



The Nature Connection

Bringing Nature, Animals & the Arts to People

Fall 2012 Newsletter

Note from Executive Director

I want you to know how powerfully you help the vulnerable individuals we visit each week. Denise, a young woman in a residential program, felt scared of just about every animal we brought—even the shy hermit crab who hid in his own shell. As NC volunteer Deborah Gerstein describes, when she met the therapy cat, “Tommy” (a lap cat if there ever was one), Denise felt too scared to pet him. She watched closely, though, as Deborah sat down next to her. After a while, Denise said “I think I’d like to try petting him,” and she did, slowly reaching out to stroke his orange fur. A true breakthrough.

We regularly receive calls from special needs schools and elder facilities seeking our programming. Many elders struggle with isolation, limited mobility and memory loss; children grapple with severe anxiety, lack of self-esteem, and depression. Funding is often a roadblock; we serve many low-income sites. Your gifts—your enthusiasm, donations, program volunteering, all help to transform lives. Each of you nurtures small yet dramatic steps toward healing.

Here at our world headquarters, we are delighted to welcome Meghan Prestidge to our Board of Directors. You can find Meghan and her husband Bob spreading the word about NC while running The Concord Shop. We are sad to bid farewell to board members Mark Bamford and Jack Scotnicki who have brought great talent and energy to NC’s work.

We thank them from the bottom of our hearts! I’m thrilled to announce that Jennie Dubitsky now leads our programming. We also warmly welcome Jennifer Johnson, our new Development and Outreach Director. A new Concord resident, along with her family, from Mystic, CT, Jennifer brings to NC both private and not-for-profit marketing, communications and development experience, along with deep-rooted passion for our mission.

As we enter this winter season, we thank you for joining us in bringing nature’s teaching and healing into the hands of people in need.

Sophie Wadsworth, Executive Director

Rose Lincoln



Singing to “Light”: NC Programs Help Youth Cope with Stress

Increased Programming Needed at Glenhaven Academy

Since 2010 NC has partnered with Glenhaven Academy to engage and nurture adolescents with complex trauma and behavioral challenges. Recently, Glenhaven requested that NC double its program frequency, to meet their students’ growing need for direct contact with nature’s healing.

During a recent Glenhaven program, NC staff brought “Light”—a ring-necked dove—to share with a group of teens. As is sometimes the case, when we brought Light out, she became nervous and agitated, so we returned her to her carrier. This allowed us to have talk with the teens about how both animals and humans need to have a place to be safe and return to calm.

One teen, Mikayla, gently held Light’s carrier on her lap while the program moved on to other topics. Mikayla began whistling a soft tune, and nearly ten minutes later Light began responding to her call. She was singing back! Mikayla’s face lit up.

In the words of one NC volunteer: “The way the teens engage with the animals and one another is amazing. Some of these kids have behavior and attention issues that make it difficult for them to sit through a class, but when they come to an NC program they stay the entire time. They participate, engage and ask questions. It’s a beautiful thing!”



◀ Seeing a reptile up-close elicits a sense of wonder
Cambridge Elder Services



▲ Learning about birds
U.U. Urban Ministry in Roxbury



◀ An elder’s “best friend”: a therapy dog provides connection and joy
Cambridge Elder Services

Photos by Sue Huszar

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Jennifer Johnson, Sophie Wadsworth, *Editors*
Leslie Hartwell, *Graphic Designer*
Keith Dawson, *Website Assistant*
Sean Fogg and Sue Huszar, *Photographers*

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The Nature Connection, Inc.
P.O. Box 155
Concord, MA 01742
Tel: (978) 369-2585
E-mail: info@nature-connection.org
www.nature-connection.org



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Program participant names have been changed.

The Nature Connection is a nonprofit 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 heal and to teach.

From Fear to Friendship: Volunteer Nurtures Courage for At-Risk Youth

Deborah Gerstein is a local naturalist, teacher, and longtime supporter of The Nature Connection. She recently shared some of her volunteer experiences with me. Excerpts of our conversation are below. — S.W.

The Nature Connection is doing really good work and having an impact in people's lives. I remember a program when we brought Cha-Cha, a therapy rabbit, to an adolescent home. At first the kids were very excitable, but as I encouraged them to just watch her, the kids grew more peaceful. Kids feel safe with us and the animals. They know they can relax and let go of their fears. NC gives kids permission to have quiet time and just be calm. They don't often get that in life.

At another program a young woman, Denise, was very fearful of holding or even touching our therapy cat. I sat on the floor, by her side, until she finally had the courage to reach out her hand and pet the cat. At my next visit she couldn't wait to hold the cat. Rather than being scared and retiring, she was so eager!

During programs you also see such wonderful things in the way the kids treat each other—sharing and taking turns. We hear them say, "Here, you can have the milkweed now, and I'll hold it after you." These are children with significant behavioral and peer issues, and this kind of behavior does not come naturally to them. We provide them with a little oasis. Our programs help kids make connections in many ways. While they learn how to make the animals feel safe, they can better understand themselves and their own needs.

Personally I've always felt connected to the natural world and how it makes me feel. I like being a volunteer and donor because I can help bring brightness, joy, and meaning into the lives of the people we serve.

◀ NC volunteer Deborah Gerstein shares her teaching experience and love of the natural world with at-risk youth



Winter 2013
Meet the
Animals of
The Nature
Connection

Date to be announced
on our website and
Facebook Page!