Edith Nourse Rogers Memorial Veterans Hospital in Bedford, MA this summer, renewing a partnership that began in 2004.

"We're so happy to bring back The Nature Connection," said Gina Bazzari, Recreation Therapist at the VA for the past 31 years. "For the vets, and those in hospice especially, they walk in and see this whole magical room set-up. It takes them away."

The Nature Connection serves veterans from WWII to the Vietnam era, including those in the long-term care and hospice units. Many of the veterans have psychiatric challenges, PTSD, dementia, or, for those in hospice, chronic illness. "No matter what their challenges are, The Nature Connection program creates a very therapeutic, meaningful environment," said Bazzari.

Most of the veterans are unable to go outdoors, or may need escorts or supervision. We bring nature indoors



A Korean War veteran at the Bedford VA discovers the prickly quills of our therapy hedgehog.

"With The Nature Connection program it doesn't matter what your challenges or abilities are - this program adapts to each person. We're not focusing on what they can't do but what they can do."

Gina Bazzari
Recreation Therapist
Bedford VA

for them to see, smell, and touch up-close.

Balancing Anxiety and Connection

According to Bazzari, the veterans need The Nature Connection program because it touches all the senses and provides a controlled, safe setting.

"The Nature Connection creates this whole habitat, this whole amazing thing right on the floor with live animals and nature. When the veterans are looking at the animals, or touching natural materials, it's therapeutic for them. It's so important to cater to each of their needs with a meaningful program like this."

"Many of the veterans have social anxiety," said Bazzari. "The Nature Connection program gives them the opportunity to participate without fear."

She also appreciates that the program works for all veterans, regardless of abilities. "With The Nature Connection program, it doesn't matter what your challenges or abilities are - this program adapts to each person. We're not focusing on what they can't do but what they can do."



Casey Bogusz Photo

Our soft but stoic therapy chicken elicits laughter from this United States Marine Corps veteran. Vets with PTSD or dementia find a sense of calm and joy in the presence of these gentle creatures.

Nature Sparks A Hero's Memories

At one visit we demonstrated how milkweed pods float in the air. Ray, a 98 year-old WWII veteran, described it as "parachuting down."

He then related that during WWII he was parachuting into Europe and was shot down, becoming a prisoner of war for 19 months.

These are the kinds of evocative experiences that engage the veterans. "The milkweed helped bring back hard but proud memories," said Bazzari. "You offered him a way to connect through nature."

Inside:

Bringing nature's healing to the littlest heroes at JRI! (page 5)

The Nature Connection

is a non-profit organization that brings nature-based programs to people with limited access to the natural world. Founded in 1983, The Nature Connection brings individuals together with nature's capacity to teach and to heal.

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Nature Connection Newsletter

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Program participants names have been changed.

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Note from Executive Director



Rose Lincoln

Our theme in this newsletter is “heroes” – from veterans, to youth just starting out in life, to the professionals and family members providing daily care for people living with dementia – we celebrate the heroes that surround us. Our donors, friends and volunteers are heroes too – you bring the healing power of nature to those who need it most.

Your generosity has helped us launch two new programs this year for children as young as 5 years old who face a variety of challenges, including complex trauma. For these young “heroes” at residential programs in Dracut and Littleton, our animals and hands-on nature spark joy, help reduce stress, and nurture new social skills. Each visit marks a child’s next step toward the day they transition into a family home.

This fall we also started programs for veterans who live with myriad physical and psychological challenges, from PTSD to dementia, at the Bedford VA Hospital. Through neuroscience we are learning more and more about how birds and other animals help veterans heal. We recently brought our rehabilitated crow on a visit to the veterans. Unable to fly, yet highly sociable, the crow models dignity and strength for these heroes who see themselves in this wild creature.

As Maya Angelou famously said, “A hero is any person really intent on making this a better place for all people.” Thank you for being a hero to the children, elders, and individuals in need whom we serve every day.

Sophie Wadsworth
Executive Director



Michael Desmond Cox Photo

Moose antlers teach children about resilience and change, and encourage conversations about survival.



Thank You to our FY 2017 Donors

We are grateful for the generosity of our donors, foundations, business sponsors, volunteers and in-kind supporters who have contributed to The Nature Connection's efforts this past year.

Our 2016-2017 Program Partners

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Special Thanks for In-Kind Donations and Professional Advice

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Mary Baum, program and training
Caroline Birdsall, program animals
Casey Bogusz, photography
Genevieve Carmichael, program animals
Marcia Chertok, program animals, events
Trinitarian Congregational Church in Concord, events
Marc Cornell-Feist, strategic development
Michael Desmond Cox, photography
Mignonette Davis, IT
Keith Dawson, website
Kate Early, events, grant review, writing
Drumlin Farm, program materials
Mary Firestone, clerical and IT
Concord Free Public Library, facilities
Susan Frey, program animals
Ann Gillespie, events, graphic design
Neil Gordon, development advising
Morgan Grenier, Winter Market Gaining Ground, program materials
Carol Hani, program animals
Christina Huggins, program animals
Karl Kussin, development advising
Clare Walker Leslie, events
Bob Lotz, photography
Bob Lucas, events
Ellie Marshall, business coaching
Ed McCune, photography
Brian Morgan, strategic business

First Parish Church of Groton, outreach
First Parish Church of Stow & Acton, outreach
Concord Park Assisted Living
Wendy Pavlicek, program animals
Jeff Perrin, outreach
Allison Picott, development and management advising
Helen Popinchalk, Winter Market
Susan Quartuccio, program animals
Jordan Rich, events
William Sager, Sager Animal Hospital, veterinary care
Alan Ward and Sarah Seabury Ward, events
Nick Shabanoff, computer specialist
Nancy Shepard, program materials
Edie Sisson, program animals
Daria Smith, veterinary care
Cindy Sorenson, events
Nancy Stillman, program animals
Robin Stuart, program animals
Liz Suneby, communications
John Tarvin, strategic planning
The Umbrella Community Arts Center, facilities
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Marcia and Mark Wilson, program animals
Bryan Windmiller, program animals
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Jessica Wolfe, research and program advising
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We have made every effort to be accurate and complete. Please accept our apologies for any unintentional omissions and call us with corrections at (978) 369-2585

Bringing Nature's Healing to the Littlest Heroes: Your Support Makes This Group Home More Like *Home*

The Nature Connection began a new partnership this year with The Little Heroes Group Home in Dracut, MA, the first program within JRI to serve children ages 5-12 who have experienced complex trauma.

"Children with complex trauma [can make] significant gains when incorporating animals into their treatment."

Cindy Powers
Division Director, JRI, and
founder of The Little Heroes
Group Home

During each bi-monthly visit, the children hop off the bus and rush inside to see what is waiting for them inside The Nature Connection habitat. From rabbits to pumpkins to fresh

corn, we always have fresh, new things for them to see and touch.

By bringing natural materials and therapy animals into this home, we offer a safe space for the children to participate and build confidence.

Cindy Powers, Division Director, JRI, and founder of The Little Heroes Group Home, believes The Nature Connection program has the power to help the children heal from complex trauma.

"Children with complex trauma [can make] significant gains when incorporating animals into their treatment," she said. "Animals offer a comforting presence and elicit positive emotions providing a sense of comfort."

According to Powers, animals have been proven to help children increase social interaction, decrease aggression, and learn to care for another living being.



Olivia, a resident at The Little Heroes Group Home, knows just how to keep our rabbit safe and warm.

Caregiver Training Doubles, Thanks to Dana Home Foundation

Since 2015 The Nature Connection has empowered professionals and families caring for elders with memory loss through our free Caregiver Trainings. At each session we teach caregivers our practices for incorporating horticultural and sensory-based activities into the caregiver role.

"The Nature Connection program enhances quality of life by bringing the outdoors to seniors ... creating moments of joy and deeper connections."

Susan McClements
Co-Chair
Dana Home Foundation

Thanks to the Dana Home Foundation, The Nature Connection will double our training programs this year

to offer a total of four free workshops.

Through its annual awards program, The Dana Home Foundation's mission is to provide for the care, comfort and well-being of seniors.

"The Dana Home Foundation is pleased to partner with The Nature Connection to bring its innovative and effective training program to those who care for seniors with memory impairment," said Susan McClements, Dana Home Foundation Co-Chair.

"[This] program enhances quality of life by bringing the outdoors to seniors with memory impairment and creating moments of joy and deeper connections."

Abbi Laushine, Life Enrichment Director at Bridges by EPOCH Westford, said "The items discussed and shared were very effective and presented in a very 'user-friendly' way. Truly failure-free."



Clinicians learn to make aromatherapy sachets at a recent caregiver training.

We are grateful to The Dana Home Foundation, The Town of Lexington, The Massachusetts Cultural Council, Middlesex Savings Charitable Foundation and the Concord-Carlisle Community Chest for sponsoring our Caregiver Trainings.

For training dates or to schedule a group session for up to 30 people email training@nature-connection.org or visit: www.nature-connection.org

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



Michael, a teenager at Watertown Boys & Girls Club, bonds with our therapy rabbit. "The animals have taught me to like nature better."

Board Expansion Continues



Welcome Maria Considine King to our Board of Directors! Maria has worked at Commonwealth Financial Network since 2000. As a business management consultant, Maria helps financial advisors gain clarity about their vision and their goals. A Concord resident, Maria and her husband Justin are active community members and philanthropists, and have been valued advisors to The Nature Connection for several years.

Volunteer Corner



Sue Dobbie, Program Volunteer
A retired hospice manager, Sue has generously devoted her life to aiding others. She has been a Nature Connection Program Volunteer since 2014, and believes "The dynamic human-animal bond engages us and can be absolutely essential to overall health. The pure joy that can be obtained from interaction with our furry friends is mutually beneficial."

Upcoming Event Join us at Winter Market!

Friday, December 1, 1-6 pm
Saturday, December 2, 11 am-5 pm
Sunday, December 3, 11 am-5 pm
The Umbrella Community Arts Center
40 Stow Street, Concord

Support The Nature Connection's annual pop-up shop at Winter Market! Purchase beautiful nature-inspired t-shirts, totes and gift wrap by artist Helen Popinchalk, and other hand-made items. Shop for the holidays and help bring the power of nature to those who need it most.



To volunteer at our Winter Market table please contact us at volunteer@nature-connection.org. We'd love to see you!