

Teens Create Happiness and Connect with Community in New Donor-Funded Initiative

What do teens and chinchillas have in common here at The Nature Connection?

Both are good at social distancing!

Program Director Taylor Eagan has observed a significant difference in the behavior of two chinchillas that youth animal care volunteers have been working with for four months, “In May, the chinchillas would flinch and scurry away if we reached into their cage, now they can calmly be held for short periods of time thanks to the work being done by our youth volunteers.”

A Wild Teen Hangout

How did we convince these chinchillas to get within 6 feet of people? We invited local teens to hang out with them.

Social distancing and remote schooling have had a severe impact on mental health for children and teens



A youth volunteer succeeds in training a chinchilla to be comfortable taking food from his hand.

“Volunteering here brings out a sense of happiness, takes my mind off things...”

— Mia, a teen girl living at Walden Street School in Concord

as we continue to fight the COVID-19 pandemic. Your generous support for Inspire 2021 and our spring fundraising allowed us to launch a new volunteer initiative this summer to offer local teens the opportunity to engage in meaningful in-person work while safely connecting with their community.

Seven students from Concord-Carlisle High School, Lexington High School, and two therapeutic boarding schools, Walden Street School and Pelham Academy, now join us once a week taking care of program animals living in the NC office including two chinchillas, a corn snake, land and pond snails, hermit crabs, and Madagascar hissing cockroaches. These students follow feeding and cleaning schedules, handle animals and provide enrichment activities, and track social behavior progress to prepare animals to be taken on programs.

A Therapeutic Win-Win

“Volunteering here brings out a sense of happiness, takes my mind off things, and doesn’t really feel like work,” says Mia, a teen girl living at Walden Street School, about her experience as a volunteer. “My favorite part is getting to socialize with the chinchillas and corn



A youth volunteer mimics program handling with our corn snake, Albus, to evaluate his comfort level.

snake. I like knowing that I’m helping them feel comfortable around people.” Another student remarks that this work is important to her because, “it’s good for practicing emotional care and taking care of others, like little siblings.”

From all of us at The Nature Connection, we thank you — our generous supporters — for creating this opportunity for local teens to gain job experience, find relief from stress, and make a difference in their community.

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*
Deborah Krause, *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
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,

This season we begin observing the natural changes in our environment: crops and fruits are gathered, leaves start falling from the trees, the temperature drops, and animals start their long preparations for hibernation. Usually, we have been able to anticipate these changes and adapt to them year after year. But if anything has become drastically clear over the last 18 months, it's that very little in our life has been predictable. The inability to plan and control our future has made for incredible instability and, as a result, the mental health of our communities has suffered significantly.

Recognizing that the mental health of our communities was at great risk, The Nature Connection responded quickly to the urgent need for mental health services and have been providing both virtual and in-person therapeutic programming along with accessible nature activities and deliveries of natural materials for a record number of partner sites. The incredible support we've received over the last year from supporters like you allowed us to bring on graduate students to deepen the impact of our programming, create a new youth volunteer initiative, partner with organizations in our field, and identify additional opportunities to provide critical mental health relief to those most isolated and vulnerable.

As we come out of the pandemic, we are opening new programs to reach as many individuals as possible. Thanks to your vital support, more vulnerable children and adults will develop the skills and coping mechanisms needed to adapt to this "new normal", create positive wellbeing, and thrive in their communities.

Thank you for walking side by side with The Nature Connection during these challenging months.

Wishing you the very best,



Kimberly Simmons, M.Ed.
Executive Director
ksimmons@nature-connection.org

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.



2021 Annual Report

The Nature Connection FY21 Financials*

REVENUE

Earned Income (Program Revenue)	\$7,115
Individual Contributions	\$69,694
Foundation	\$98,046
Government	\$64,900
Corporate	\$10,650
PPP Loan and Misc. Income	\$18,350

Total Revenue \$268,755

EXPENSE

Program Services	\$171,841
Fundraising and Marketing	\$91,125
Management	\$32,651

Total Expense \$ 295,617

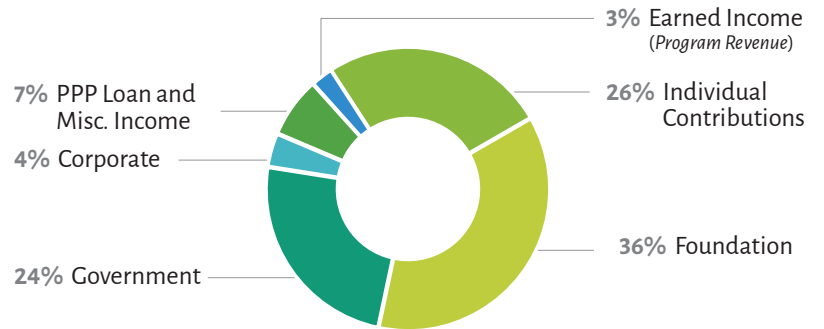
ASSETS

Net Assests, Beginning of Year	\$77,840
Change in Net Assests	(\$26,862)

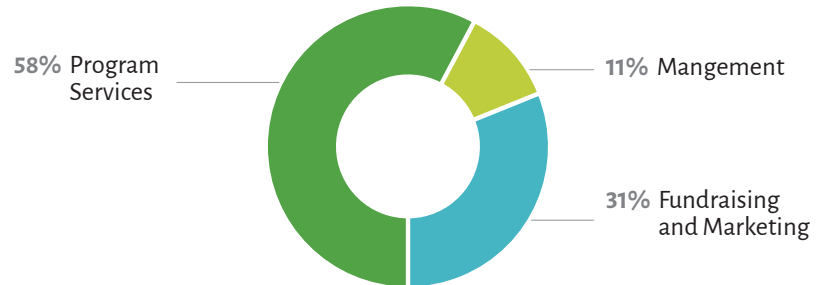
Net Assets, End of Year \$50,978

*preliminary unaudited financial report

FY21 REVENUE



FY21 EXPENSES



Program Impact 2020–2021

537

children and adults served

1,737

individual connections made to nature

25

program partner sites

13

cities and towns served

Percentage of partner site staff reporting our programming to be somewhat or very effective in these key areas:

Increasing social connection and community development

100%

Decreasing stress and anxiety

86%

Increasing self-confidence and autonomy

93%

*“The Nature Connection has provided our participants the opportunity to **immerse themselves in nature that they have not had access to due to the pandemic.** Having the opportunity to learn from and talk to NC staff and volunteers has been **a great way for participants to maintain community connection during this time.**”*

— Brain Injury Specialist at Supportive Living, Inc. in Lexington

“The Nature Connection has been a great way to involve clients with nature, after this past year of being very isolated and indoors.”

— Program staff at
Head Injury Community
Services in Quincy



Relating to Crustaceans

Isaiah scooted backward and scrunched up his face as if he just bit into a lemon. “Those look kind of weird and scary”, he said while hesitantly looking at two large hermit crabs whose spindly legs and curious antennae were emerging from their shells. As the group of children at a low-income housing residence in Framingham leaned in to get a closer look, the crabs jumped back into their shells. “They’re scared,” said Isaiah, “because we’re like giant monsters to them!”

Our staff told Isaiah that hermit crabs use their shells for protection and that the only time these crabs leave their shells is when they need to find a larger one to live in. “They have to be brave,” our staff said, “because they’re not protected when they’re switching shells.” Isaiah thought for a moment and replied, “Kind of like when people move. It’s scary, but they have to be brave.” He crawled closer to the hermit crabs, his face relaxed, as curiosity grew in his eyes.



Two young boys excitedly watch a hermit crab emerge from its shell.