

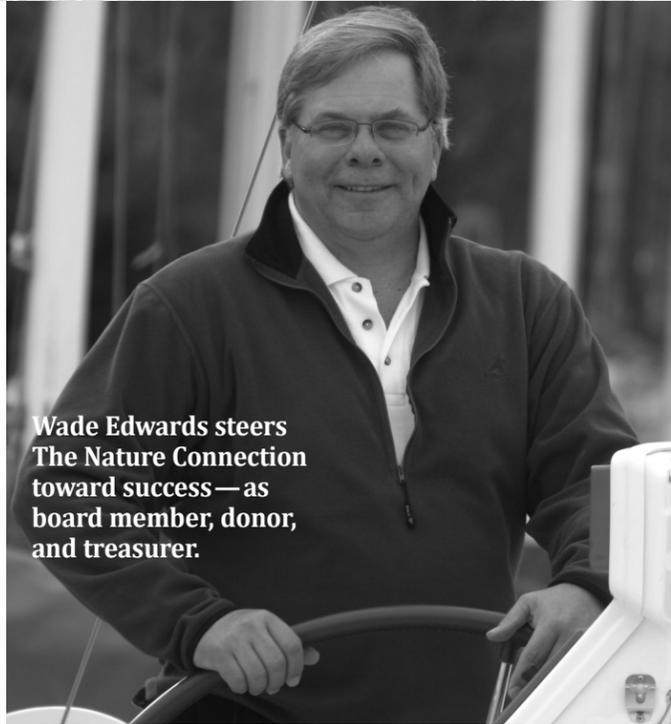
## “Lives Changed” Inspires Board Member Wade Edwards to Help The Nature Connection Reach Out to More People In Need

**What led you to get involved with The Nature Connection?**  
My wife Aliza has been a program volunteer for years and has loved the participants’ enthusiasm for the programs. We hosted a party, which allowed me to get to know many of the board members.

**What keeps you involved?**  
The organization is small, and the actions that I take and the effort that I put forth really make a difference in the ability of the organization to serve more people. The people in the organization are wonderful, which certainly doesn’t hurt my motivation to stay involved!

**What most excites you about NC’s work?**  
The vivid stories of lives changed and quality of life enhancements that the Nature Connection makes possible through its programs are truly what drive the staff and the board, myself included.

**What inspires you to support The Nature Connection?**  
As treasurer, I can see clearly that the dollars that I donate are critically important to the organization’s ability to serve more youth at-risk, elders, and people with disabilities, and to fund the site visits. It is satisfying to know that my donations matter!



Wade Edwards steers The Nature Connection toward success—as board member, donor, and treasurer.

**What do find most rewarding about being a board member?**  
Clearly the board is made up of people who care about other people, and the natural world. Not a bad combination! Without a doubt, it is the most positive, warmest group of individuals with whom I have served on a board within my years of assisting other organizations.



Christy touches a therapy rabbit. The Nature Connection creates a safe space where children can engage with animals one-on-one.

### NC Seeks New Animals!

Many of our therapeutic animals are “regular” family pets shared with us by pet-owners in our area. They are screened and vet-checked by trained staff. If you live in or around Concord, Acton, Waltham, Cambridge or Somerville and have a pet (cuddly or not), please let us know. Perhaps your pet can also help to transform lives!

Sue Huszar



# The Nature Connection

*Bringing Nature, Animals & the Arts to People*

Spring 2013 Newsletter

Up close and personal! Su Baltozer teaches NC participants with disabilities how a tortoise shell provides protection.



Jennifer Johnson

## Turtle As Teacher: NC Animals Give Courage and Healing to Deaf-Blind and At-Risk Individuals New Programming at WCI, Waltham, and Glenhaven Academy, Marlborough, Helps Transform Lives

As I sit with Dorothy, a blind-deaf woman who spent her childhood in an institution, she slowly reaches out to touch our therapy rabbit, Teddy. Dorothy’s body, which initially appears lethargic, awakens. Her distant gaze becomes a bright, full faced smile as she strokes Teddy’s warm, soft fur and feels his

*continued on page 2*

## Wheelchairs in the Woods: NC Program Brings New Experiences to People with Disabilities Your Support Helps NC Begin a Year-long Program at Minute Man Arc in Concord

When the men and women at Minute Man Arc’s Day Habilitation Program (MMA) walk, wheel or have their wheelchairs pushed into NC programs, their eyes light up. They are looking to see what animal and natural objects they will get to interact with that day. They are engaged even before we share the tortoise, flower, or dove with them one-on-one. As MMA Case Manager Jessica Ronco said, “The anticipation from our group and eagerness to participate is fantastic. NC has introduced new and unique ways of seeing and experiencing nature to people with a large range of developmental and intellectual disabilities. NC staff and volunteers are fun and engaging. Our participants anticipate seeing them just as much as the plants and animals.”

During one winter program I brought around a simple branch of white pine. I asked Joe, who navigates the world in a wheelchair, to close his eyes and imagine being in a snow-covered forest. As he closed his eyes I lifted the branch and slowly moved it so that the soft needles just grazed the top of his head. Joe laughed and jumped in his chair. He asked me to do it again. And again, and again. I was just holding a branch of pine, but to Joe I was holding a magic wand able to transport him to a world where his wheelchair could go anywhere he wished.

— Su Baltozer, Program Coordinator



Shawn Fogg

**Julie meets a rabbit. For children in institutional settings, NC programs provide much needed contact with animals. Massachusetts Hospital School.**

*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.*

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*Program participant names have been changed.*



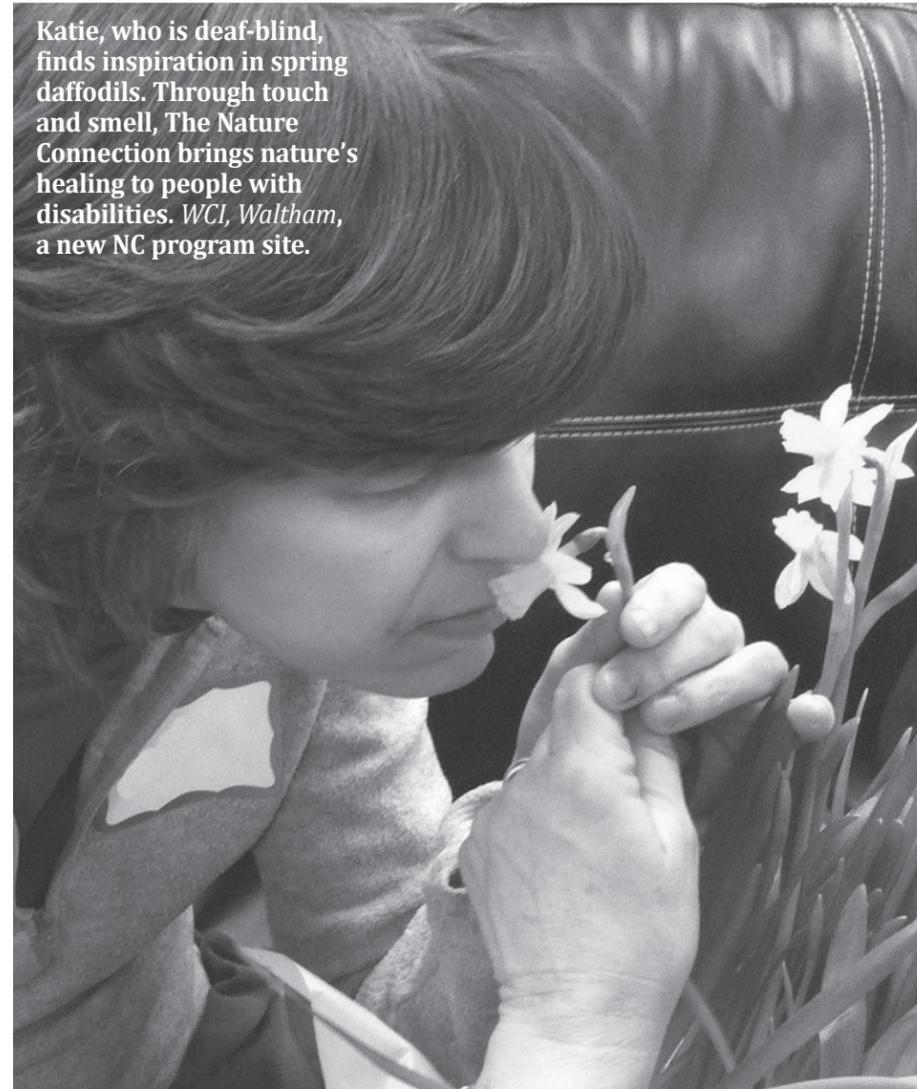
**Turtle as Teacher . . . continued from page 1**

heart beat. She reaches out with her other hand to hold and stroke my arm. For a few moments, we are present, all of us, connecting with the healing power of nature.

With your support, we have also increased our visits with at-risk adolescents in Marlborough: on a recent program we shared chickens, turtles, and tadpoles. These youth, who have a history of trauma, abuse, and neglect, are learning healthy and safe ways to experience their emotions and foster positive peer relationships. The birds, amphibians, and reptiles we share with them facilitate powerful therapeutic work. Billy, who is usually shy, ponders out loud what may cause the turtle to retreat into its protective shell, and what we could do to provide a safe space that would encourage it to come out of its shell.

Moments later, the metaphor of the turtle and his shell inspires others. When offered the opportunity to touch a chicken, a boy named James says he feels afraid of this odd, fidgety bird. Billy encourages him to overcome his fear. James eventually reaches out and pets her. Then, as he leans in closer, he begins to ask many questions: "How often does she lay eggs?" "Where does she sleep?" Thanks to your generosity, he can experience the safe space provided by The Nature Connection program. With the help of NC animals, a volunteer, and his peers, James is courageously exploring his environment and working through his fears.

— Jennie Dubitsky, *Program Coordinator*



**Katie, who is deaf-blind, finds inspiration in spring daffodils. Through touch and smell, The Nature Connection brings nature's healing to people with disabilities. WCI, Waltham, a new NC program site.**

Aishaw Davis

**Touching All the Senses: NC Helps Elders with Alzheimer's Tap Memories**

Excerpted from an article by Kimberly Hooper originally published in the *Concord Journal* February 14, 2013.

**F**or more than a year now, The Nature Connection has been visiting Concord Park's memory support unit, and bringing the natural world to residents once a month.

During a recent visit, NC program coordinator Jennie Dubitsky walked around with fresh evergreens and had residents take turns mashing them up in a mortar and pestle and then smelling them and touching them to see if they were reminded of anything.

Many residents [then] turned their attention to a rabbit named Teddy who was also there for a visit, along with a ring-necked dove. Residents could gently pet the animals and talked with each other about their experiences and memories with animals and pets.

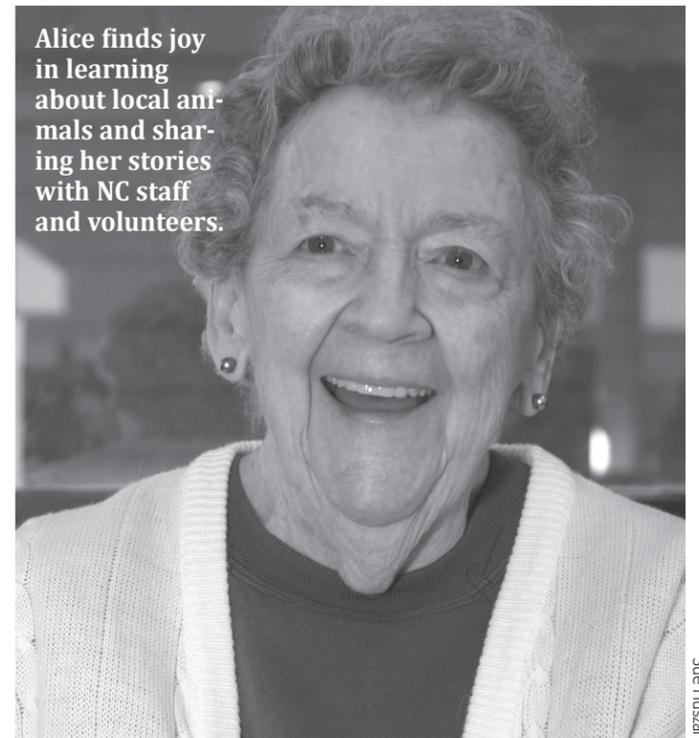
"It's so soft," resident Jean Carey said as her index finger glided along the dove's neck. "This is fascinating. I liked touching the bird because it was so nice and very gentle."



**Gladys studies native plants. New sensory activities help trigger elders' memories.**

Sue Huszar

**Alice finds joy in learning about local animals and sharing her stories with NC staff and volunteers.**



Sue Huszar

Meg Gaudet, social program director at Concord Park, said in an email that the Nature Connection program is a good fit for Concord Park, especially for the residents who have memory impairment. "They love it for many reasons when Nature Connection visits with various animals and provides educational nuggets of information."

Cheryl Young, activities director for the memory support neighborhood at Concord Park, said the program is so unique because it touches all the senses. "It's neat to witness the universal response to soft cuddly animals or a smell that prompts reminiscences backing from years ago," she said. "We offer a wide range of activities here but this is one that everyone seems to be interested in. This one lingers."

**Wish List**

- Lightweight foldable cart/hand truck
- Sturdy wooden trays, preferably with handles
- New plexi-glass enclosures • Laptop PC Computer
- Portable CD player • Label maker and cartridges
  - Storage tubs with lids, large/med/small
  - Weatherproof sandwich boards
- Desk, approx. 5 feet, with built in file drawer(s)
  - 2 drawer filing cabinet, tan or white
- Sturdy lightweight folding table for events

For details about donating, please call: 978-369-2585