

## Elders Explore Power of Choice Through Nature

Nancy didn't want to sit down. She didn't want to touch the guinea pig, or even the colorful turkey feathers. Instead, Nancy slowly milled about the seated program group at The Gardens, a memory care residence at Newbury Court. She furtively glanced around, expecting someone to tell her to sit down. To Nancy's surprise, our Program Manager, Taylor, affirmed her choice to stroll around.

Not everyone needs to interact with nature in the same way to access its healing power and our program benefits. When Nancy refused to smell the spice jars, Taylor adjusted her approach and instead told her an anecdote of baking Thanksgiving desserts with similar spices. Nancy nodded with understanding and told Taylor that she had decades of holiday baking experience.

### Sparking Memories

As Nancy's choices and preferences were affirmed, her mood lightened and she became more willing to participate in the group experience. Our program volunteer, Deb, struck Nancy's interest when she displayed an array of red and



**An elder strokes the silky fur of our program chinchilla.**

*“We have some people who don't go to any other activity, but they will go to The Nature Connection.”*

— Caitlin Jones, Former Activities Coordinator,  
Elder Service Plan, Cambridge Health Alliance

golden leaves. Nancy was enamored with a giant oak hydrangea leaf that covered her palm. Nancy remarked, “I loved growing up in New England because of the beautiful fall colors.” Recalling this memory, Nancy's mood brightened even more and she engaged with the animals and plants throughout the remainder of the program.

### Setting Up Success

Nancy's story is one of many examples of our core program methodology “Safety, Choice, Respect” at work. We offer a safe therapeutic environment where program participants of all ages and abilities can exercise their power of choice.

In a memory care facility, choices are limited for safety reasons and daily tasks can be frustrating for residents who are losing their cognitive function. In our programs, elders choose their level of participation and feel a sense of freedom in directing their own experience, which builds their confidence and engagement with life. An elderly man living in a nursing home recently said of our programs, “I see more now because of my knowledge.”



**Helen brightens as she receives a bouquet of wildflowers at a memory care residence.**

“We see more participation from elders when The Nature Connection comes in,” said Caitlin Jones, Former Activities Coordinator at Elder Service Plan, Cambridge Health Alliance. “We have some people who don't go to any other activity, but they will go to The Nature Connection.”

## The Nature Connection

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Program participants' names have been changed.



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# Note from Executive Director



Rose Lincoln

Dear Friends,

Thanks to you, as I write this a child is meeting a gentle rabbit for the first time. An elder who lives in a memory care residence is planting bean seeds which she'll watch grow—by the day—in the weeks to come! *Your support* reaches those who live their lives indoors, bringing fresh flowers and the comfort of animals, sparking joy, and nurturing their well-being.

We're also bringing our approach to personal and professional caregivers, through Dana Home Foundation funded trainings. A recent trainee, Trish Garland said, "Thank you for sharing so much of your considerable knowledge about the power of nature to connect with people with dementia. I am looking forward to trying out some nature activities."

Thanks to your support, we're partnering with a new program site, Rivercrest Rehab and Nursing at Newbury Court in Concord. We are also thrilled to announce that we have been awarded a 10-year Sustaining Grant from Cummings Foundation to expand our programming and make animal and nature-assisted therapy widely practiced in Greater Boston.

As we continue to grow, I invite you to jump in and get involved with our work. Join us as a volunteer, check out our animal photos on Facebook or Instagram, or come with me to see one of our local programs in action (the ocean, delivered!).

Thank you again for all you do to bring nature's healing power to people of all abilities.

Sophie Wadsworth  
*Executive Director*

“Thank you for sharing so much of your considerable knowledge about the power of nature to connect with people with dementia. I am looking forward to trying out some nature activities.”

—Trish Garland,  
Recent Trainee

### OUR MISSION

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.



# Cummings Foundation Awards NC with 10-Year Sustaining Grant

We are proud to announce that The Nature Connection has been selected to receive a Cummings Foundation Sustaining Grant, a \$200,000 grant that will be distributed over the span of 10 years. This long-term support will help grow our programs, launch caregiver webinars throughout the state and nation, and continue to subsidize our programs for low income individuals.

In 2016, The Nature Connection received the 100k for 100 grant from

Cummings Foundation, which allowed us to increase our program capacity for children and adults of all abilities in Greater Boston and Metro West. Thanks to this previous grant, we are serving a record number of program sites and are on track to make over 3,000 people-to-nature connections in 2019!

As The Nature Connection continues to grow year after year, the demand for our programming has exceeded our capacity. With this new sustaining

grant, The Nature Connection plans to reach twice as many vulnerable individuals in our communities who need the healing power of nature.



**L-R: Bill Cummings with Sophie Wadsworth, Executive Director, and Ron Bott, Board President**

*The Nature Connection's work is practical, uplifting, and singularly focused, creating a positive, joyful impact. Moreover, it's paving the way for important changes in therapeutic services.*

— Cummings Foundation volunteer

## Meet Our Volunteers

**Sarah Tucker** is a “jack of all trades” as a program and event volunteer, and animal caretaker. Her warm smile and gentle nature comfort participants as they experience an animal for the first time. For four years, Sarah has brought her chicken, Cauliflower, on programs where participants love to feel Cauliflower’s smooth feathers.

“Bringing the magic of a seed, the love of an animal, or the beauty of a flower to the people we serve awakens an authenticity in all of us,” says Sarah. “Sharing curiosity and joy over the wonders of the natural world is healing, empowering, and inspiring.”



**Deb Gerstein** helps deliver programs to youth in residential schools and elders with memory loss. As a former biology teacher, Deb is a nature guru and brings her extensive natural history knowledge and conversation starters with her on programs.

“Deb always has a nature story and a new plant to share on programs,” says Justine, Program Coordinator. “She speaks passionately about nature and can answer nearly every participant’s question!”



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## Get Involved!

*You can bring nature's healing power to people with limited access to the outside world.*

Join us as a program or project volunteer, committee member, or ambassador! Please get in touch to explore the many ways to get involved by emailing: **swadsworth@nature-connection.org** or by calling **978-369-2585**.



On May 15th we celebrated the healing power of nature with delectable hors d'oeuvres and good friends in the beautifully renovated barn at Gibbet Hill in Groton. Bestselling author Peter Zheutlin and State Senator Jamie Eldridge joined 150 guests and raised over \$25,000 to benefit kids and adults of all abilities.



**Erin Moran (second from left) and Kate Moran, Honorary Event Chair (second from right), with friends at Inspire 2019.**

## New Program Site Joins The Nature Connection

We are excited to announce a new program partnership with Rivercrest Rehab and Nursing at Newbury Court in Concord. Beginning in June, NC staff now support the healing process of older adults in this nursing home using natural materials and animals.

Michelle Behr, Life Enrichment Director at Rivercrest, is excited about their residents' positive responses to nature and said, "*[at Rivercrest] our connection to nature feels a few steps away. We are so happy that you are bringing your programs to us!*"



**Carol Hani shares a dove with Rivercrest residents**