



Nature Up Close: Increasing Joy at Minute Man Arc

“NC enthusiastically comes to Minute Man Arc with a myriad of sensory activities,” says Joshua Weidenhammer of Minute Man Arc. “When The Nature Connection is here, I see an increase in joy.” Weidenhammer who directs the Day Habilitation program at Minute Man Arc notes that NC provides a unique service through hands-on activities tailored to the needs of adults with disabilities. “Many individuals are wheelchair bound; it is difficult for them to experience nature,” he explains. Each visit supports progress toward occupational therapy goals, and offers up-close

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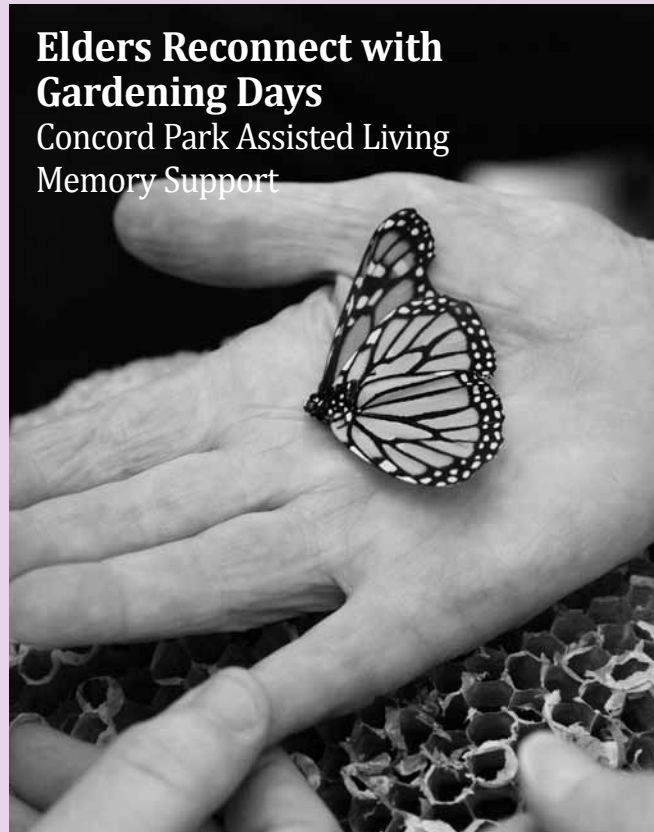
contact with live animals and plant materials. “NC’s volunteers work around whatever issues may be present and try to get everyone to participate,” Weidenhammer notes. “The animals have a strong positive effect.”

“My favorite part is when NC brings the rabbit,” says Mary Blauveldt, a participant at Minute Man Arc. “I get to see animals up close that I never did before When someone pets an animal, it makes them happy. A friend of mine likes to smell the flowers.” Blauveldt adds, “If it weren’t for The Nature Connection, most people at Minute Man Arc wouldn’t be able to feel what nature is all about.”

Joshua Weidenhamer is the Director of Day Habilitation Services at Minute Man Arc in Concord; Mary Blauveldt is a Minute Man Arc program participant and member of the Minute Man Arc Board of Directors.



Welcome to Karin Gaffney,
NC’s newest board member
Vice President at Rockland Trust
and Seasoned Philanthropic Leader



Elders Reconnect with Gardening Days
Concord Park Assisted Living
Memory Support

Ellen Harasimowicz



The joy of touch:
Elise connects with a therapy rabbit

Sue Huszar

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.

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Note from Executive Director

Branch by branch, leaf by leaf, you give individuals with limited access to nature a sense of connectedness. When a girl, with her fingers in beak-like formation, shapes grasses into a bird's nest, she feels more at home in the world—and herself. She comes home through her senses. She knows deeply that all beings, herself included, need a safe home to thrive and grow.

When an elder in a memory care program smells fresh herbs—rosemary and parsley—she comes home too. Our volunteers listen as she awakens, and shares her forgotten joys of gardening and cooking. As you reflect back on this year, I hope you



Sy Montgomery, award-winning author, and Sophie Wadsworth, NC Executive Director

Bob Lotz

"We are part of a great turning point in human history, a point at which humans realize and honor the healing and transformative powers of animals and nature. You and your colleagues supporting The Nature Connection are at the forefront of this sea change."

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Thank you for fostering this change, and for helping others to find their place at home in this sweet green world.

Sophie Wadsworth
Executive Director

will delight in knowing that you have played a vital role in nurturing these connections.

As you read stories from this year, you'll see that your support has helped us to start programs at two new sites. You have also enabled us to launch a "big and bold" new chapter for The Nature Connection this year. We have begun to expand awareness of our work, mapped new ways to deepen our impact through research and strategic partnerships, and laid the groundwork to reach even more individuals in the future.

If you haven't seen our "Power of Nature" presentation that shows images of our work in action and maps out our new goals, I invite you to take a look. Please visit our home page at: www.nature-connection.org.

Sy Montgomery, award-winning author of many books about animals, the human-animal bond, and the "sweet green world" enchanted us as guest speaker at our fall Inspire benefit. She praised our collective efforts when she said, "We are part of a great turning point in human history, a point at which humans realize and honor the

Choosing a Shell, Finding "Home"

New Programs Reach At-Risk Youth In Residential Settings

This fall, The Nature Connection launched two new programs to serve youth in residential schools. These students struggle with past trauma, depression, and anxiety. NC programs help to nurture a safe and supportive environment in which they can learn, and thrive.

Working with youth is a humble reminder of how beautiful a growing mind can be.

"Sometimes the smallest creature can help an individual relate to the world, and in turn helps us all relate to each other."

Recently, we worked with youth on a program called "Basic Needs." Girls worked together to build a habitat choosing food, water, and shelter items. The excitement in the room was palpable. What was going to live in this small habitat? Would it be a dangerous animal or a cuddly one?

As we worked together, we talked about the basic needs of all living beings. Then, we brought out the stars of the program—the land hermit crabs. The hermit crabs performed brilliantly, folding up into their shells when there was too much commo-



Sue Huszar

tion. When the students quieted down, the creatures came out bravely to explore their new habitat. The wonderful thing about the hermit crab is that it has a shell it carries around and hides in when it feels scared. As it grows throughout its life, it changes its shell many times. The crabs represent such

a human reaction to the world. Our youth see this metaphor, too, and relate their own lives to that of the crab.

Sometimes the smallest creature can help an individual relate to the world, and in turn helps us all relate to each other.

—Kinsey Rosene, Program Coordinator



Cindy Sorensen has served as a program volunteer since 2011.

Volunteer Spotlight—Cindy Sorensen

No matter where people are from, they all appreciate the engagement we bring. What I love about our program with Cambridge Elder Service Plan is that it's very diverse. Some elders have lived in Cambridge or Somerville their entire lives, but many others are from all over the world—Greece, Haiti, Brazil. These elders whose challenges include mobility and memory loss, receive medical and social services—including The Nature Connection's sensory activities throughout the year. They love the attention. When we bring them a dove, or a rabbit, or a basket of farm vegetables, something will trigger their memory.

I first learned about The Nature Connection years ago through a high school friend who was involved with the organization. What inspired me to get involved was a love for animals and just all of nature. Being able to give some of that pleasure to others is heartwarming.

I also love going to WCI (Work, Community, Independence) in Waltham, where we bring nature indoors to people with a wide range of intellectual and developmental disabilities including those who are blind, deaf, or deaf blind.

One woman we visit there, who is blind and deaf, has learned new ways to explore the things we share with her. Now she knows she is going to experience something new; her enthusiasm is great. She now wants to explore. She has really changed through our programs. When we come, her face is just glowing. It's a wonderful feeling.