



In this Issue:

The Eagle Has Landed

Classroom as Community

Growing Toward Independence

Children & Animals: A Reason to Believe

Fruits of Our Labor

Honoring Legacy, Securing Future

Holiday Wish List

greenchimneys.org

Therapeutic Education
Residential Treatment
Farm & Wildlife Programs
Animal Rescue & Rehabilitation
Outdoor Education
Community Youth Outreach
Preschool Programs
Summer Camp
Public Recreation



The satisfaction of achievement: Emma Grace and family on her last day at Green Chimneys.

Finding Focus and Living in the Present

For many, a quiet horseback ride on a wooded trail is inherently relaxing. It clears the mind, brings enjoyment of the outdoors, and provides a peaceful diversion. Now imagine your head filled with thoughts, thoughts that overlap and mount upon each other, until your mind is absolutely racing and you feel completely overwhelmed. The idea that you can slow yourself down and block out distractions enough to guide a horse seems impossible.

Emma Grace arrived at Green Chimneys at 12 years old, with challenges that made her unable to maintain safe behavior at home. She often felt frustrated and anxious, and then confused about why she was feeling this way. She also contended with numerous coinciding and distressing thoughts that would stay with her throughout the day, causing her to feel out of control.

Erin Rider, her social worker, recalls that many of their early sessions were spent simply helping Emma Grace to open up. Enter guinea pigs! The

animals at Green Chimneys – and there are more than 200 of them – are often a great motivator for students who are reluctant to talk about their feelings and challenges. Emma Grace had always wanted a guinea pig and the pair in the farm science room at the Farm & Wildlife Center became the perfect way for Emma Grace to relax enough to start sharing about how she felt. In time, Erin was able to understand how Emma Grace was processing information and that what she needed help in was quieting her thoughts.

Erin felt incorporating Mindfulness into Emma Grace's therapy would help her learn to find the calm and focus she needed. Mindfulness-based interventions have progressed through

Left: 'Tis the season to believe in the power of human-animal bond.
See center spread

Commitment to Quality Care

From Executive Director
Dr. Edward Placke



A philosophy of care is a framework of goals and values to help guide the best choices for students and families. Founded in our 72-year-old nature-based approach, the Green Chimneys Philosophy of Care has evolved

into a system of collaboration and support that focuses on each individual student's success.

Our philosophy is comprised of seven principles. These principles drive all of our interactions across our many programs, as we continue to learn from staff, students, families, nature and, of course, our beloved animals. They are:

- Human-animal and nature-based interactions contribute to learning and social/emotional growth
- Services are trauma-informed
- Services and treatment/learning goals are individualized and strength-based
- Family connections are essential to treatment and growth
- Positive reinforcement is essential to behavioral change
- We create a collaborative treatment-team culture built on professionalism, accountability, respect and the valuable contribution of each individual
- We are committed to continuous quality improvement

These seven principles are the tools required for all Green Chimneys community members to employ consistently to ensure our mission is realized. They are central to all we do to prepare students to transition to the next logical environment which could be home, community, school, another therapeutic program, employment, and/or college.

The Green Chimneys Philosophy of Care is one attribute that sets our organization apart from other schools and residential facilities but when in conjunction with the sometimes barely recognizable small, caring gestures our staff offer students, Green Chimneys is clearly in a league of its own. A quote from writer/poet William Wordsworth perfectly captures the spirit of Green Chimneys: "The best portion of a good man's life: his little, nameless, unremembered acts of kindness and of love."

Our tradition of a safe and supportive environment, in which students can thrive, continues.

Bald Eagle Lands Forever Home



In March, this Bald eagle was found injured in Dover Plains, New York and transported to Green Chimneys by a DEC officer. Over the next few months, and thanks to our team of animal caretakers, interns and volunteers, the eagle regained strength and good health. However there was one problem: a permanent wing injury meant he could not fly great distances and would be unable to survive in the wild. This July, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service officially designated Green Chimneys as the Bald eagle's permanent home. He will live out the remainder of his days here, under the care of our students and staff.

To plan a visit to our Farm & Wildlife Center, or to learn about the animals who call Green Chimneys home, please visit greenchimneys.org/farm

Classroom as Community

With terms like “growth mindset,” “restorative justice,” and “positive behavior interventions and support” permeating schools across the country, educators continue to be dually tasked with adopting new approaches to classroom behavior management while also ensuring the growth of each individual. At Green Chimneys, and through professional development workshops, staff keep current on the issues faced by children with special needs and acquire tools and techniques to assist in student healing and growth. Customized education and individualized treatment have long been part of the Green Chimneys tradition, as has providing an inclusive learning environment. Seeing how staff embrace these principles for the benefit of students is inspiring.

One such example is Melissa Massari’s second grade class. In partnership with teaching assistants Elaine Kushner and Gina Sweeney, Melissa sets out each September to build a team among her students. “Community begins in the classroom,” she explains. “We create a nurturing environment with clear expectations and respect for one another.”

The classroom starts out bare at the beginning of the school year. Toys are stored out of sight. Few visuals are hung with the exception of class rules. Games that reinforce positive behavior are introduced to the class. Students come together every morning for a community meeting to “check in” and share feelings.

As the team builds, so does the classroom environment. Desks are brought together in the shape of a circle. More games and tools fill the walls. Colorful toys remain on display.

As time passes, students are engaged and motivated to earn rewards for positive behavior. Melissa and the teaching assistants consistently address behaviors and choices. As a result, students know what to expect when poor decisions are made. They know the procedures and the consequences; and staff are there to help them. The best part: students often offer up a solution, too.

“Last semester one of my students asked to meet with each classmate when he knew his recent behavior was preventing him from succeeding outside of the classroom. He wanted to explain his intentions to do well on an upcoming class trip and asked his peers for permission to join them for the trip,” explains Melissa. “It was his idea! And it’s because of the community we built together that students are taking ownership of their actions and proposing solutions on their own. It’s so awesome to see.”

“We’re helping children develop lifelong skills. When they feel safe and welcome to express their feelings, we’ve done our job,” says Toni DeMato, Clinical Coordinator for Green Chimneys School. “When children take ownership and self-identify as being a part of a team, are willing to collaborate, and feel empowered to solve problems collectively, then we have really succeeded.”

Get to know Green Chimneys School by visiting greenchimneys.org/school

School Spirit



The Green Chimneys School behavior model, as many students can tell you, is ROCK, the acronym for Respect, Ownership, Communication, and Keep Safe. ROCK not only reinforces positive behavior in students, it’s celebrated throughout the organization.



Fabulous 50

Congratulations to Anne Marie Wittlin on her 50 years of service at Green Chimneys. Anne Marie’s dedication, much like her laugh, is distinct. As an administrative assistant at the school, she greets each day — and student — with a smile. She is a constant we count on. Thank you Anne Marie!

Finding Focus

continued from page 1

healthcare and into schools. Multiple studies of school-based initiatives have shown notable improvements in student attention span, emotional regulation, compassion, and adaptability. Erin introduced Mindful Riding into Emma Grace's sessions partly because horses are acutely aware of their environment and immediately responsive, making them particularly good partners in this form of therapy designed to increase an individual's awareness of the present moment.

For Emma Grace, mindful riding became an important grounding activity, allowing a sense of control over her thoughts. On horseback, Emma Grace and Erin would talk through what was occurring with the animal, notice its movements, and acknowledge what she was seeing along the trail as she rode. By focusing on just these elements, Emma Grace could practice living in the present, connecting her thoughts with her feelings and her behaviors in that particular moment. And she developed a great love of horses as well!

"A key ingredient in Emma Grace's success was Emma Grace, herself, and her family," explains Erin. "The family worked hard together and was always ready to do whatever would help the most, and Emma



Left Emma Grace visits one of her favorite farm residents, the guinea pig.

Above Emma Grace's experience with mindfulness sessions on horseback was featured last spring in a Fox 5 NY News story. See how students' emotional needs are being met at Green Chimneys with the help of animals; watch the story: [greenchimneys.org/fox5](https://www.greenchimneys.org/fox5)

Grace was 'all in' when it came to ways to work on and solve her challenges. If I came to her with a new idea, she was always willing to do what she needed to do to help herself and her family."

Also while at Green Chimneys, Emma Grace pursued her passion for singing and theatrical performance, starring in campus productions as Veruca Salt in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*; the genie in *Aladdin*; and the title role in *Charlie Brown*. She also became skilled in American Sign Language and hopes to become an interpreter.

Green Chimneys' philosophy is based on the belief that if children are given a chance to explore and discover their inherent strengths in a safe and structured nature-based environment, their self-esteem, compassion, coping and social skills will improve. Through numerous activities at the farm and in school, and great support, Emma Grace has paved a new path for herself — a win for all involved!



Where Theory Meets Practice

The Sam and Myra Ross Institute at Green Chimneys leads an immersive internship program which draws applicants from across the globe. Saori was accepted into the program from Kunitachi, Japan with a degree in animal science. While here, Saori is expanding her experience in facilitating human-animal interaction (HAI) activities, program development, and animal care. She's interested in occupational therapy and ways in which animals can be partners in helping children grow.

Explore internships by visiting [greenchimneys.org/careers/internships](https://www.greenchimneys.org/careers/internships)

Learning to Cope when the World Gets to be Too Much: Naturally

The Sam and Myra Ross Institute at Green Chimneys recently hosted a one-day symposium at the Leir Retreat Center in Ridgefield, Connecticut to share how nature-based settings are valuable in helping children cope with sensory integration issues. Strategic and varied experiences with animals and plants, facilitated by trained specialists, can rapidly develop coping skills and help a child succeed at school, at home, and in the bigger world.

While most of us are only occasionally overwhelmed by the world around us, for many students diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder or Anxiety Disorder, adjusting, managing and responding to the sights, sounds, smells and competing stimuli that everyday life provides can be a losing battle. Typical responses when overwhelmed can be dramatic behavioral outbursts, oppositional behavior, or simply shutting down and refusing to participate.



Natural settings are an excellent treatment and reeducation tool in helping children to be aware of their unique responses to everyday stimuli, gain understanding of their emotional needs, and strengthen coping skills to manage an over-stimulating world. The symposium explored how the Green Chimneys treatment team enlists contact with animals, gardens and outdoor environments to provide a sensory-rich and motivating place for children to increase self-awareness, ultimately, leading to self-regulation.

For example, it can be difficult to deal with the sights, sounds and smells of the barn at first, but because the child wants to succeed, they are open to trying. One student had to wear headphones to filter the every-day noises in the barn; after three weeks of regular visits, he no longer found the noises unmanageable and was able to enjoy the barn without headphones. A process that corresponds to a student's own pace, and in a desirable environment, can bring notable progress to even the most challenged individual.

The Fruits of Our Labor

Our first shiitake mushrooms have finally fruited! Students at Green Chimneys School's Clearpool Campus spent last year learning about some of nature's most overlooked residents – mushrooms – including how they grow and spread. In spring 2018, with the help of Putnam County's Cornell Cooperative Extension staff and volunteers, the students planted shiitake spores into fresh logs, known as inoculation, and then waited for mycelium (roots) to grow throughout. Mycelium takes a full year to grow before fruiting and students monitored the logs, tracking their progress until...mushrooms!



This first harvest gave us nearly three pounds of fresh, log-grown shiitake mushrooms, which have been incorporated into meals for Clearpool staff and students thanks to the fantastic kitchen staff.

Shiitake are best known for their savory taste and are commonly found in a stir fry or soups. They have superior anti-inflammatory benefits and support positive gut bacteria and function and, if dried outdoors, can retain vitamin D just like us!

The experience of learning, growing and eating brings Green Chimneys' nature-based approach full circle and strengthens our students' knowledge of the world around them. In addition to supporting our own school curriculum, the Model Forest educational program teaches the public just how easy it is to grow these mushrooms. Introductory demonstrations for beginners and enterprise workshops for those looking to expand offer the opportunity for many to participate in what has become an economic initiative for New York State.

Learn more about Clearpool Model Forest at greenchimneys.org/clearpool-model-forest



Your support will go toward the Green Chimneys Farm & Wildlife Campaign. Every gift helps sustain the home of our farm animals and wildlife, our best partners in therapy.



The Green Chimneys Farm & Wildlife Center supports therapeutic education and treatment for day and residential students, serving as an adjunct to classroom academics, vocational activities, and clinical support.

We believe ...

- That the human-animal bond is powerful and transformative
- That being with animals and in nature can bring about tremendous healing and growth
- That all living beings deserve to be given the chance to live to their fullest potential.

We know you believe too.

With your support, the Green Chimneys Farm & Wildlife Campaign will continue to help children with special needs and care for the animals who enrich their lives.

Now your support doubles!

Thanks to a dollar-for-dollar match from Newman's Own Foundation.

Giving is easy!

- Take advantage of the self-addressed envelope inserted in this publication
- Call the Fund Development Office at 845.279.2995 x211
- Or go online to greenchimneys.org/believe

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



'Tis the season to
believe
in the power of the
human-animal bond.

Twice as Nice
All year-end gifts to
Green Chimneys
will be matched by

NEWMAN'S OWN
FOUNDATION

The goal of any therapeutic intervention, whether delivered in a residential setting or in the community, is to provide intensive supports that result in the development of attitudes, self-concepts, and behaviors that are constructive, allowing one to accept responsibility for their own decisions and lead a productive life. Green Chimneys programs are designed to meet each individual's goals by helping them build the skills and confidence to achieve the life that they envision for themselves. One particular youth is successfully doing just that.

Greg entered Green Chimneys School at the age of 14 as a residential student. It was a bit of an adjustment for him because he was accustomed to city life, but quickly felt a sense of ease and peace with nature all around him. He graduated in 2018 and to help him better prepare for the 'real world,' he chose to join Green Chimneys'



Transitional Living Program, a supportive arrangement that helps youth move toward self-sufficiency via stable housing, employment assistance, continued life skills development and, intervention, if needed.

Greg has transferred all of the skills and knowledge he gained as a Green Chimneys student to his independent living, and is building on them. One of his favorite life decisions was becoming a committed vegetarian. The experience of living on a beautiful farm and exposure to a wide variety of foods, and ideas, has shaped his world view. He has also held the same job for over two years and has saved a significant amount of money, which he plans to put toward college. Greg has much to be proud of in terms of achieving independence but his greatest success is that he feels confident about his accomplishments. He is excited to see what the future holds for him.



Mini Update

Cricket, the miniature horse who was born on the Brewster campus in May is growing by leaps and bounds. Time with Cricket is requested by many students. Some seem to take pride in being a part of her life from the very beginning and seek to checkin on her. Others seem comforted by spending a few quiet moments with her. Track her growth by visiting greenchimneys.org/cricket



S'more Summer, Please

Green Chimneys Summer Camps topped the season with sweetness abounding. Friendships were fostered and memories were made as children unplugged and spent time in the great outdoors connecting with peers and a dynamic team of camp counselors. **We're always preparing for our next summer!** Registration for the 2020 camp season opens Nov. 12 for returning families and Dec. 10 for new families. For details, visit greenchimneys.org/camps

My Experience

By Green Chimneys Alumnus
Catherine Nisi

My name is Catherine Nisi and I was a resident at Green Chimneys from 2015-2018. Before I started at Green Chimneys, I was struggling a lot. I struggled basically my whole life. I would throw temper tantrums, run away, self-abuse (hit myself, bang my head, punch and kick walls, cut myself), and break things. My family and I tried so many things to help reduce the struggles: after school programs/activities such as gymnastics and sports; playdates with friends; going for bike rides or car rides; crafts; and such but honestly, they mostly just helped in the moment and then it would just start building up again and again. As I got older, I started to get worse and more aggressive.

My parents didn't know what to do next, so the next step was to have me see a therapist at least once a week, which I absolutely hated! I hated talking and sharing about my feelings and talking about what's been happening at home. After going to some therapy appointments, my therapist recommended a psychiatrist who tried different medications to see if it helped me feel any better, and calmer. After years of trying and not giving up, nothing was getting better. My parents were trying so hard but they had to think of a Plan B. They didn't want this to keep happening and they really wanted the best for me.



Catherine with Green Chimneys Residential Administrator Danielle Kelleher.

When I found out that I was going to become a resident somewhere, I was super scared, nervous, upset, sad, and anxious. The first residential I looked at was Green Chimneys. When I went for my interview and tour, I started to feel a little bit better, I was so amazed by all the animals they had, even the camels, while we were walking by the camels my dad looked up and was like "You guys have camels here? Are they real?" To be honest, he was a little scared of the camels. I was also feeling a bit better because you could relate with the kids and some of the staff I met were very nice and seemed very welcoming.

I had a few main goals while I was at Green Chimneys: get discharged home; have a closer relationship with my mom; and accept the help when it's being offered. Even though I still have my struggles,

it isn't like 3-4 years ago. I had a huge support system while I was at Green Chimneys, I could talk about everything that's going on and tell them what's bothering me. Since I've been home, I've had some big bumps on the road but I have my parents support as well to help me get through some of the challenging times. If I was never brought or introduced to this residential, I honestly don't think I would be as successful as I am today. Thank you, Green Chimneys for everything you did to help achieve my main goal: being home with my family.



Each year 102 boys and girls are enrolled in Green Chimneys' residential program and attend our therapeutic day school. As part of residential life, students with social, emotional and behavioral challenges receive comprehensive support outside of the classroom. Learn more about our multi-faceted approach at greenchimneys.org/residential

Helping Hands



With a career in software development behind her and extensive experience training shelter dogs, Carrie was looking to volunteer with an animal-related organization. Her research led her to Green Chimneys. Two years later, Carrie is very much a part of our community.

"As volunteers, we're working alongside staff and interns. That's what makes volunteering at Green Chimneys so unique. We're made to feel like more than just workers. We're valued members of the team," explains Carrie.

More than 75 individuals volunteer annually in various parts of the organization, from providing administrative support in offices to helping students with homework to tending to gardens. Corporations are encouraged to organize company give back days, as well. To get involved, visit greenchimneys.org/volunteer

Donor Corner: Mission Driven

Board member Andy Wood and his family weren't looking for Green Chimneys. But, like so many others, Green Chimneys found them.

"We discovered Green Chimneys through our daughter being invited to the birthday party of one of her classmates that was being held on the Brewster Campus," Andy mentioned. "Turns out, that classmate was the grandson of then Executive Director Joe Whalen."

Andy was intrigued. He asked a lot of questions. As a father of a son with Autism, he was fascinated by the combination of therapeutic education for children with special needs and animals. He wanted to learn more, and Joe invited him back for a visit and full tour.



When he arrived on campus, founder Sam "Rollo" Ross insisted on giving Andy the tour himself. "We hit it off immediately and kept in contact after that visit. And after about twelve months of persistence on Rollo's part, I agreed to come on the board."

But in addition to Rollo's legendary persistence, Andy was attracted to the mission of Green Chimneys. "I like how the animals help get children into a position – physically and emotionally – that enables them to receive the interventions and education they need. I know from our experience with our son, that unless he is in a physical and emotional "place" to receive interventions, none of it will be effective. The animals play such a big role in that process at Green Chimneys."

That important role of the animals was one of the reasons Andy and his family have become participants and donors in Green Chimneys' \$10 Million Campaign for the Farm & Wildlife Center. "This partnership with animals is Rollo's legacy. He understood it instinctively and knew how important it was that the farm survive for a long time. I wanted to honor him, and ensure his legacy continued."



Honoring Our Past While Securing Our Future

Green Chimneys is proud to announce the naming of the Farm & Wildlife Center. The centerpiece of our nature-based philosophy will now be known as **The Sam and Myra Ross Farm & Wildlife Center**.

Kicking off the public launch of The Campaign for the Farm & Wildlife Center, Green Chimneys' Board of Directors unanimously voted to formally name the Farm & Wildlife Center after the organization's beloved founders.

"Rollo and Myra dedicated their lives to making Green Chimneys a place for learning, a place for healing, and a place that children and animals can call home," stated Board President Bob Vetere. "With the launch of the Campaign that was so important to both of them, we felt it was important to honor the two people who built the foundation upon which we continue to build our future."



Ready for the holidays?
Just add Green Chimneys!

Here are 4 easy ways to include Green Chimneys children and animals in your festivities:

1. 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 hand-made 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 30.**

2. Shop with Amazon Smile

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

3. 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

4. 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.

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

Green Chimneys Gazette Fall 2019

Contributing Writers: Anne Cox, Kristin Dionne, Michael Kaufmann, Jennifer Milillo, Clare Rigano **Contributing Photographers:** Anne Cox, Jason Houston, Jennifer Milillo, Jerry Newell, Matthew Smetana **Design:** Anne Cox

Green Chimneys
400 Doansburg Road, Box 719
Brewster, NY 10509-0719

CHANGE SERVICE REQUESTED

Non-Profit Org.
U.S. Postage
PAID
Hearst, CT Post, LLC
Permit No. 331
Bridgeport, CT



Share in the awesome!

Our nature-based approach to education is helping children with special needs become more aware of themselves and the world around them. As students learn, they are actively contributing to the community as well. Case in point: Lori Sheffer's eighth grade class embarked on a year-long project raising monarch butterflies. From caterpillar to winged beauty, each life stage has provided amazing lessons in science via hands-on learning and therapeutic experiences, including ceremonious butterfly releases. Thanks to creative and intentional curriculum development, students are able to spread their wings, too.

Want to see more awesome? Get snippets of student life, nature-based programs, farm news and more by connecting with Green Chimneys online:

