

Full Lives Need Meaningful Engagement



Cheer-cheer-cheer-purty-purty-purty

Participants at a local memory care unit listened to song of the bright red cardinal that stands out so well against still bare branches. And then the red-winged blackbird's **o-ka-lee**, a sure sign of spring and muggy summer days to come.

Participants explored evergreens of different colors and textures, sticks that had been chewed on by beavers and rabbits, buds from trees and flowers that were just waiting for the right time to burst, and the minty smell of wintergreen which participants described as “musky” and like “double mint gum.”

“[The Nature Connection] provides Nature reminiscing with the senses, it is educational, engaging and entertaining. It allows our residents with limited mobility to experience nature.”

— Abbi Laushine, Life Enrichment Director at Bridges by EPOCH in Westford, a memory care residence

“Spicy” Witch Hazel

Many of the participants were fascinated by the witch hazel. They recognized the name, but never knew what the plant itself looked like. Eyes widened when it was shared that the witch hazel, a small shrub, blooms during the cold winter months. The yellow flowers prompted one participant to tell us about the house in Florida that she had for 25 years. Another participant smelled the flowers and described them as “spicy!”

The simplicity of this experience with the witch hazel is what makes it so potent: Underlying this particular sensory experience there are so many layers at work: memories inducing a positive sense of well-being, meaningful interpersonal and cognitive interaction, and a reminder that the extraordinary is happening around us all the time.

“[The Nature Connection] makes me think of my childhood. I grew up knowing cornfields and now I learn about flowers and herbs. I love everything you can see and touch.”

— Elder participant and resident of a memory care unit



Time with Nesquik the Bunny

One of the women, who rarely speaks, was loving her time with Nesquik. As soon as our team spoke to her though, her smile disappeared and she withdrew completely ending the interaction. After Nesquik had been around to meet everyone else, we went back to her. Just sitting next to her with Nesquik, no talking this time, she lit up again.



She started to talk to the bunny. We kept silent, only there to witness and guide, but not intrude. It was a complete turnaround from before. Sometimes, words can get in the way of an experience. It is in these small ways that The Nature Connection makes programs meaningful for our individual participants.

Letter from the Executive Director



Dear Friends and Supporters,

Raise your hand if your life hasn't been upended in the last two years.

Reflecting on the past two years—pandemic, social and racial unrest, global economic instability—I know my hand isn't raised. Like you, I've coped with changes to my favorite restaurants, hair salon, grocery store, and of course my team of healthcare providers. We all likely

know someone who has lost a job, started a new job, or had their working and learning conditions fundamentally altered with the shift to virtual and hybrid jobs and schools.

These lifestyle changes would not be a big deal for most of us if we experienced them one at a time. We've all developed healthy coping mechanisms that make it possible for us to adapt if there is a short or long-term change in plans in one aspect of our lives (e.g., you get a flat tire on the way to work or your favorite colleague leaves work or a beloved neighbor moves).

However, **when multiple aspects of our lives are turned up-side down consistently and over a long period of time, it is common to feel a loss of control in one's life.** This can lead to feelings of fear, isolation, anger, confusion, depression, and hopelessness that creeps into our minds and body, disrupting our overall equilibrium.

These feelings are similar to the emotions many **elders, particularly those living with dementia or Alzheimer's Disease experience when they transition into dependent care. No longer able to take a walk outside, spend hours in the garden, cook their favorite meal, or meet their friend for Sunday brunch, they are coping with loss on so many levels, and needing to get accustomed to a totally different way of living.**

The Nature Connection (NC) offers seniors and others moving into dependent living with a place to address the feelings associated with these losses. **NC programs are based on a growing body of evidence that shows connecting with nature encourages elders to increase their physical and mental activity levels,** which in turn can reduce the risk of developing cognitive decline, immobility, and other diseases. Recent academic studies have also noted a direct correlation between nature and stress reduction; increased vitality and mental focus; increased positive self-reflection and self-esteem; decreased isolation and withdrawal behaviors; and increased social contact.

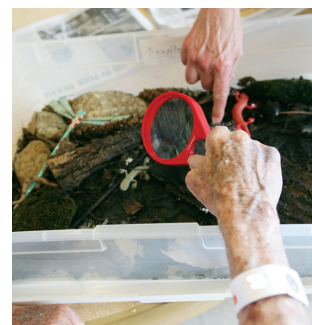
If there is a silver lining to be seen after the last two years, it is that nearly every one of us can now empathize just a little more deeply with senior citizens and other people transitioning from independent to institutional living. I hope you will consider using this deeper empathy to make a donation to the Nature Connection so we can continue to deliver our evidence-based programs that improve the quality of life and reduce the negative impact of losses for the hundreds of people we serve across Massachusetts.

Thank you for continuing to value the impact that the Nature Connection has during these life altering transitions.

In good health,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kimberly Simmons". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.


Kimberly Simmons, M.D.
Executive Director




Follow us on social media!

 @NatrConnection

 @the_nature_connection

 @nature-connection

 Mass
Cultural
Council

 FSC Printed on recycled paper.



Keeping Nature Close

As we have been transitioning back to in-person programming, we are taking the best parts of our online programming with us! For our interactive online programming, natural materials would be drop off for sensory exploration, these became a “takeaway” element to our programs, a nature trinket to collect. Everyone participating was able to take a piece of the program home with them.

Not only does this aspect of programming add to the joy of our participants, but it also makes a deeper impression. **Having the reminder of a special experience makes it easier to reflect on the fond memories it brings.** We can see and hold an item during a stressful moment and retreat to a memory of adventure, curiosity, and wonder!

A Life Long Journey

Connecting to nature looks different for everyone – whether the connection is sparked by being brave enough to pet Jim (the bearded dragon) for the first time or examining a flower under a microscope – it’s these early interactions for kids that develop into lifelong relationships with nature. By focusing on the experience of the moment; curiosity, personal connection, and mindfulness become attainable for all.

As the 300 kids in our programs explore the plants and animals of seasonal topics, they are also learning about themselves and the world around them.

Our program coordinators encourage observation, discussion, and use metaphors from nature to promote self-growth. As we investigate signs of life in spring by planting seeds, our participants learn about resilience in nature and their own lives. Seeds that sprout in no more than a crack of pavement become sturdy as an oak, flexible as a blade of grass, or tenacious as a dandelion. We can embody these qualities when facing our own challenges and transitions, and can be reminded of them when coming upon these plants out in the world as we go through life.



Lichens, precious stones, and sea shells sent out for an exploration of early spring

Creating Community

Making and holding space for experiences is so important, so is having a place and space to share those with others.

The Nature Connection is taking our expertise in this and bringing it to our community at large through programming open to the public!

Join us for an Earthnotes: Mindful Nature Journaling workshop series to develop your self-awareness, observation skills, and creativity; or for our monthly Nature Book Club to talk about themes of our human-nature relationship brought to light by some of our favorite authors.

By coming together, we learn from and support each other as we interact with nature, ourselves and our communities in new ways of belonging and connecting. Find more info on our website!





PO Box 155 | Concord, MA 01742

978-369-2585

www.nature-connection.org

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



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.

Inspire



Celebrate with us on June 15th at Gibbet Hill

at our 9th annual signature fundraising event, Inspire: Rooted in Resilience.

A night of celebration and inspiration for the impact nature has on our wellbeing.

Speakers, food & drinks, and one-of-a-kind auction items in support of The Nature Connection's therapeutic nature programming.

Come see and experience for yourself the impact exploring nature and meeting our animals can have!

Your Support Matters

At The Nature Connection, we value community, the natural world, and the relationship between the two.

While there is a growing body of research that attests to the healing benefits interacting with nature has on our wellbeing, unfortunately there are still barriers preventing those who need nature most from having access to it. We are on a mission to improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities by bringing the lessons, gifts, and healing power nature to all communities regardless of location, personal ability or socioeconomic status.

These therapeutic nature programs can't happen without your support.

Go to [nature-connection.org/donate](https://www.nature-connection.org/donate) or use the enclosed envelope.

Thank you!

