

## Elders Find Warm Relief in Winter with Indoor Nature

In the mid-morning hours of a chilly February day, The Nature Connection team pulled up the tree-lined drive of Artis Senior Living of Lexington. It was nearly silent in the misty rain, and the world was coated with a light layer of snow. Inside, elders sat in a semi-circle facing a wall of windows that looked out over the frosted woods — just out of reach.

These elders, living with Alzheimer's or another form of dementia, often face frustration, confusion, and anxiety throughout their day. Their facility, their home, is locked on the inside for safety. They do not have the ability to go outside alone and see their breath fog in cold air, or feel the sun's warmth on their cheek. The ease and comfort that many of us enjoy in nature is challenging for these elders to access without The Nature Connection's programs.



**A curious chinchilla sparks delight with a program participant.**

As Ada gently caressed the fur...the tension left her face and the corners of her mouth turned upward into a smile.

### Evergreens Spark Lively Banter

On this particular day, The Nature Connection's team of staff and volunteers brought the restful stillness and peace of winter indoors with holiday-scented evergreens, colorful textured gem stones, and delicate owl feathers. Two program chinchillas, named Sage and Chili, sat center stage among the winter materials as the elders curiously peered at the chinchillas' large, upright ears and warm insulating fur.

As staff and volunteers each brought a piece of nature around the room, and introduced the fuzzy chinchillas, participants lit up while recalling humorous anecdotes and joyful times spent in nature. One man raised a branch high and exclaimed with the accuracy of a botanist "spruce trees are coniferous evergreens that can grow up to 80 feet tall!"

### Touch Recalls Tender Moments

On one side of the circle, a woman named Ada sat quietly with her shoulders hunched and a look of confusion on her face. Autumn, a Program Coordinator, noticed Ada's reserved mood and approached her with sheddings of soft Angora rabbit fur. As Ada gently caressed the fur, she closed her eyes and sighed in deep relief. The tension left her face and the corners of her mouth turned upward into a smile.



**A man is soothed by the scent of a pine branch.**

Ada raised her head and spoke for the first time that program, telling Autumn about her years of knitting sweaters, mittens, and scarves for her kids and grandkids with sheep's wool. Ada's new-found tranquility rippled out to the participants sitting around her as they leaned in to experience the fur themselves. The Nature Connection's programs offer elders like Ada, who are largely removed from their life-long connections with nature, a chance to not only recall, but once again immerse themselves in nature's comfort and serenity.

## The Nature Connection

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Program participants' names have been changed.



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## Note from the Executive Director



Dear NC Family,

It is with a sense of honor and humility that I have been able to join The Nature Connection team as its new Executive Director. While this is certainly an unprecedented time to start a new position, it is the perfect time to join an organization with such a meaningful mission. During this period of uncertainty, fear, and isolation, access to nature is especially critical today.

Like for many people, getting out in nature is therapeutic for me. It calms me, and at the same time fills me with energy, joy, and a sense of renewal. Experiencing the outdoors provides a simplified existence from the stress of everyday life and the myriad of things that we cannot control. Despite having the social world as we know it change daily, nature continues to endure. The birds still sing, the rivers still flow, and the sun still rises. These are gentle reminders that something greater than us is in control.

If ever there was a season to work with an organization that has a commitment to bringing the healing power of nature to those who do not have access to it, it is certainly right now. The vulnerable populations The Nature Connection serves are unfortunately more cut off than ever to the powerful benefits that come from contact with nature. While our in-person programs simply aren't possible right now, we are providing creative vehicles for those people cut off from the natural world to be able to experience nature in spite of the limitations we all find ourselves in.

Our staff have been working diligently to collaborate with our program partners, adjust, and deliver the much-needed access to the relief nature provides. It is for this reason I am excited to continue building upon The Nature Connection's great legacy, working alongside our passionate board members, stellar staff and volunteers, and committed community partners to pursue our goals and fulfill our mission...even in this current state. Like you, we can't wait to get back to the business of directly sharing the power of the human-nature bond.

Thank you for your continued support. In the meantime, please stay safe as we look forward to brighter days ahead.

In our thoughts,

Kimberly Simmons, M.Ed.

*Executive Director*

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### 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.



# Adapting to Best Serve People in Need

Hiking trails, parks, and backyards have become a critical refuge for many of us as the COVID-19 pandemic continues. We have flocked to these green spaces as they provide us with relaxation, adventure, and connection. Unfortunately for many children, adults, and elders living in locked-door memory care units and group homes — they have only become further isolated from the joy, comfort, and relief found in nature.

In response to COVID-19, The Nature Connection (NC) is creating accessible activities, based on our therapeutic nature programs, that continue to bring nature indoors for those we serve. These activities include methods refined by NC staff and volunteers of interacting with and exploring commonly found plants and natural materials for all ages and abilities. NC staff are sending these activities to program sites so that year-long program participants can continue

engaging their senses and curiosity through nature.

Program staff are also developing plans for interactive online programming this summer and webinars to teach caregivers to use nature indoors. The Nature Connection remains active despite social distancing, and continues to work toward our mission thanks to the generous support of donors and volunteers. We will not stop finding ways to make nature accessible for those in need.



Try our indoor nature activities by visiting our website, Facebook, and Instagram pages. Help further NC's mission by sharing them with friends and family caring for a grandparent with dementia or a child with autism.

## Owl on a Program Prowl



Jamie training with the Barred Owl

Back in January we added a unique member to the program team — a Barred Owl! Under state and federal education permits, NC received the owl from a rehabilitation center after he was deemed un-releasable due to injuries sustained in the wild. Over the winter, NC staff trained with the owl and enthusiastically created programs that explore the importance of owls' senses as a nocturnal animal and how they fit into New England forests and food webs.

NC Program Coordinator, Jamie Truman, described her first program with the owl at the day habilitation program for adults with disabilities at Minute Man Arc in Concord saying,

“It Was Truly Transformative...”  
— Jamie Truman,  
Program Coordinator

“the room, that is usually full of exuberant noises, came to a dramatic moment of silence and total focus.

Participants who are consistently vocal suddenly fell quiet as soon as the owl was within view. Everyone, staff included, was in awe.” Jamie went on to share how program participants can relate to and find solace in the owl's experience, “when discussing the owl's injuries, I also talked about how he is still whole, amazing, and able to have a good life — a relatable metaphor for people recovering from trauma or living with disabilities.”

Jamie summed up the program experience saying, “it was truly transformative in that moment.”



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ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



See inside to read about our efforts during COVID-19 to make nature accessible for all.

## A New Kind of Inspiration

We are blown away with the amount of support we received for our virtual Inspire fundraiser. Your support proved that despite our physical distance, our community is as strong as ever! Together, we raised **\$15,000** to provide the joy, curiosity, and relaxation of nature to people who are even more cut off from the outdoors due to COVID-19.

On behalf of the NC board, staff, and volunteers — thank you.

The Inspire event page is still on our website for viewing:

[nature-connection.org/virtual-fundraiser](https://nature-connection.org/virtual-fundraiser)

