

## Isolated Elders Form Strong Ties — Thanks to You!

### “For people living with dementia, engagement is key.”

Abbi Laushine has seen firsthand the active engagement that The Nature Connection brings to elders with dementia. As Life Enrichment Director at Bridges by Epoch, a memory care assisted living facility in Westford, she values our programming for its inclusive engagement:

“You present to people in the way that is best for them, so that they can participate at any level. I see residents smiling, asking questions, touching, smelling – relating to the content instead of letting it passively wash over them.”

### Creating Close-Knit Communities

While temperatures were low in February, elders living with memory loss at Bridges by Epoch explored wool, weaving, and the ways that animals find warmth in winter. Our program staff dropped off 24 bags of alpaca, sheep, and angora rabbit fibers along with a simple loom for participants to practice felting and weaving during that month’s virtual program.



**Bags of wool, yarn, milkweed, and other fibrous materials dropped off to program participants, made possible by our supporters.**

“I see residents smiling, asking questions, touching, smelling – relating to the content instead of letting it passively wash over them.”

— Abbi Laushine,  
Life Enrichment Director  
at Bridges by Epoch,  
Westford



**Thanks to your generosity, Pamela can feel fluffy Alpaca wool in her hands.**

Autumn Cutting, NC Program Coordinator, showed some examples of crochet and knitting during the program, which sparked a lively conversation within the group about items they had made using similar animal fibers: sweaters, a scarf, baby clothes...

Autumn invited the elders to play with Alpaca wool by first exploring how easily it comes apart when loose, and then twisting it into a cord and pulling on it again. Pamela, an elder resident, playfully tugged at the wool and remarked that though the raw material can be pulled apart, it becomes much stronger as the fibers are weaved together. Taylor Eagan, NC Program Director, related this activity to the idea of community resilience saying, **“We’re stronger together than on our own.”**

### A Year of Resilience

Our communities have shown great resilience this year and the same is true for our program participants. While many people sought the outdoors as a haven for relief from quarantine, some people in our communities were not able to go outside to access the rejuvenation of nature. Some people were further isolated away from family, friends, and the outdoors.

The Nature Connection is focused on bringing social connection and mental wellbeing to program participants this year who are experiencing drastic isolation. This is only possible thanks to our dedicated network of donors and volunteers. Our supporters stood together with people in our programming and proved that *together*, we really are *stronger*.

## The Nature Connection

### Board of Directors 2020-21

Andrew Boardman, *President*  
Jennifer Albanese, *Vice President*  
Diane Harwood, *Treasurer*  
Doug Koval, *Clerk*  
Frann Addison  
Rhonda Duddy  
Joao Evora  
Janet Ferone  
Robin Kanarek  
Maria Considine King  
Angela Yarde  
Sarah Seabury Ward, *Founder, Board Member Emerita*

### Advisors

Joel Andrews  
Becky Bartovics  
Tina Bloom  
Lisa Brukilacchio  
Judith Burton  
Christine Callahan  
Marcia Chertok  
Justin King  
Ellen Leigh  
Liz Loudon  
Nicole Pecorelli  
Dick Pleasants  
Alan Rom  
Nancy Stillman  
Rebecca Reynolds Weil


### Staff

Kimberly Simmons, *Executive Director*  
Taylor Eagan, *Program Director*  
Jennifer Reilly, *Development and Marketing Director*  
Autumn Cutting, *Program Coordinator*  
Carol Hani, *Program Coordinator*  
Judith Aronstein, *Program Consultant*

The Nature Connection Inc.  
P.O. Box 155  
Concord, MA 01742  
Tel: 978-369-2585

Email: [info@nature-connection.org](mailto:info@nature-connection.org)  
[www.nature-connection.org](http://www.nature-connection.org)


Program participants' names have been changed.

 @nature-connection

 @the\_nature\_connection

 @NatrConnection

 Mass Cultural Council

 FSC Printed on recycled paper.

## Note from the Executive Director



Dear Friends,

It is spring! With spring comes life, new growth, refocusing, and fresh potential. The birds chirp again, the sun warms the air, and our vegetation grows freely.

We have all lived through a year that has challenged us like never before. The impact of the pandemic, economic instability, and social and racial unrest has changed our world on almost every level. In so many respects it has been unimaginable, and we are just beginning to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

As we move forward, I continue to think about the meaning of the word resilience: the act of adapting to change...the ability to become strong, healthy, or successful after something traumatic has taken place. It's being able to work with or within the change, as opposed to succumbing to it. This is exactly what The Nature Connection did by helping members of our community who were already struggling with complex mental health illnesses; disabilities; and social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. We continue to provide programming to assist people of all ages to weather the storm, build coping skills, identify and reduce stress, practice self-awareness and self-regulation...ultimately, to be resilient.

The Nature Connection could not have adapted and remained true to our mission without your invaluable support and generosity. We have not just survived, we have found ways to thrive. On behalf of our talented and dedicated team, I hope this newsletter inspires you the way your support has transformed the lives of others.

Here's to a warm and opportunity-filled season!

Kimberly Simmons, M.Ed.  
*Executive Director*  
[ksimmons@nature-connection.org](mailto:ksimmons@nature-connection.org)

*“The importance of getting outside and enjoying nature has increased dramatically... For those that may not have access to all the outdoors has to offer, organizations like The Nature Connection are incredibly important.”*

— U.S. Congresswoman Lori Trahan during her remarks for Inspire 2021

**OUR MISSION** is to improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities through the therapeutic use of nature. Founded in 1983, The Nature Connection delivers impactful nature-based programs to people with limited access to the outdoors.



# From Resilient, To Thriving

The Nature Connection's partners, participants, volunteers, and donors have shown incredible resilience this past year. Here are just a few of the ways that we have strengthened our partnerships and impact in 2020 and 2021 with your support.

**250**  
PEOPLE SERVED

**22**  
PROGRAM SITES –  
OUR HIGHEST NUMBER EVER!

**691**  
BAGS OF NATURE DELIVERED

**21**  
TWIG ACTIVITIES SHARED

**8**  
NEW GRANT PARTNERS

**9**  
NEW CORPORATE SPONSORS

**2X**  
THE GRANT INCOME

*“[NC] does a wonderful job helping children find focus, connection with each other, mindfulness, and noticing the beauty and the power of nature.”*

— Royce McGrath,  
Supervisor of Children's Services,  
Concord Free Public Library

## Branching Out with New Partnerships

The Nature Connection is participating in the Service Enterprise Initiative (SEI) this year through the Massachusetts Service Alliance and Points of Light.

This program is designed to increase our volunteer capacity and community impact by leveraging our strong volunteer base in all aspects of our organization and improving the volunteer experience.

NC staff are completing a series of trainings this spring and then will begin growing and developing our volunteer program over the next year.



**POINTS OF LIGHT**



The Nature Connection is proud to be named an UP Designated organization by the Mass Cultural Council in recognition of our work to make nature accessible for all people.

Universal Participation (UP) Designated organizations are recognized based on criteria showing they have “demonstrated a commitment

to learn, take action, and embrace inclusivity as a core organizational value.”

As part of the UP Network, we are learning from other cultural institutions in MA and improving our accessibility practices.





The Nature  
Connection

P.O. Box 155, Concord, MA 01742

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

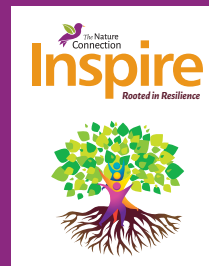


Is your organization looking for affordable virtual or in-person programming? Send us a note at [info@nature-connection.org](mailto:info@nature-connection.org)

Thank you for raising **\$20,500** to support community resilience!



A young participant comes out of her shell when meeting Cauliflower the Chicken (the winner of our Inspire animal fundraising competition!)



We are energized and grateful for your outpouring of support for Inspire 2021. Once again you showed that physical distancing can't stop us from taking care of our communities.

Inspire 2021 featured big laughs from our host, Vance Gilbert, and meditations on the power of nature to restore and revitalize from guest speaker, Alan Lightman. With heartwarming stories about program participants and a friendly animal fundraising competition, we surpassed our fundraising goal and ensured that hundreds of our neighbors have access to much-needed relief, connection, and joy through animals and nature.