



Utilizing Nature-Based Programs to Provide Sensory and Self-Regulation Strategies for Children

November 6, 2019

Leir Retreat Center · Ridgefield, CT

WHAT

The Sam and Myra Ross Institute will host a one-day symposium to address sensory and self-regulation challenges students may experience in schools and residential programs and illustrate how nature-based activities and interventions can support the development of key coping skills in children.

Nature has a calming effect on most of us, and many of us seek nature and animals to comfort us when we are in distress or sad. How does this help children who have difficulty in the school environment?

Clinicians work alongside students to help them become aware of their individual sensory and emotional needs, their unique responses to everyday, yet unpleasant, stimuli. Through nature-based interventions and activities, different coping skills are explored and practiced. In time, students are encouraged and empowered to apply these coping skills in areas outside of sessions, such as in the classroom or dorm. With a shared goal of successfully remaining in class and contributing to their community, students and clinicians utilize time with animals or in nature to sooth, hone skills, expand on learned behaviors and more. Examples include:

- Eight-year-old Sam is unable to stay on task in the classroom, completely distracted by noises and movements around him. When working with his Occupational therapist in a barn setting, he is engaged with heavy work activities such as mucking or carrying water buckets. These tasks calm and organize his body and help him tune out all the typical animal noises and activity that otherwise would distract him.
- Jarelle has low self-esteem and difficulty following directions, trusting and connecting with others. After multiple weeks of observing, grooming and walking a tame sheep with her School Social Worker on the school grounds, she is able to follow multiple step directions, can anticipate obstacles and adjusts to changes more easily. Her self-esteem and self-confidence has grown, and she can express her feelings, look at other people, responding when spoken to and appropriately greeting others.
- After spending time in the garden weeding, digging in soil and learning about growing seeds Brandon has improved his fine and gross motor skills as well as developed a sense of pride and confidence in his accomplishment. He has realized that working in the garden calms him and helps him better tolerate distress.

WHO

Teachers, clinical staff, paraprofessionals, residential care staff, educators in other settings may benefit from the workshop. Individuals who are interested in how nature, animals, and outdoor environment can help children in school setting, as well as anyone interested in sensory integration and self-regulation are encouraged to attend.

GOALS

- To identify common challenges faced by children who have difficulty with sensory modulation and self-regulation.
- To understand how these challenges impact students, and what it looks like within the school setting.
- To understand how nature, animals, and outdoor environments can provide a sensory-rich and motivating place to increase self-awareness leading to self-regulation.
- To share strategies and steps to help young people develop coping skills around sensory and self-regulation.
- To provide examples of how skills developed utilizing nature and animals can be transferred to coping skills used inside the classroom.

REGISTER

Space is limited. There is no cost to attend.

Reserve your place before **November 1** by completing the [Registration Form \(PDF\)](#).

THANKS

This meeting is made possible with generous support provided by **Henry J. and Erna D. Leir Foundation**.

ABOUT GREEN CHIMNEYS

At Green Chimneys, a multi-departmental therapeutic team includes teachers, clinicians, occupational therapists, paraprofessionals, direct care staff, and nature based program staff work together to incorporate non-traditional and innovative approaches that engage children. Nature-based programs including variety of animals and plants offer such unique opportunities. Within this unique nature-based program, the therapeutic team and students work together to explore and develop coping skills and strategies necessary in order to succeed in school.

AGENDA

8:30-9:00am	Registration and morning coffee
9:00-9:15am	Welcome & Introduction Dr. Ed Placke, Executive Director, Green Chimneys Michael Kaufmann, Director, The Sam and Myra Ross Institute Director
9:15-10:15am	Keynote <i>Dogs, goldfish, bugs and horses: mystery, magic and science</i> Martha McNeil, LMFT, CEIP-MH, TRI, TDI, ESMHL
10:15-10:30am	Break
10:30-11:15am	<i>Neuropsychology basics applied to animal-assisted therapy</i> Sabrina Donalies-Schell
11:15am-12:00pm	<i>Sensory regulation on the farm</i> Rachael Chiulli, MOT, OTR/L
12:00-1:00pm	Lunch
1:00-1:45pm	<i>Why nature? Connecting our personal coping skills and our work with children with sensory and emotional regulation challenges</i> Miyako Kinoshita, MS. ED
1:45-2:00pm	Break
2:00-2:45pm	<i>Self-regulation and nature-based interventions</i> Shauna McWilliams, LMSW
2:45-3:30pm	Facilitated group session Be a part of the solution, innovation, and changes.

SPEAKER BIOGRAPHIES

Rachael Chiulli, MOT, OTR/L is an occupational therapist at Green Chimneys. Her clinical work incorporates the use of sensory-based strategies, pre-vocational/life skills, and animal-assisted activities. She has extensive experience working with children and adults with Autism Spectrum Disorders in a variety of settings including clinics, therapeutic riding centers, daycares, home, and residential community-based centers. Her current areas of interest include work readiness and life skills, classroom strategies for regulation, and nature-based programming.

Sabrina Donalies, LMHC, a licensed Mental Health Counselor and Medical Technician, is the Respite Program Supervisor at Green Chimneys. For over a decade Sabrina has been passionate about a nature-based approach to health and resilience, and she has successfully incorporated equine assisted activities into her clinical work with children and adults. Her current research focuses on the neuropsychological benefit of stress reduction through experiential therapy such as animal assisted interventions. Sabrina is also advanced certified in the Eagala model (Equine Assisted Growth and Learning Association), and serves on the Eagala research committee.

Miyako Kinoshita, MS. ED, is a Farm Education Program Manager at Green Chimneys and a member of the Sam and Myra Ross Institute. She was a past president of the Equine Facilitated Mental Health Association (EFMHA) and serves on the board of the Professional Association of Therapeutic Horsemanship International (PATH Intl.), and currently chairs PATH Equine Welfare Committee. Having led Green Chimneys Equine programs for many years, she now focuses her work on the integration of farm programs at Green Chimneys, lectures internationally, and supervises the international intern program.

Martha McNeil has practiced as a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist for the past 21 years. She is the founder and has been the Director of DreamPower Horsemanship, a PATH Intl. Premier Accredited Center in Gilroy, California, for the past 17 years. Martha is a PATH Intl. Registered Therapeutic Riding Instructor, Therapeutic Driving Instructor and Equine Specialist in Mental Health and Learning. She is also a Certified Equine Interaction Professional in Mental Health. She has been Adjunct Faculty in the John F. Kennedy University Holistic Studies program since 2014, teaching master's courses in equine-facilitated mental health work. She has trained and currently partners with two certified therapy dogs and is a staff consulting therapist for Operation Freedom Paws, a service dog training organization in San Martin, California. Martha is trained in EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing) and has a particular professional interest in working with trauma, military veterans and law enforcement officers and their families. For 17 years she worked for the City and County of San Francisco Community Behavioral Health Services with children in foster care and adults with severe and persistent mental illness. She was the 2011 PATH Intl. Equine Facilitated Psychotherapy and Learning Professional of the Year.

Shauna McWilliams, LMSW is a Social Worker in the Green Chimneys Therapeutic Day School program. As a teenager, Shauna worked as a camp counselor at Sprout Creek Farm in Poughkeepsie, NY, where she discovered her love for farm animals & nature-based activities. She graduated from Fordham University with her Masters in Social Work and joined Green Chimneys first as a social work intern in 2000, and then as a social worker in the Residential Treatment program. She has been working with a variety of animals including goats, sheep, cows, equines, and camels in her therapeutic work with children at Green Chimneys. She is a mother of three children and one dog, an avid hiker and a lover of the outdoors in general.

ABOUT THE INSTITUTE

Green Chimneys and The Sam and Myra Ross Institute offer a meaningful introduction to the theoretical and practical principles of incorporating animals, plants and the natural world in the re-education, socialization and treatment of deeply impacted children who have experienced crisis and a lack of success in their lives.

The Institute serves to deepen the legacy, vision and impact of Green Chimneys' animal and nature-based programs by demonstrating how purposeful contact with animals and the outdoors can enhance formal therapies and traditional education, and sharing knowledge to bring continued growth and leadership to the field. [Learn more by visiting www.greenchimneys.org/theinstitute.](http://www.greenchimneys.org/theinstitute)

GETTING TO LEIR

Leir Retreat Center · 220 Branchville Road · Ridgefield, CT 06877 · (203) 438-6074

From I-84E

1. Head **southeast** on **I-84 E** entering Connecticut
2. Take exit **3** to merge onto **US-7 S** toward **Norwalk**
3. Turn right onto **CT-35 S/Danbury Rd**
4. Turn left onto **Main St**
5. Turn left onto **Branchville Rd**
6. Turn left onto **CT – 102 E/Branchville Rd**

Destination will be on right.