

A Young Girl Finds Stillness Among Seashells

“Hello?”

Emma held the large hermit crab shell up to her ear waiting for a response, the corners of her mouth curled into a knowing smile while she checked to see that her peers were in on the joke.

“Nope, nobody’s home!” she declared as she carefully placed the shell back on the table.

This was a markedly different Emma than the one who had joined the program 30 minutes earlier. At the start of The Nature Connection’s afternoon program in August, Emma was fidgety. Her eyes darted to the many toys around the room at Littleton Academy, a therapeutic boarding school for children ages 6–12. Emma lives with ADHD and is working through emotional dysregulation caused by past trauma, which made the task of sitting still and listening a significant undertaking for her. With other, more colorful distractions, it was easy to understand why following along with the virtual program was difficult.

Shifting Focus

Autumn, the NC Program Coordinator leading the program, sensed Emma’s particular needs and immediately pivoted her engagement method to a more hands-on approach:

“Do you see the many shells in front of you? I invite you to explore them using your hands, eyes, and even ears. Can you find two that are almost exactly alike and two that are very different?”

Emma’s darting eyes settled on the array of vibrant seashells in front of her and her hands went to work sorting them into piles based on shape and size. She sorted quietly for two minutes while staying on-topic, which we later learned was a big accomplishment for

Emma. She then held up two pristinely white clam shells of roughly equal size and told Autumn they looked like hearts with a rounded top and point on the bottom.

Emma continued to make comparisons between the shells and everyday objects: one was shiny like a mirror, one was long and flat like a snake, and one she put up to her nose like the carrot on a snowman’s face. While other kids shared, Emma sat still in her chair and waited for her turn to speak. In fact, for the rest of the program Emma kept herself calm and engaged with the group, helping to spark curiosity and connections with her classmates.

Expanding Nature’s Influence

In addition to engaging with this group of kids twice a month through interactive online programs, Autumn has also been sending supplementary pre and post activities to staff at Littleton Academy to integrate curiosity and comfort through nature into the daily routines of the kids living there. At a time when feelings of stress and



“Jennie” intently observes a snail as it explores her hand during an NC program

isolation are high, these supplementary games, crafts, and thought-provoking activities build on the therapeutic themes of Autumn’s programs and offer kids new ways to experience joy and comfort throughout their day. Julie Trani, *Special Education Teacher* at Littleton Academy, praised these supplementary activities saying:

“Having the overall engagement with your topics during the two weeks prior to the [virtual program] has helped the students in my class stay more focused and with more positive behavior during the [program]. Thanks for the material that you send and post!”

Sea-ing a Change

Autumn closed that day’s program with a breathing exercise. She played the sound of ocean waves and invited the group of kids to close their eyes, slowly breathe in with the rising sound of the wave.....and then breathe out as it receded. The group repeated this meditative breathing and sat in stillness for several minutes – Emma included. Autumn closed the program by reminding the group of their own power, saying “the ocean is like people, sometimes it is stormy and sometimes it becomes calm. If something that big can calm itself, so can you”.



Emma arranges seashells in the shape of a crab during an interactive online program

The Nature Connection

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Program participants' names have been changed.

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 Mass Cultural Council

 Printed on recycled paper.

Note from the Executive Director



Dear NC Family,

Below are the words of an 85-year-old loving husband of 60 years, a father, a grandfather, a physician for over 50 years, a church Deacon, an active church member, and a strong primary bread-winner for his family, that were shared through tears on the phone from a rehab facility specializing in memory loss.

"Where is everyone? I want to go home and go back to work. I miss the love of my life, my staff, and my patients."

These were my Dad's cries of panic, fear, and loneliness as the pandemic restrictions went into full effect just a few months ago. I knew that the early stages of dementia contributed to his heightened sense of abandonment and confusion, and I was willing to do anything to just offer my dad some peace, some serenity, some moments of joy. As his caregiver, I struggled to know what to do to enhance his immediate quality of life.

In the past several months with The Nature Connection, I've been fortunate enough to witness the incredible healing ability of nature for members of our community, like my Dad, who are desperate for connection and relief. In a socially distant world, nature is a safe medium in which to decrease stress and improve well-being for those most vulnerable to the pandemic.

The Nature Connection will continue fighting to combat the despair and isolation that so many people are experiencing as a result of the pandemic, increased economic instability, and the racial and social struggles facing our country. We will continue to innovate our program models to reach more children and adults in need, and to ensure access to therapeutic nature is more equitably provided throughout Greater Boston, Middlesex County, and beyond.

As someone who is experiencing the *new norms* first-hand, I am encouraged and excited about the hope and joy that The Nature Connection continues to offer so many. I hope that you will continue to stay engaged, be safe, and enjoy every opportunity you have to take advantage of the healing power of nature.

My best to you, your family, and friends in these unprecedented times.

Kimberly Simmons, M.Ed.

Executive Director

ksimmons@nature-connection.org

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.



2020 Annual Report

The Nature Connection FY20 Financials*

REVENUE

Earned Income (<i>Program Revenue</i>)	\$41,549
Individual Contributions	\$76,116
Foundation	\$66,090
Government	\$8,150
Corporate	\$8,600

Total Revenue **\$200,505**

EXPENSE

Program Services	\$110,525
Fundraising and Marketing	\$74,320
Management	\$33,665

Total Expense **\$218,510**

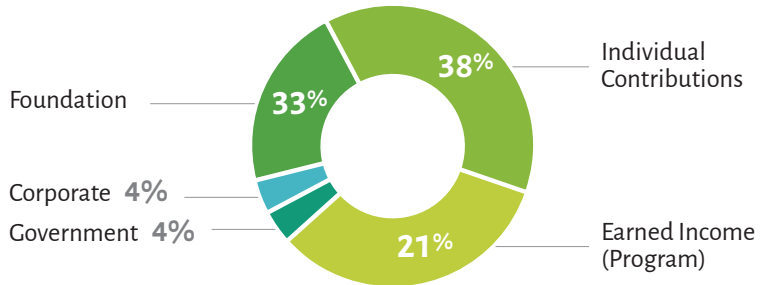
ASSETS

Net Assets, Beginning of Year	\$127,187
Change in Net Assets	\$(38,005)

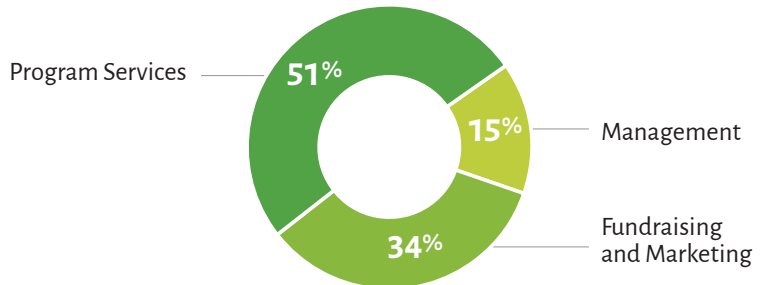
Net Assets, End of Year **\$89,182**

*preliminary unaudited financial report

FY20 REVENUE

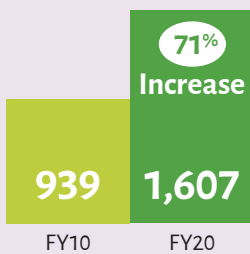


FY20 EXPENSES

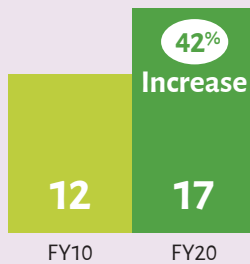


Program Impact 10 Year Comparison

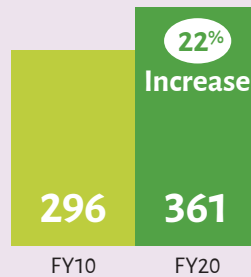
Individual Connections with Nature



Program Sites



People Served



Over the past ten years, The Nature Connection has expanded our reach to serve more people and partner sites in our region. The number of times that each individual we serve connects with nature has dramatically increased, which shows the deepening impact of our work.

Community Engagement

120
VOLUNTEERS

48
CAREGIVERS
TRAINED

2,544
PEOPLE RECEIVING
E-BLASTS

845
SOCIAL MEDIA
FOLLOWERS



The Nature
Connection

P.O. Box 155, Concord, MA 01742

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

8th ANNUAL
Inspire

**Virtual or in-person...
you'll be *Inspired!***

We don't yet know if we can see you face-to-face for our annual spring fundraiser, *Inspire*, but we are certain you won't want to miss it. More details coming soon.

Our Three Year Vision

The Nature Connection Board of Directors and staff are pleased to share the completion of our next strategic plan. This summer we identified key areas of improvement within the organization and prioritized them within three categories of growth and development that we plan to accomplish from 2020 – 2023, ending in our 40th year as an organization!

"We are raising the bar for what we hope to accomplish at a time when challenges abound because ultimately, we know a stronger more vibrant NC will emerge along the way."

– Andrew Boardman, NC Board President

Want to help us reach these goals? We rely on passionate volunteers to support our programs, help out at the office, and advise our committees. Get in touch:

www.nature-connection.org/volunteering
info@nature-connection.org

2020–2023 Strategic Plan

Strategy 1: Grow, develop, and expand The Nature Connection as an organization and program provider.

Goals include increasing program delivery, promoting diversity and inclusion, expanding our geographic region, and diversifying our funding sources.

Strategy 2: Become a leader in the fields of accessibility and therapeutic nature programming.

Goals include receiving accreditations, offering specialized trainings for professionals, collaborating with industry leaders, and meeting accessibility standards.

Strategy 3: Make The Nature Connection a desirable place to work, volunteer, and support.

Goals include increasing volunteer appreciation, growing our internship program, improving the donor experience, and offering more professional development opportunities.