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greenchimneys.org

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Partnering with Horses to Learn About Self

A small group of students are gathered in the riding arena, watching three horses. While two of the horses engage in play, the other stands alone in the corner. “What do you notice?” asks Social Worker Jess Aiello. “Do the horses look content playing together? What do they do when they need a break from playing?” As the students share what they see, questions shift inward and prompt the group to relate personal experiences. Jess asks how they feel when they’re on their own and watching other people have fun. Or what they do when they need a break from other people.

Green Chimneys students discuss scenarios like these during an animal-assisted activity called Herd Observation. Led by a clinician, they observe equine behavior and apply insights into human interactions or their own situations. For example, adding a new horse to the arena parallels the challenges of embracing change in human social environments—a situation particularly relevant to students who may be new to Green Chimneys.

The Green Chimneys horticulture program offers opportunities for growth all year long. See page 6.

Herd Observation is just one facet of Hoof Harmony, a specialized therapeutic group aimed at cultivating meaningful connections with horses, and translating these lessons into human connections. Through structured activities spanning several weeks, students practice new skills and develop a level of introspection, with the support of an equine partner.

Hoof Harmony has helped Green Chimneys student Zoe grow. In the group, students are paired with their equine partner at random. When Zoe drew Gandalf’s name, she felt upset and did not want to work with the Appaloosa/Draft crossbreed; she had ridden him previously

Innovative Practices

From CEO Kristin Dionne



Part of the success of Green Chimneys' long history is the ability to stay true to our mission while adapting to the needs of our students, families and community.

Founders Sam "Rollo" and Myra Ross began Green Chimneys School for Little Folk with the belief that a nature-based environment that is nurturing, safe and supportive enables children who are struggling to learn and thrive. This foundation remains core to our services and guiding principles, which provide the framework for supporting the evolving needs of our children and families.

I see, every day, how our dedicated staff build on our foundational elements, creating the innovative activities and practices like the ones you will read about in this issue.

From art and technology to education and approaching animal-assisted activities from a new angle, our staff is finding new ways to connect and support our students and families, while teaching them the skills they need to succeed beyond Green Chimneys. And I am always excited to see how our students themselves incorporate these lessons as they create their own futures.

We continue to embrace the natural world in our education and therapies as we know its profound impact, while we incorporate new activities and evidence-based models of education and therapeutic approaches to help children and families in today's environment.

I thank everyone at Green Chimneys for providing this essential support to our students!

Tea and a Show: The Power of Self-Expression

One of the defining aspects of growing up is the struggle to find a balance between fitting in and being yourself. At Green Chimneys, recreation staff work hard to create opportunities that encourage self-expression and inspire youth to share their talents. Just a few months ago, the concept of an open mic night emerged. The idea was to recreate the vibe of such events at coffee shops, where patrons can relax, chat and enjoy live performances from everyday people in an informal setting. And "Tea and a Show" was born.

One evening a week, Green Chimneys residents can gather with peers and staff for herbal tea and lemonade in the dining hall, and settle in for a welcoming and entertaining experience. At first, the night was just a handful of confident teens singing their favorite songs but it quickly grew to a large group of residents in attendance. Some would say, "I'm just here for the tea," but they couldn't help getting into the spirit and seizing the opportunity to perform.

Acts range from singing the classics to stand-up comedy to naming every country in Europe and Asia. Sometimes a participant just stands up to give compliments to the crowd. Because, why not? Who doesn't like to receive a compliment? In this setting, performances have few limits.

Students have begun to bring their instruments, practicing songs to perform specifically for the Tea and a Show crowd. Staff have caught the stage bug and sometimes accompany the students.



Groups also practice dances together each week to show the audience. This self-expression builds confidence in the students individually but also helps to grow a strong, supportive community for all.

Recently, a social worker was speaking with a student who was refusing to attend treatment sessions and struggling to identify positivity in their life. The social worker asked the student to think of just one thing that brings them joy and would be something to look forward to. The student readily replied, "Tea and a Show."



An Adaptable Approach to Education

An important part of educating children is adaptability; an ability to adjust instructional style to ensure students can focus, participate, and grasp content in order to proceed with classwork and independent assignments. Over the past year, Green Chimneys School has adopted a teaching model called Explicit Direct Instruction (EDI), an evidence-based approach in working with special education students.

EDI includes extensive differentiation, to acknowledge individualized learning needs, and scaffolding, which presents new information in a collaborative manner, and progressively builds on it. A typical lesson begins with teacher-directed instruction, incorporates check-ins and opportunities for students to demonstrate understanding in different ways, and transitions to a gradual release to independent tasks. This method supports whole and small groups, as well as individual instruction, and enables the teacher to assess each student's comprehension of the material being taught.

"I'm excited about the positive impact the EDI approach is having on our students," says Clearpool campus teacher Laurie Sarracco. "We're breaking down lessons into clear and straightforward steps; it's like giving students a roadmap for learning. This is particularly beneficial



for our kids because it caters to different learning styles and helps keep everyone on the same page. My students remain on task more consistently because of the expectation to respond in different ways. It keeps them engaged."

One of the strengths of the EDI model is how it integrates with Green Chimneys' Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (PBIS) objectives in the classroom. Encouraging and recognizing student participation, and helping them feel successful in carrying out the work motivates them to stay focused, and contributes to a more effective learning environment for the entire class.

"What's really cool is that EDI isn't just about academics; it's helping to build confidence in our students," says Laurie. "Students are fond of the whiteboard and 'pair-share' partnering activities; these engagement tools allow for students to get their thoughts out without having to wait as long. By providing a structured and supportive environment, they're not just learning, they're really getting it. That feeling of accomplishment is spreading some serious good vibes in the class."

Get to know Green Chimneys and take the first steps in exploring our therapeutic school by visiting greenchimneys.org/admissions.

Small Hooves, Big Impact



Tater Tot the mini horse quickly stole the hearts of all at Green Chimneys. He arrived last October significantly overweight, prompting the implementation of a health plan to reduce strain on his joints and hooves. At the age of 20, his teeth also required attention under the expert guidance of a veterinarian.

After an initial adjustment period, and the dedication of staff and students, Tater Tot grew comfortable in his bustling new environment. He eagerly embraced a regimen of daily walks, getting healthier and revealing his vibrant personality and

a sweet disposition that brightens the day of anyone in need of a smile!

Alongside the other minis in our equine program, Tater Tot provides invaluable opportunities for students to engage with horses, especially those who might find full-sized breeds intimidating. Their compact size also allows younger students to participate in activities such as grooming or walking with a lead.

Discover the connection between Tater Tot and our students on his path to fitness at greenchimneys.org/tater-tot-fitness.

Partnering with Horses

continued from cover

and did not enjoy the experience. Additionally, it was hard for Zoe to see the other students draw horses they were excited about, and she chose not to participate in a walk with the horses that first session.

The second week involved a grooming exercise and Zoe decided to give Gandalf a chance. Riding Instructor Becky Cobban knows Gandalf to be a horse that needs his personal space and requires respect when he doesn't want interaction.

"Zoe was respectful and attentive to his body language as she brushed him. She watched how his ears told her what he did—and didn't—like," says Becky. "There were a couple of moments where I think she was getting overwhelmed but she took a step back, took a breath, and then re-entered the situation with him. It resulted in Gandalf truly paying attention to her and when you win him over, you really win him over. And Zoe did win him over."

"I think for Zoe, the word that came up for me at the end of the session was resilience," adds Jess. "She did a really great job."



Zoe easily reflects on her time working with Gandalf, "I can't remember why I didn't like him. I know once I got to know him, I changed my mind. I know he likes me, too. Group really helped me with learning new coping skills when I'm upset. Sometimes you just need to breathe."

Across programs, Green Chimneys staff note how students often share more, or show more, when an animal is involved. Whether in a social work session, performing caretaking tasks or during casual interaction, students tend to open up more freely in the company of animals.

"Engaging in an activity together eases the pressure of intense face-to-face interactions, allowing thoughts and emotions to flow organically," offers Becky. This is the basis for the diverse animal-assisted interventions that embody Green Chimneys' therapeutic approach.

In weekly Hoof Harmony sessions spent grooming, walking, and tending to their equine partners, students like Zoe gain insight into their own emotions, fostering a deeper understanding of themselves and their relationships with others.

Enhanced Therapeutic Support

Hoof Harmony is designed to help students explore themes in respect, communication, and relationship-building through facilitated equine activities. In weekly group sessions, participants are paired with a horse in exercises that allow them to identify and practice effective communication skills, and respect within relationships, through the partnership built with their horse.

The program is part of an array of specialized therapy groups that provide skills development and therapeutic support to help residential students meet the goals and objectives outlined in their individual treatment plans. Groups are developed and facilitated through the collaboration of Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialists, Licensed Creative Arts Therapists, clinicians, farm staff, and residential life staff.

Learn more about comprehensive clinical support provided in our residential program at greenchimneys.org/clinical-support.

Focus on Family: Parent Resources

Having your child attend a school outside of district can be daunting. All too often, families come to Green Chimneys feeling displaced from their home districts and communities, due to the challenges they have faced. “We moved so that our child could be close to the elementary school he would be going to...it was disappointing,” shares Rachel, parent of a 4th grade student. When a student’s needs necessitate alternate plans, it’s an adjustment for all.

Helping our families find a sense of community and build a base of support as they navigate special education or residential treatment, is key to their role in supporting their child. Green Chimneys’ family-centered approach recognizes the family’s expertise when it comes to their own child, and that strong family and community connections are essential to positive growth and change. Admissions Director Lara Signorini often likes to point out, “When we accept a student, we accept the whole family!”

Family-centered care is based in the collaboration between a family and

Green Chimneys educators and clinicians, who help to minimize isolation, increase skills, and provide much needed resources. These resources include the community of Green Chimneys families, as well. The goal is to strengthen the individual child, as well as the family unit, by providing knowledge and fostering connections they can carry with them beyond their time at Green Chimneys.

Connection starts even before a student’s arrival, with the Parent Welcome Committee. Comprised of parents of Green Chimneys students, it is a resource for families as they acclimate to the school and programs. Parents benefit greatly from hearing first-hand experiences, and hopefully gain the understanding that they are not on this journey alone. Green Chimneys clinicians conduct monthly trainings to help parents to strengthen skill sets and support generalization of skills for their children. “We have been learning so much about our son and our interactions; how we all regulate ourselves in day-to-day life and understanding what challenges he faces with his ADHD,” says Rachel.



“These trainings have been invaluable in handling his dysregulation at home; I know how to put certain strategies in place.”

Additional family resources include monthly Parent Support Groups, as well as annual Parent Retreats and Family BBQs, which provide a forum for parents to come together to share their stories, learn with and from one another, and build an internal community. Rachel sums up her family’s Green Chimneys experience clearly: “We’re not isolated. We are not the only ones going through what we are going through. It makes you feel better that other parents are going through similar stories and that it’s the dynamic of the situation.”

Wildlife Rescue: Red-tailed Hawk

As a renowned wildlife rescue and rehabilitation facility, the Green Chimneys Wildlife Center saves the lives of many birds each year. Approximately 150 injured or impaired birds of prey are brought to the Wildlife Center annually, and the majority are released back into the wild.

One of the species we see most frequently is the Red-tailed hawk. This past November, an injured Red-tail was found at the Trailside Zoo in Bear Mountain, NY by the on-staff wildlife rehabilitator. The hawk was believed to have been hit by a car and fortunately, found its way up the mountain to the zoo. The rehabilitator brought it to Brewster Veterinary Hospital

where a damaged wing was examined and treated by setting the wing with pins to limit movement as it healed.

The hawk was transferred to the Green Chimneys Wildlife Center to recover in a small rehabilitation cage, until it was deemed healthy and strong enough to increase its activity. By February the hawk was ready for the flight cage where wildlife staff worked on building the bird’s strength and endurance, helping it reacclimate to flying and ultimately, prepare for release back to its native setting.



This is one of so many stories of Green Chimneys’ wildlife work. We celebrate each and every rescue and release, sharing with our students the message that humans can make a profound difference in helping wildlife to thrive. Learn more about our wildlife and visit with magnificent species when we open our doors for Birds of Prey Day on June 2nd! Details at greenchimneys.org/preyday



Greenhouse Crafts

All year long, our horticulture program blossoms with creativity. In colder months, each lesson starts in the cozy teaching area of the greenhouse, still focusing on gardens or plants.

Then, students move to the activity area and create craft projects, from image transfers on cedar wood to concocting handmade natural soaps or lip balms. They also cultivate veggies and herbs in grow bags or the hydroponic tower. Herbs from the prior summer are dried and made into teas, a much sought-after treat.

Plus, students like Ezra assist garden caretakers in spring preparations, including crop planning, seeding, and building bug houses.

Every season at Green Chimneys is a time of growth, supporting a holistic nature-based experience.



4-H Student Speakers

As part of our farm education and nature-based programming, Green Chimneys students participate in 4-H activities, which include demonstrations and illustrative talks from a wide range of topics for them to explore. These talks aren't just informative, they're opportunities for students to practice public speaking, research, and logical thinking while boosting their confidence.

This year, Green Chimneys staff and volunteers evaluated presentations on student-selected topics such as walrus, mental health, fishing, manga, and *Hamilton: An American Musical*.



HAI: The Next Generation

Growing in ways that are both career-focused and also personal is at the core of the Henry J. and Erna D. Leir Global Internship Program at Green Chimneys.

Our 2024 Leir Interns are enhancing their skills through hands-on experience working with our children and animals. The program supports those establishing careers in Human-Animal Interaction (HAI) and nature-based programming to stretch, connect, and map next steps. Learn more at greenchimneys.org/leir-intern

hai2025
April 25-26

Our interns are also part of a much bigger picture in our practice of HAI. Join us for the next HAI Conference at Green Chimneys, *People, Animals and Nature: The Restorative Power of Relationship*, to learn best practices and exchange ideas with experts and peers in nature-based programs. Details at greenchimneys.org/hai-save-the-date

Technology in School: Enter Esports!

Competitive video game play has become a global phenomenon, capturing the attention of millions worldwide. Once confined to the realm of entertainment, “esports” has found its way into educational institutions, making strides in shaping the academic landscape by helping students build particular skills and benefit from a dynamic learning environment.

Green Chimneys has begun piloting a program with EliteGamingLIVE, a product that supports STEM education for students in grades 3-12 as they hone skills that also prepare them for the future. The platform blends academic content with opportunities for students to collaborate and problem-solve, as a means to promote positive interactions and create a sense of community. Some

games are also designed to improve motor skills and short-term memory.

In a typical game, students are tasked with completing coursework, followed by a quiz on what they learned. Points are earned for the work and the quiz score, and then combined with points earned in monthly gaming tournaments. Top players move up to a final tournament and prizes are awarded to those scoring the most points. EliteGamingLIVE even incorporates professional sports announcers to add to the excitement!

“Playing video games has always helped me clear my head and make new friends,” says 8th grade student Irson. “Mr. Gui has taught me a lot, especially in *Dragon Ball FighterZ* and *Super Smash Bros.*”

“While it’s a great way to engage students, integrating esports into learning is not



about gaming or using a slick online tool,” says Brewster campus teacher Gui Martins. “It’s about fostering skills, nurturing talents, and forging communities, all of which help to provide students with a firm foundation for the future.”

Path to Prevention

As a Putnam County youth services provider for over 20 years, Green Chimneys Community-Based Services (CBS) has become an important resource for schools and families in efforts to educate and support youth around substance abuse, and the mental health issues that often coincide.

“Our team has first-hand knowledge of the growing mental health and substance abuse crisis among youth over the past few years,” says CBS Director Clare Rigano. “Education and early intervention is critical to the health and safety of our youth. Over the past three years, 100% percent of youth admitted to our temporary shelter reported issues with mental health, which is a major risk factor for alcohol and/or drug use.”

CBS recently integrated a Substance Misuse Prevention Program for youth ages 10-21 into the mental health

services and support groups provided at the Community Outreach Center in the Village of Brewster. The group meets weekly to teach the facts about substance use, its potential to lead to use disorders, and how this can affect a developing mind and long-term mental health. Led by clinical staff, discussions focus on ways for youth to explore their thoughts, beliefs

and attitudes, and the behaviors that result, and develop personal coping strategies to help in solving problems.

Equipping youth with the information and tools to help them make healthy decisions is core to the work of CBS. Learn about our prevention programs and outreach for youth at greenchimneys.org/CBS.



Need immediate help? Call our 24-hour hotline at 845.279.2588

Parent Perspective

When Iva Sutton thinks back on her experience as a Green Chimneys parent, she realizes how far her son, and her family, has come.

Her son Josh is a graduating senior at his local high school on Long Island, where he has been an honor student ever since his return from Green Chimneys in 2022. In the mornings he attends a trade school where he studies digital media production. Josh travels to high school each afternoon for classes that include astronomy, economics, ELA and finance, and he is working toward a Regents diploma.

“When we first got to Green Chimneys, we didn’t even think this was a possibility,” says Iva. “We were told he was probably just going to age out. The fact that he’s graduating is *huge*.”

At 10 years old, Josh had already been struggling in school for some time. The family tried a special education program that was not a good fit. Then spent a difficult six months homeschooling.

In working closely with their school district’s special education director, the Suttons were introduced to Green Chimneys.

Iva talks about the support of the staff and the strong relationships that Josh, and the family, built with his clinicians and residential life team. “When Josh started at Green Chimneys there was a big shift,” Iva recalls. “The entire staff always went out of their way with different approaches, even when he struggled the most. He had amazing staff.”

She also talks about the incredible support of the parent community. “I can honestly say that from the beginning, the network of people we came in contact with was key. The parenting groups and seminars and information provided gave us an immense understanding of how to navigate all of this but the support group, just the moms and the dads, was instrumental in itself; they knew what we were talking about.”



As Josh prepares for graduation and continues to build his independence, both he and his parents can see a path of potential. “He wants to go to college and he has goals, which he didn’t have before,” says Iva. “He’s worked very hard to get where he is; he’s had a lot of support, especially at Green Chimneys.”

Counting Down to Birds of Prey Day

Mark your calendar for Sunday, June 2!

Take part in Green Chimneys’ famous annual tradition dedicated to children, the environment and magnificent birds of prey.

- Over 100 raptors
- Free-flying demos
- Top wildlife experts
- Live animal presentations
- Family fun

Come for the owls, hawks, and eagles - stay to explore the Farm & Wildlife Center. Shop crafts by local artisans and enjoy tasty bites from popular food trucks. Tickets now on sale!

greenchimneys.org/preyday



Donor Corner: 2024 Gala Honorees

The power of partnership is its ability to strengthen capabilities, achieve shared goals, and benefit the community being served. We are thankful for long-standing relationships and the advocacy of local representatives, both of which provide critical support for the children we serve. This May, we will honor the contributions of two distinguished partners at the annual Green Chimneys Gala: New York State Senator Pete Harkham and NFP Inc.

Gala Honoree Senator Harkham is a leader in advocating for students with special needs. As State Senator for the 40th district since 2019 and a former Westchester County legislator, Senator Harkham has been a powerful voice for our region. In 2022, thanks to his support, New York State awarded Green Chimneys a \$175,000 capital improvement grant to upgrade safety and security at Green Chimneys School. “We are so grateful to Senator Harkham,” says Senior Vice President of Facilities Cheryl Tricarico. “Through his support,



a generous grant enabled us to enhance safeguards and protect our campus to provide the best environment for our students and staff.”

Corporate Partnership Awardee NFP Inc. has helped Green Chimneys students to thrive through generous annual giving and sponsorship of special events. NFP Senior Vice President Charles “Charlie” Daniels, III has been a friend and supporter of Green Chimneys



for over a decade. “Green Chimneys is one of the region’s premier behavioral health human services agencies,” states Mr. Daniels. “NFP is proud to support their efforts and on a personal level, I applaud Green Chimneys’ mission to provide these services to the most vulnerable youth in our community.”

Join the celebration! To attend the Gala or provide sponsorship support, visit greenchimneys.org/gala.



Green Chimneys Gala

Thursday, May 2, 2024
Tappan Hill Mansion - Tarrytown, NY

Each year this event raises critical funds for innovative education and animal-assisted therapy programs for children with special needs, as well as for the care of our animal partners. Join the celebration as we recognize key individuals, organizations and all who are part of our students’ success.

Event details and ticket purchase at greenchimneys.org/gala

Further your support with our online auction of unique and luxurious items.
Scan and start your bids!



Inspiring Spaces for Students

Part of maintaining a safe and supportive environment includes offering spaces for students to take a break, release or regulate emotions, and ultimately, prepare to return to their activities. Therapeutic support staff use these spaces throughout the day to assist students in their daily routine.

Clearpool campus teacher Evan Samuelson brings a special set of skills as an accomplished artist, and often shares his passion with students through a variety of projects. After a scenic nature landscape evolved into an athletics-themed mural surrounding the interior of the campus gym, he was invited to “re-invent” the space in the student support building, with the help of the students, themselves.

“I see first-hand how freeing and connective art can be for the students so I often utilize life skills classes to lean into certain art activities,” says Evan. “Here, I wanted to create a more inviting space and promote a sense of ownership. I feel it also provides a positive mental connection during a time of dysregulation.”

To create a mural, Evan typically paints the background and adds white outlines for the students to paint in. He then works on unfinished areas or refines some elements for overall cohesion. “I also



use an old overhead projector to provide stencils for the kids to use, and to show them how the creative process can be broken down to be much more attainable,” he says. “It’s a full-on collaboration.”

The result has been three full-wall murals that a number of Clearpool students have contributed to, and can look to as source of pride. And Evan promises more projects to come!

Hit the Green for a Great Cause

Sunningdale Green Chimneys Golf Classic

Monday, August 5, 2024 • Sunningdale Country Club • Scarsdale, NY

Tickets and sponsorships are available; visit greenchimneys.org/golf



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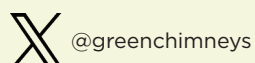
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Green Chimneys News