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greenchimneys.org

Therapeutic Education
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Virtual therapy sessions allowed students to receive clinical services and support during a critical time.

Keeping the Clinical Connection

A child's perspective typically depends on their age, and their understanding of events going on in the world around them. When we think about helping children deal with change, we consider age and level of development to help gauge what degree of explanation and support they may need. The psychosocial implications of the pandemic have been far-reaching and few have gone unaffected but what has it meant for Green Chimneys students, children who faced mental and developmental disorders well before COVID-19?

"There is no common way that people have dealt with the health crisis," says Dr. Steve Klee, Associate Executive Director for Clinical & Medical Services at Green Chimneys. "It depends on your life situation, access to resources, what mental or emotional struggles you may have. Our students were sent home suddenly and then, along with their family, had to learn a lot of new information, most of which had to be shared remotely."

Strategic coordination between the school, residential, clinical and student support programs began in February to prepare staff, students and families for the emerging health concern. At the time, no one imagined that it would lead to a complete change in how Green Chimneys delivered its services, and for such a lengthy period.

Director of Social Services Kristin Licardi oversees 21 social workers, mental health counselors, and transition coordinators who provide daily clinical support to Green Chimneys students and their families. "The social isolation had a tremendous impact on the kids. The

Left: Help make our one wish come true this holiday season.
See center spread

Guiding with Intention

From Executive Director
Dr. Edward Placke



This has been a year like no other, and I would like to thank our entire Green Chimneys community for your support of our students, families, staff, and of course, our animals, during these highly unusual times. Following the closure on March, we all had to think like never before to ensure our services continued with the same level of quality and access for the students and families that count on us every day.

Over the last six months, our staff has embraced the challenges, and the opportunities. It was with great pride and diligence that our staff quickly pivoted to a virtual learning and support environment. The level of professionalism and creativity was exceptional across all departments. Comprehensive summer school and fall reopening plans were developed to ensure all students could maintain their individualized programs. The large majority of students returned to our two school campuses with great success and it has been uplifting to observe the excitement and enthusiasm from both staff and students.

Green Chimneys' response to COVID-19 was and continues to be driven by the philosophy on how we deliver our services and collaborate with each other to do so. It is known as our Guiding Principles:

- We value and promote *Human-Animal and Nature-Based Interactions*, understanding the impact they have on social development and emotional growth.
- We provide supports that are *Trauma Informed* to create an environment of safety and promote empowerment to the individual while allowing them to heal.

- We provide children, their families, and our staff with opportunities for learning and growth by establishing expectations and goals that are *Individualized and Strength Based*.
- We are *Family Centered*, recognizing that families are the experts on their child and that strong family and community connections are essential to positive growth and change and a sense of well-being.
- We believe that *Positive Reinforcement* creates an environment that fosters growth and the development of skills.
- We value a *Collaborative Culture* built on professionalism, accountability, respect and the unique contributions of all team members.
- We are committed to constant *Quality Improvement* through continuous evaluation, research and adaptation.

These seven principles encompass our beliefs and values as an agency, and are the foundation of our shared commitment to the provision of services, the strength of our culture, and the endurance of Green Chimneys. I thank you for joining us in sustaining this legacy in support of children, animals, and community.



Kids Reconnect with Nature and Each Other at Clearpool

Set at the top of a winding hill, in the protective shade from acres of woodlands, the calming effect of nature is instantly palpable. Our Clearpool Campus in Carmel, New York is not only a site for Green Chimneys School, it's also home to Clearpool Summer Camp and incredible outdoor education programs.

In response to shifts in state and country mandates, Green Chimneys led a concentrated summer camp season. And on the heels of the program's success, fall outdoor programming at Clearpool launched in September in an effort to support local families navigating complicated school and work schedules. Enrichment programs offer parents and caregivers a reprieve while also providing kids much-needed opportunities to reconnect with nature, stay active, and socialize with peers.

Stay tuned for future events and programs by visiting: greenchimneys.org/clearpool-family

Parent Perspective

By Irene Pizzo

The last month of school, we sat and picked out classes for our son's senior year. It all seemed surreal. This is something we never thought we'd be doing but thanks to the dedication and support of Green Chimneys we are. Green Chimneys gave our son Dennis a chance at success.

Three years ago Green Chimneys helped us advocate for our child's needs to return to district. We started that year very unsure if we had made the right choices. At one point I even said to our district special education director, "So where do we go when this doesn't work?" But Dennis showed us that he could do it. It wasn't easy at first. It had been four years since our son actually lived at home full-time with us, and had been seven years since our son was in a regular school setting.

The first week of 9th grade was very overwhelming for all of us. But we had many supports in place for him at school and at home. He was welcomed each morning at the bus by his one to one and the school psychologist. The psychologist would remind him each morning of what to expect for his day and that if he needed her she was there for him. His teacher truly met him at his level, which was a godsend. Our son was very behind academically because of all the years of behavior issues before Green Chimneys.

As the first quarter came to an end, I met with our special education director. As I walked in she looked up at me and said, "See! Aren't you glad you gave him a chance?" YES!!!! Yes, I am glad I gave him

a chance because my son took all those skills and coping mechanisms he was taught at Green Chimneys and ran with it.

Dennis has been so successful and has come a long way. He joined Best Buddies his first year home. The program helped him navigate how to interact with students not in class with him. He even represented our district at a conference for Best Buddies and spoke about the benefits of being part of their group. That June our son took the Algebra I and Living Environment Regents. He didn't just pass them. He did well on them!



The following year, in 10th grade, our son tried out and made the Boys Bowling Team. We were very unsure about how this would impact him. The longer days, the interactions, and the desire to do his best were stressors we weren't sure he'd handle well. Not only did he handle these stressors, he loved it. He learned a lot from his peers and they learned a lot from him. Dennis learned to genuinely be part of a team. His teammates embraced him and

watched out for him. It was beautiful for us to see after years of our son being the outcast because of his behaviors. We saw true kindness in the way these children helped our son learn. In his 10th grade year we also saw an amazing gain in his reading level, thanks to adding a one to one reading specialist to his support team. That June he passed the Earth Science Regents and received a good grade but wanted better. This was the first time we saw our son place a value on his education. Before he did it because that's what we told him he had to do. He worked very hard that summer in school to be prepared for 11th grade. He was interested in reading books on his own and learning about what was to come in September.

This school year we have continued to see our child grow as he splits his days between our school district and BOCES. He wanted to go to BOCES to study Digital Media Production. We were very nervous because he doesn't like change and stresses over transitions. He took it like a pro from day one. Dennis absolutely loves the program and talks about it with excitement. More importantly he is excited and is gaining a trade that he can use in life. He continues to be successful academically and is making gains in his reading levels.

I'm not going to tell you it's been easy, I'd be lying. He still has outbursts but they are very few and far between. When they do occur, the intensity is mild compared to what it was and they don't last long because he uses his skills to get through them. But it has been the most enriching and heart-filling thing to watch our child be so successful. And we know that our son would not be where he is if it wasn't for the help he received at Green Chimneys.

Tips, Tools, Techniques

Green Chimneys' Clinical Team has launched a series of videos along with online resources to provide families ways to expand skills and knowledge from the comfort of their own homes. From self-care activities to an introduction to Dialectical Behavioral Therapy (DBT), these resources are free and accessible for all: greenchimneys.org/clinical-support

Clinical Connection

continued from page 1

specific needs of the population we serve require ongoing support; these kids don't readily have the coping skills and social-emotional aptitude to navigate a long-term crisis or to be disconnected from the support they're accustomed to."

Green Chimneys pivoted quickly to using a variety of platforms to ensure continuity of students' education and treatment plans. Migrating to virtual clinical treatment, also known as telehealth, was a serious challenge for staff and students but it was imperative. "There are limitations in a virtual setting and it can feel strange not sitting face-to-face but even in a remote session, the focus remains on the existing treatment plan," says Klee. "It's vital support that has to happen for the people who need it. Despite children and families being remote, it was critically important to continue to provide mental health services and therapeutic support."

Regression was fully anticipated by staff; educationally for all students in some form, and those who had progressed emotionally and socially in their treatment were bound to suffer setbacks due to few,

or no, opportunities to practice social and developmental skills. Clinicians, occupational therapists and student support teams pressed on with all-virtual sessions to meet students' regular treatment plans. The clinical team also developed a steady stream of online resources, self-care videos, and virtual support groups to give families additional tools as they became service providers in their own right, now that their child with special needs was at home.



This summer, when New York State permitted special education programs to provide in-person instruction, a portion of Green Chimneys students returned to

campus. The start of the fall semester saw about 70% of day and residential students return in person but online clinical treatment continues. Some beneficial outcomes of the past months include knowledge of new tools and increased self-reliance among families, which has led to some students stepping down to a lower level of care, and some discharges.

"During our campus closure, we offered a wide range of services and support to our families. It was important for us to model flexibility and willingness to make it continue," says Klee. "The risk of not continuing was simply too great; it would mean rupture to the therapeutic relationship with the child and family, and all the trust that's been built."

"It was never an option not to deliver," says Licardi. "It felt contrary to our mission and purpose. The commitment of our staff, and of our students and families, has never been clearer and we are working in a 'new normal' with the benefit of new skill sets – it's empowering."

Unwavering Support for Local Youth

Well before the whispers of a global pandemic, Putnam County youth were receiving support and services to help navigate school and life. When the reality of COVID mitigation efforts threatened youth's access to essential services like those of our Community Outreach programs, Green Chimneys' Community-Based Services (CBS) recognized the challenge: How would local youth access the clinical and recreational support they relied on as schools and agencies closed?

The clients served by CBS typically feel isolated from society so in some ways, remained "unaffected" by quarantine; their everyday struggles continued. Our team implemented a telehealth strategy

which not only allowed over 178 youth and families to continue sessions with clinicians; it also brought the safe, supportive environment of the Community Outreach Center online. Children and teens who typically visited the Outreach Center after school to hang out with friends and get help with homework began meeting virtually. Led by CBS social workers and program staff, youth participated in online mindfulness group therapy sessions, which provided stress reduction strategies and a means of socialization. Mindfulness skills helped youth plan and problem solve for themselves, from making daily schedules to getting homework done to developing ways to get along better with everyone being at home.



In June, the Outreach Center reopened with safety protocols in place for youth to physically return. An increase in calls indicated the need for in-person support, particularly among youth with social anxiety for whom remote services were not as effective. The Center was also able to offer much of its usual summer socialization and recreation, including field trips, at a time it was needed most.

Now serving youth in the new school year, CBS is at the ready with programs and support. For more information, go to greenchimneys.org/cbs. For immediate assistance, **call our 24-hour hotline at 845.279.2588.**

Back in the Saddle Thanks to Barn Buddies

Similar to our students, our animal partners come to Green Chimneys with histories of their own. In providing enrichment and optimal care, the Farm & Wildlife Center team considers each animal's history and behaviors, health, strengths and needs. With this awareness, they are able to individualize care, strategize programming, and ultimately, enhance services for our students.

Such is the case of the Green Chimneys horse herd. Made up of equines as small as miniature horses and as grand as Clydesdales, the overall herd of 21 is as complex in personality as it is in size. With this in mind, the horse barn staff creates schedules for riding, grooming, chores and specific therapy sessions for students, and essential down time for the equines.

Years ago, the Barn Buddies program launched as an additional way to meet the needs of our equines. Pulling from a group of 20 experienced riders and equine-familiar folks, Equine Program Coordinator Samantha Arevalo pairs volunteers with specific horses based on their skills and strengths. From the vantage point of the horse, training goals are established.

Walter the Quarter Horse is one of our younger horses and requires some special handling and attention. While his calm and quiet demeanor makes him an ideal candidate for working with newer riders, Walter is very sensitive to energy. He needs a soft, loving and confident partner to work with him. Walter displays physical scars on his body leading us to believe trauma is part of his past. To his advantage, Walter still loves human attention so while he excels at fulfilling his jobs, Walter benefits from dedicated riding time with his barn buddy, Debbie Moore. With Debbie's help, Walter is transforming into a confident horse, capable of handling high or low energy situations from his rider.



A purposeful riding session: Eliza Love (left) and Debbie Moore are among the volunteers who helped Chief, Walter, and the rest of the herd, prepare for the return of students.

After Green Chimneys' physical closure in mid-March, Samantha began to notice a shift in the herd. On a typical day, our horses are handled by more than a dozen staff, volunteers and students. During the peak of our closure, the herd was cared for by a dedicated pair of essential equine caretakers.

"While all of the horses became a little more sensitive and reactive to touch and gestures, eventually I noticed they were all really seeking out human attention for their own benefit," explains Sam.

By July, and with safety protocols in place, a portion of the Barn Buddies was welcomed back for a special mission: to help the herd shift from quarantine mode to school mode. During the spring closure, the horses stayed relatively contained at the farm, no longer exploring our beautiful campus while carrying young riders throughout the day. The time had come to prepare for students to return and riding sessions to resume. It was essential that Debbie and the team of Barn Buddies help with the socialization, activity, and retraining of the herd. As such, they rode the horses all over campus, allowing the equines to re-explore their home and remember their role of introducing adventure to our students.

This also meant dear Walter was no longer in his own quarantine, spending his entire

day eating grass and taking naps in the paddocks. With Debbie's return, Walter perked up from the extra attention. His cobwebs were cleared. He was back to his hardworking self, practicing being ridden in the ring and out on the trail.

Soon summer session began, and the first day of riding classes came; Walter was well prepared thanks to Debbie. He was more than ready for the children, high and low energy, riding or groundwork...and he seemed excited to be reunited with them, too.



Though on-site volunteer opportunities are limited at this time, select options are available to individuals and corporations. Learn more at [greenchimneys.org/volunteer](https://www.greenchimneys.org/volunteer)



* Our wish this winter ...

We believe that all children deserve the support necessary to learn, grow, and be healthy. We recognize the worth of all living beings and honor the animals and land that are our partners in the education and therapy of children with special needs. Our wish this winter is to come together and support the children and animals of Green Chimneys.





*With your help Green Chimneys is fortified and able,
to maintain essential programs, from the school to the stable.*

The combination of therapeutic education, clinical support and nature-based experiences is critical for children who struggle with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges. With expert care and services, Green Chimneys students develop self-regulation skills and coping strategies. They pursue interests in class, outdoors, and beyond. All the while, they're discovering what it means to be a part of a community.

In caring for the animals and gardens, students are learning to care for themselves. Please consider a gift to Green Chimneys.

Giving is easy!

- Take advantage of the self-addressed envelope inserted in this publication
- Or go online to greenchimneys.org/support

**Thank you for making a difference
in the lives of children and animals.**

Building Knowledge and Skills Through Internship



In the fall of 2019, Kristen Stec arrived at Green Chimneys to start an internship. Having just graduated from Saint Michael College with a bachelor's of science in biology and a minor in chemistry, Kristen was excited to merge her scientific knowledge with hands-on work with animals.

Kristen came here not as a stranger, but as someone who grew up “with” Green Chimneys. She attended Green Chimneys Summer Camp at Clearpool and later, was a camp counselor at Hillside. During college, Kristen spent a summer working in the Horse Barn. It was her first time working directly with equines, and the experience inspired her to pursue a career working with animals.

Internships have long been a part of how Green Chimneys shares its expertise and promotes advocacy for children and animals. Supporting the future of the human-animal interaction through education is one of the main facets of The Sam and Myra Ross Institute at Green Chimneys. The Institute's nature-based internship program offers those launching or changing careers the opportunity to fuse knowledge with practice. “The future of ethical and effective human-animal interaction services relies on trained professionals,” explains Michael Kaufmann who directs both The Institute and the

Farm & Wildlife Center. “While academic institutions can provide the theoretical foundation of this work, an internship with The Sam and Myra Institute offers a rich immersion into the challenges and opportunities of working with children and animals over months. In the process, skills emerge and lives are enriched.”

Kristen spent last fall and early winter in the Horse Barn. Working with staff, students, volunteers and, of course, the equines, she quickly realized that she wanted to extend her time. Kristen began a second internship in the Teaching Barn, which is home to a range of livestock including chickens, sheep, goats, llamas and alpacas, pigs, and so on.

Kristen credits her dual internship for helping her adapt to new and different environments more quickly, as well as enhancing her abilities as a handler. “Some of the biggest takeaways from interning with both horses and livestock are learning how to work as a team, learning how to handle difficult animals, and learning to be more confident in myself,” Kristen explains.

One animal that has clearly left a lasting impression is the llama Lance. At just seven years old, Lance is relatively young as most llamas live to be around 20. Between his personality and age, Lance has

shown great potential for partnership in sessions with students. For several months, Kristen worked with Lance using clicker training to strengthen existing skills and to help develop new ones, too. By working with Kristen, Lance remains engaged, thus supporting his health and enhancing future interactions with students.

“Lance has taught me a lot of patience,” Kristen explains. “There were days where I was determined to engage Lance in an activity that he had never done before, such as jumping over a log or climbing up a wood chip pile. Some days he would be really into working with me and then there were days he did not want to work one bit.” On the days that Lance was struggling, Kristen says that she really had to take a step back and look at the situation and try different approaches. She likened it to working with Green Chimneys students in terms of breaking down tasks into smaller steps to complete a goal. Over time, Kristen felt a bond had been created; Lance began greeting her when he was out at pasture and would simply observe what she was doing.

Kristen also acknowledges the support of her supervisors and the camaraderie of farm staff and interns for her success. We wish Kristen well in her future pursuits and we are confident she will stay in touch with Lance...and many others here!

Practitioner Experiences Illustrate Benefits of HAI



While the COVID-19 pandemic has created substantial challenges for both Green Chimneys and the University of Denver-based research team, the portfolio of research projects has proceeded with data that had been collected concurrently with content for the recently published "Documentation of Nature-Based Programs." The result is several qualitative studies on the perceptions of Green Chimneys staff and practitioners in the integration and impact of nature-based activities on participating youth.

The first in this series of studies focused on describing the essence and nature

of special education teachers' lived experiences in incorporating nature-based interventions as a tool to improve youth social-emotional learning outcomes and promote positive youth development. "Human-Animal-Environment Interactions as a Context for Child and Adolescent Growth" indicates that almost universally, teaching staff perceive nature-based interventions to effect marked improvement in:

- Prosocial behavior
- Caregiving and nurturing
- Connection to animals, plants and humans
- Curiosity and excitement about learning

Recently published in "Complementary Therapies in Clinical Practice" a second qualitative study asked farm staff to describe how they've seen youth be impacted by nature-based programs, particularly in shaping outcomes related to their development and well-being. Staff shared that youth interactions with plants, animals, and nature improved mood, strengthened relations, self-regulation, and self-conception.

Publication of the third study, which was conducted with Green Chimneys clinicians, is forthcoming. Read findings from this compelling research at greenchimneys.org/recent-findings

Securing the Future While Honoring Our Roots



The Leirs



The Rosses

Green Chimneys Founders Samuel B. "Rollo" Ross, Jr. and Myra Ross always understood the importance of supporting future generations of nature-based educators, clinicians, and animal experts. And as much as they believed in hands-on learning for Green Chimneys students, they valued its significance for adults too. Meanwhile, The Leir Foundation, which honors the legacy of its founders, Henry J. and Erna D. Leir, has provided decades of support to The Sam and Myra Ross Institute Internship program. The future of human-animal interaction is reinforced thanks to the leadership of the Leirs and the Rosses. To learn more about the internship program visit: greenchimneys.org/institute/internship.

Donor Corner: Changing Lives for the Better



The COVID-19 crisis has heightened our collective awareness about children's mental health. But for the children and families we serve here at Green Chimneys, challenges around children's mental health have always been at the forefront and have only been compounded during this pandemic.

Thankfully, our donors understand it too.

Green Chimneys is fortunate to have donors who know that our caring, innovative approach with nature-based therapies helps our children develop skills and tools to help them cope with their challenges, and provides a model of therapy and education for the country and the world. We rely on the generosity of these donors: individuals, foundations and corporations, to ensure therapeutic and nature-based programming remains available to our students who desperately need it.

Shortly before restrictions of the pandemic took over everyone's lives, Green Chimneys welcomed Kris Engelstad McGarry and her family, for a visit and tour. As a trustee of The Engelstad Foundation headquartered in Las Vegas, Nevada, Kris understands the impact of philanthropy on issues both local and national.

Created as a family foundation in 2002 by Ralph and Betty Engelstad, The Engelstad Foundation exists for the purpose of partnering to create solutions in medical research, improving day to day living for people with disabilities, and raising the possibilities for at risk individuals.

"During their visit we talked at length about the challenges of various mental health issues for children and their families and the need for places like Green Chimneys," states Executive Director Ed Placke. "We were thrilled a few months later to be awarded a \$300,000 grant by the Foundation. When others were shifting their funding, The Engelstad Foundation recognized the importance of our work, especially during a time when children needed us most."

"Green Chimneys is changing young people's lives for the better, particularly here in the pandemic," said Kris Engelstad McGarry. "The organization is providing so many children with fulfilling educations, as well as vital services, both of which are key components of healthy minds and future successes."

Thanks to supporters like The Engelstad Foundation, Green Chimneys is able to continue to meet the needs of our children and families.

Why Give Now?

We hope you will consider a gift to Green Chimneys before year's end. And this year the U.S. CARES Act has established incentives to make giving rewarding for donors at all levels of support:

- **New Deduction!** Tax payers can take up to \$300 (\$600 per married couple) in additional deductions on top of the standard deduction. Your donations will reduce your annual gross income (AGI) thus reducing your taxable income!
- **Increased Limits on Charitable Deductions!** Do you itemize your deductions? You can deduct even more in 2020. New limits on charitable contributions allow you to deduct up to 100% of AGI — up from 60%.

Green Chimneys is truly grateful to you for whatever amount you give as every penny supports the programs and services we provide for our children and families, and the care of our animal partners. Thank you! To discuss your options, please contact Associate Executive Director of Development Kristin Dionne via kdionne@greenschimneys.org or 845.279.2995 x330 or visit greenschimneys.org/support.



Celebrate the Season with Green Chimneys

Incorporating Green Chimneys children and animals into your festivities is easy. Choose one or more of the following:



Holidays on the Farm

Green Chimneys students help to make our season bright! Every year Boni-Bel Farm & Country Store comes to life as a wintry wonderland with handmade decorations, prepared gift baskets and warm customer service provided by our students. Plan to pick up your sustainably grown holiday greens: **Tree sales start Sat, Nov 28.**

Shop with Amazon Smile

Before you shop on Amazon, login to Amazon Smile and .5% of your purchase will be donated to Green Chimneys!

A Gift that Gives Back

Contribute to the care of Green Chimneys animals on behalf of the animal-lover in your life. Sponsor an Animal this holiday season with opportunities starting at \$25.

365 Days of Green Chimneys

Featuring award-winning photography by Jason Houston, our annual calendar provides 12 months of our animals and their real-life stories. A great gift for yourself or a loved one. \$19.50

For more on celebrating the season with us,
please visit greenchimneys.org/holidays.

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Now & Always



The continuity of care for our students and animals has been and remains paramount throughout the COVID-19 health crisis. It's critical that children with special needs stay connected with the people, places and programs that build them up. Stay current on student life, nature-based programs, farm news and more by following Green Chimneys online:



Green Chimneys



@greenchimneys



Green Chimneys



Green Chimneys News