

New Programming Brings Transformative Power of Nature to Youth and Elders

Thanks to your support, The Nature Connection is on its way to making nature-assisted therapy a mainstay in Greater Boston! We are delighted to announce the addition of three new program partners in 2016 expanding our reach to elders, people with disabilities and at-risk youth. Our new partners include the **Watertown Boys & Girls Club, Putnam Square Apartments** in Cambridge, and **The Gardens at Newbury Court** in Concord.

These programs are being launched by new Program Coordinator Samantha, or “Sam”, Sheppard, who has studied counseling psychology with a holistic specialization at Lesley University.

The Healing Power of Touch

At the **Watertown Boys & Girls Club** (BGC) our programs are immersing youth in learning about the natural world. They are particularly finding



Betty explores summer blooms and reminisces about seasons past.

Three New Partner Sites in Watertown, Cambridge and Concord

shared connections with our animals as the gentle creatures awaken insights about themselves.

Program Coordinator Sam Sheppard recounted how one young participant told her, “I don’t get in the rabbit’s face because I don’t like it when people get in my face.”

BGC’s after-school programs engage children ages 7-18 in activities from indoor soccer leagues to swim lessons, all aimed at producing positive outcomes in the areas of academic success, healthy living and character development.

Through interaction with our animal ambassadors and natural materials, BGC Executive Director Renee Gaudette has already observed BGC youth “learning about the natural world while gaining insight on how to value and respect their surroundings.”

Color, Comfort and Life

At **Putnam Square Apartments** in Cambridge, our programs are bringing stress relief and the healing power of touch to seniors. Jayme Bond, Putnam Square’s Resident Service Coordinator, has seen the positive effect the programs have had. “The Nature Connection brings color, comfort, and life to the residents of Putnam Square,” she said, “reminding them of the yester-years.”

The Nature Connection is providing similar benefits for elders at **The**

Gardens at Newbury Court. This Concord-based community offers residential support for memory-impaired elders. Resident Care Director Erin Dirks says residents of all levels become engaged during our visits. “I am fascinated by the conversations residents have amongst themselves and the memories the program awakens.” Our staff and volunteers have also seen elders come alive as they pry



Boys & Girls Club of Watertown

Daniel, a young member of the Boys & Girls Club of Watertown, feels the calming presence of NC’s bearded dragon Cain.

open milkweed pods, or stroke the soft fur of a rabbit. These tactile activities ignite conversations about the past and present, and our vital connection to the natural world.

“It is wonderful to watch as seniors interact with the materials and each other, recalling memories about the sights and smells that change of seasons bring,” observed Program Coordinator Sam Sheppard. “Sometimes they just want to have a contemplative moment. It’s truly a joy to see.”

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 heal and to teach.

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Nature Connection Newsletter

Keith Dawson, *Website Volunteer*
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Program participant names have been changed.



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Note from Executive Director

Rose Lincoln



Here at The Nature Connection we are more committed than ever to our goal of transforming lives through nature's healing power. Recently I was heartened to hear a keynote talk by child psychologist Dr. Ross Greene, founder of Lives in the Balance. Like The Nature Connection, his work empowers and nurtures the most vulnerable individuals in our communities, with two key elements: collaboration and empathy. Our approach adds a third ingredient: Nature.

While we can't literally fold up Walden Pond, we strive to be "Walden on Wheels" for those who cannot get outside. For the teen in a restricted residential school who cannot have her own pet, we bring the rabbit to cuddle and love each visit. For the elder who can no longer dig in their own beloved garden, we bring seeds and soil for them to plant indoors. For the wheelchair-bound young adult who watches autumn from the window but doesn't get outdoors, we bring the sound of crisp maple leaves and the vibrant colors of gourds and pumpkins.

When people ask me about The Nature Connection, I tell them (only half-jokingly), that we are a 33-year-old grassroots organization that is now operating with the energy of a start-up. Thanks to our ever-expanding community of board members, volunteers, partner sites and donors, we are on the brink of unprecedented growth.

In the coming year alone we're on a path to add 3 new program sites, engage dozens of new volunteers, and expand our Caregiver Training Program to connect many more people to the healing energy of our natural world. Our goal over the next decade is to lead the effort in making nature and animal-assisted therapy widely practiced in Greater Boston.

As part of The Nature Connection circle you already know how the healing power of nature can increase a sense of well-being in at-risk youth, elders, and people with disabilities. We are committed to being a catalyst to strengthen the practice of animal and nature-assisted therapy both locally and nationwide. It's a bold vision, but one we embrace enthusiastically.

Thank you for your faithful support. You make possible our effort to bring comfort to our most vulnerable neighbors and to many, many more.

With gratitude to you, in this season of thanksgiving,

Sophie Wadsworth
Executive Director

Cummings Foundation Grant Builds Capacity for Program Growth

The Nature Connection was proud to be selected earlier this year as one of 100 local non-profits to receive a \$100K capacity-building grant from Cummings Foundation. Through its **\$100K for 100** program, Cummings Foundation provides vital funding to local charities working to improve the lives of community members. We are grateful to Cummings Foundation for this generous grant that gives us critical leverage to increase staffing, with the ultimate goal of expanding programming to reach more individuals in Greater Boston.



Nature Connection Board Member Jennifer Albanese (left) and Executive Director Sophie Wadsworth (right) with Bill Cummings, founder of Cummings Foundation, at the 2016 \$100K for 100 grantee reception.

Cambridge Mayor Honors Two Volunteers with Service Awards

In April 2016 The Honorable E. Denise Simmons, Mayor of Cambridge, MA, recognized Nature Connection volunteers Chris Salas and Pat Magee with 2016 Cambridge Volunteer Service Awards. Given to “outstanding individuals who dedicate their time and talents in volunteer capacities,” Chris and Pat were among nine volunteers honored for selflessly serving the people of Cambridge.

“That moment I get with each person – stroking an animal, smelling a flower – it is all about offering the chance to marvel at nature, which often sparks happy memories,” said Chris, who values the opportunity to share her love of nature with seniors.

Mayor Simmons recognized both Pat and Chris for their work serving the people of Cambridge and for their gentle



Volunteers Chris Salas (left) and Pat Magee (right) were honored by Cambridge Mayor E. Denise Simmons with 2016 Volunteer Service Awards for sharing the natural world with seniors at Cambridge Elder Services.

“That moment I get with each person – stroking an animal, smelling a flower – it is all about offering the chance to marvel at nature, which often sparks happy memories.”

Pat and Chris are dedicated volunteers who help bring nature indoors to elders at the Elder Service Plan of the Cambridge Health Alliance, an organization The Nature Connection has served for more than two decades.

guidance connecting seniors with nature.

“Chris Salas is a deeply dedicated volunteer whose curiosity about people and nature makes everyone at Cambridge Elder Services excited to explore what she is showing them,” said

Mayor Simmons. “In her capable hands a rock becomes a gem to carefully examine. Chris is kind, thoughtful, a great listener and a beautiful human who deeply cares about people and nature.”

Mayor Simmons commended Pat Magee for “bringing great knowledge of the natural world to Cambridge Elder Services. She always finds a beautiful

budded branch, unfurled fern, or plump seed pod from one of her walks in nature. Her enthusiasm is contagious as she shares and asks elders what they know about the item. And Pat knows a lot!”

Congratulations to Chris and Pat, and to our entire team of program volunteers who bring the healing power of nature to people with limited access.



2016 At-a-Glance

Strengthening well-being by the numbers

10x



Welcomed 10 New Animals

20x



Trained 20 New Program Volunteers

2x



Added 2 Professional Caregiver Trainings in Greater Boston

1,500x



Fostered 1,500 one-on-one connections to the Healing Power of Nature

3x



Added 3 New Program Partner Sites



The Nature
Connection

P.O. Box 155
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Mary, a resident of Putnam Square Apartments, enjoys the comforting warmth of Milo, one of our Netherland Dwarf Rabbits.

Our Program Partners

At-Risk Children & Youth

Boys and Girls Club of Watertown
Watertown

Massachusetts Hospital School
Canton

Pelham Academy
Lexington

Robert F. Kennedy Children's
Action Corps
Lancaster

The Susan Wayne Center for
Excellence
Thompson, CT

Walden Street School
Concord

Elders

Concord Park Assisted Living
Memory Support, Concord

Cambridge Health Alliance
Elder Service Plan, Cambridge

The Gardens at Newbury Court
Memory Support, Concord

Putnam Square Apartments
*Elder and Disability Housing,
Cambridge*

Adults with Disabilities

Minute Man Arc
Day Habilitation Program
Concord

Work, Community, Independence
(WCI)
Waltham

Upcoming Event

Join us at Winter Market!

Friday, December 2, 1-6 pm

Saturday, December 3, 10 am-5 pm

Sunday, December 4, 1-5 pm

The Umbrella Community Arts Center
40 Stow Street, Concord

Finish your holiday shopping early and support the Nature Connection! Come to our pop-up shop during the Umbrella's



festive Winter Market to purchase beautiful nature-inspired T-shirts, totes and giftwrap by artist Helen Popinchalk and original nature photography by Alan Ward. Shop handmade for the holidays and help us bring the power of nature to those who need it most.

If you'd like to volunteer at our event table, please contact eborreliz@nature-connection.org. We'd love for you to join our team!

Soaring Above Adversity: Kessie To Bring Strength and Dignity to At-Risk Individuals

A New, Wild Presence Arrives at The Nature Connection

Kessie is an American Kestrel belonging to the falcon genus (*Falco sparverius*), the smallest raptor in America. She came to us from Eyes on Owls in Dunstable, MA, where she was nursed back to health after suffering permanent damage to her left eye and wing in a car accident this year.

Kessie's injuries have left her earth-bound, but as an ambassador for her species she displays courage and healing – a role model for us all.

Until she is able to live outdoors in an aviary, Kessie is currently living with Advisory Board member Nancy Stillman (along with other NC ambassadors including snails, salamanders and toads!).

Having gotten to know Kessie, Nancy is certain that she will make a big impact on the vulnerable people we



serve. "We are excited to offer our program participants a unique opportunity to be up close to a creature from the wild and spend time in her calm presence," she said. "I believe that people with disabilities will relate especially well to Kessie, even see themselves in her."