

Celeste the Box Turtle Uncovers the Full Lives of our Elders

Program Coordinator Carol brought Celeste, a Box turtle, to the Malden PACE program for elders with medical support needs. She caught the attention of two participants whose first language is Haitian Creole. **One participant taught Carol the Haitian Creole name for turtle is, "Torti" and sang a song about turtles.**

The other, who had shared his love of animals and tortoises in the past, had a National Geographic book opened to a page of a tortoise coming out of its shell. Carol shared, **"We looked at the beak of Celeste and the photo - they were very similar! What a way to bring a moment to life."**

These moments of sharing cultures, learning, and connecting reminded us that language barriers can hide all sorts of knowledge that the commonality of nature can help uncover.



Celeste visiting elders with Alzheimer's/dementia at Bridges by EPOCH in Westford. Celeste has been volunteering with The Nature Connection since 2018

Our residents love this interactive program. They enjoy touching & smelling, they feel smart and enjoy the meaningful conversation. The program validates who they are and who they were. The program is calming and fun for all.

~Jacqueline, Bridges by EPOCH in Westford

Building Empathy with Rocky the Rabbit

Program Coordinator, Autumn and one of our graduate interns visit Littleton Academy, a therapeutic residential school for kids ages 6-12 every week. **They were very excited that we brought Rocky the rabbit this week.**

E, who is working on empathy, task initiation, and awareness, among other things asked, "can I tell L the Nature Connection rules?" This was L's first time at Nature Connection. E explained about being quiet and calm, about asking before touching, and touching gently. **Together, we spread out the tarp and set up the plexi, then they put in the hut, the food, the water, hay, and a toy.**

When we let Rocky out into the enclosure **E and L, who had been fidgety, became still and quiet as they watched Rocky explore his surroundings.**

They started trying to interpret his body language, wondering if he was scared or nervous or comfortable. We paid attention to his breathing, the position of his ears, and then...he stood up! And looked around...what did that mean?

Using their own experiences and emotions as reference, they wondered how these translated to rabbits and their new friend, Rocky between gentle pets.



This is Simon, the only Nature Connection bunny without a story in this newsletter, we couldn't leave him out!

Our mission is to improve the wellbeing of individuals and communities through the therapeutic use of nature.

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Note from Executive Director

Assuming it's more than the absence of suffering, how would you define wellbeing?

I believe that The Nature Connection is an organization with unmatched potential. During a time of unprecedented mental health decline, isolation and loneliness, action needed to heal our planet – The Nature Connection works towards all these issues. When we take the time to notice the way a fern unfolds, dig our fingers into warm sand, listen for the different bird songs we deepen our bond with nature, ourselves, and whoever we are with.

Assuming it's more than the absence of suffering, how would you define wellbeing?

The Nature Connection is unique in its combination of horticultural, animal assisted, and expressive therapies. This combination creates environmental systems for our participants to experience, engage, and reflect on the dynamic interactions, metaphorical cycles, and mindful wonder of nature through creative processes.

It is unique in using a person-centered approach, honoring each participant's experiences, interests and connections in the context of nature exploration.

It is unique in its repeated interactions across multiple visits to build personal relationships, community, and belonging - basic needs for our incredibly social human existence. These personal relationships let us get to know each participants' particular interests and challenges. This allows them to build trust that leads to the development of self-awareness, mindfulness, and self-confidence through their ongoing interactions with the natural world.

Assuming it's more than the absence of suffering, how would you define wellbeing?

I was posed this question a few months ago, and for me it speaks to the importance of things beyond food and shelter. It's being able to follow your creativity and find your community. It's more than surviving, it's getting to be your full authentic self. To feel seen and heard. And the reality is that not everyone always has that.

The Nature Connection supports the human spirit and improves wellbeing by providing connections through and to nature. The Nature Connection not only cultivates the human-nature connection, but the human-to-human connection too.

And the truth is, that all of the impact you see in this newsletter, which is only the tip of the iceberg, is only possible because of donors and volunteers, like you.

Thank you.

With Gratitude,



Taylor Eagan, MS
teagan@nature-connection.org

Support the Nature Connection's Spring Appeal!

This spring, you can help build community through nature by donating to The Nature Connection. Over 50% of our annual income comes from individuals donors - every dollar counts. You can donate using the QR code or going to: nature-connection.org/donate



Nature Builds Community Fighting Isolation and Loneliness

April 2nd was one of those days when it all came together. J is a frequent visitor of The Nature Connection. Even more so now that the angora rabbits Peaches & Cocoa have moved in, which is fitting since rabbits are her favorite animal.

Back in early March, J joined us for a Wednesday Nature Night on early springtime gardening where we planted seeds and repotted some herbs. **J planted some lettuce seeds for the bunnies** and has been keeping it under one of the grow lights here at Nature Connection. When she comes by to see the bunnies she checks on her seedlings and waters them.

A few weeks later J also joined us for a springtime nature journaling workshop series. **Their first task was to find a plant to observe over the next 6 weeks. J chose her lettuce sprouts.**

Once a week she comes by and we make observations of these little green shoots that have gotten taller, wider, greener, and a little spotted over time. Autumn leads the group and gives new nature journaling prompts for new things to pay attention to each week.

We've felt the veins of the leaf, color matched, and tried very hard to describe the smell and taste of lettuce.



J shows Peaches & Cocoa the lettuce she's been growing for them

And on April 2nd, J picked off a few large leaves, and fed them to Peaches and Cocoa for the first time. Their noses twitched as they nibbled up leaf after leaf. And then nudged J's hand for more after each leaf was finished.

Isolation and loneliness have been linked with serious health conditions; heart disease, dementia, depression, suicide. **The Nature Connection creates and holds space for building relationships to and through nature;** actively meeting participants where they're at to welcome and engage their authentic self, building genuine connection and supporting the human spirit.

3 New Board Members Bring Energy and Expertise

Since the rescue board took over in September 2022, we have added three new members!

Wendy Leiserson, LLM served as counsel for the Public Interest Research Groups, taught non-profit law at Northeastern University School of Law, and practiced and taught environmental law at University at Buffalo School of Law.

Elda Kalivioti is the Vice President and Premier Client Relationship Manager at Cambridge Trust and a member of the Rotary Club of Concord.



Left to right, Board Members: Wendy L, Elda K, Jenn A, and Executive Director, Taylor E at Inspire 2023

Patricia Roggeveen is the President/CEO of Sophia Snow Place retirement home, and has extensive fundraising, development, and strategic planning experience.

Cornhole for Connections Cornhole Tournament Fundraiser

Saturday, June 29th 1-4pm
at
Verrill Farm
11 Wheeler Rd, Concord, MA

Enjoy a summer afternoon and raise money for a great cause! Everyone is invited to participate in our summer fundraiser. Whether you're a cornhole champion or have never picked up a beanbag before, you can compete to win the grand prize. There will also be face painting, a live animal encounter, and a chance to win raffle baskets.

Tournament Registration:

\$40/Team
\$20/Individual





The Nature
Connection

PO Box 155 | Concord, MA 01742

978-369-2585

www.nature-connection.org

The Nature Connection's New Memory Café

Share your knowledge & learn from naturalist experts during hands-on explorations and activities with plants, natural materials and animals at **The Nature Connection's Memory Café for people living with dementia and their care partners.** Facilitated by Carol Hani, LICSW and nature enthusiast.

80 Beharrell Street, Suite D,
West Concord

11:00 am - 12:00 pm

- May 3 - Vernal Pools with Amphibians and Snails
- June 7 - Fossil Exploration
- No Café on July 5 due to holiday
- August 2 - Fish and Rivers



RSVP Required - Please let us know you are coming as space is limited! Call 978-369-2585 or sign up online to register.

Nature Connection Numbers

57 Programs per Month

- 7 Youth Programs
- 18 Elder Care Programs
- 3 Adults with Disabilities Programs
- 4 Community Nature Nights
- 24 Animal Care Volunteer Days

75 Volunteers

21 Animal Volunteers

3,000+ Connections/year

\$255,000 Annual Budget