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HAI2025 this April!



Individualized Approach Takes Student from Struggle to Success

A core strength of Green Chimneys is its therapeutic milieu, which enables a highly individualized approach to intervention aimed at fostering a student's growth. Middle school student Luis is benefitting from Respite Therapy, a program that enhances the support outlined in his individual education and treatment plan through targeted activities to address his more specific needs. Part of Luis' day-to-day experience at school includes managing peer interactions, which can range from positive to challenging. A key area of focus has been developing his interpersonal effectiveness to help him navigate relationships and maintain healthy communication.

Several months ago, Luis personally expressed interest in respite services, demonstrating his commitment to his own development and advocating for what he needs. The first step in helping students is identifying their perspective on areas they wish to improve. Respite staff work with the student to determine which approach, such as talk therapy, play therapy, animal-assisted interactions, or more active interventions will best support their goals, and strengths.

Respite therapy has been a cornerstone of Luis' daily routine with a treatment plan built around practical, engaging activities such as Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT) groups and

consistent psychoeducation and skill-building support to practice DBT coping skills, which include mindfulness, emotion regulation, and relationship-building. Hands-on activities like designing a relationship wheel, where Luis and his therapist mapped out his support system, have been especially effective.

Luis and his parents also participated in a family session focused on relationships and communication, which gave him a chance to share his knowledge and enthusiasm for the farm. At that session, equine staff took notice of the way Luis showed his parents how to care for the horses, the detail that goes into each task,

greenchimneys.org

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



Boni-Bel Farm Helps Students Grow
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Building on Strengths: A Message from the CEO

In our own lives, we learn how our accomplishments—both small and large—build upon each other to provide the confidence and resilience that help us cope with life’s many obstacles. Here at Green Chimneys, we know when children are encouraged to focus on their strengths, and provided opportunities to experience success, the outcomes can be most rewarding and are often life-changing.

As parents of two school-aged children, my husband and I are constantly amazed at how differently each of our girls navigate their various challenges in their own unique way. And when they seek our guidance, we know that our advice to one may be completely different for the other, depending on their individual processes and strengths.

Green Chimneys thrives on an individualized and strength-based approach in its therapeutic and educational support. As you read this issue, you can see how this manifests itself in our programming and treatment planning. From respite and adventure-based therapies to animal-assisted activities and discovered hidden talents, Green Chimneys gives students options

and opportunities to explore and cultivate their strengths. Educators, clinicians, and support staff guide them in utilizing these strengths to become confident individuals who learn to overcome their challenges.

Working with the incredible staff here at Green Chimneys, I am truly inspired by the range of talents, dedication and caring each staff member brings to their work every day. They are helping our students to develop their own unique skillsets that are the building blocks to their current and future success.

I am also fortunate to have the partnership of a wonderfully supportive board of directors and am pleased to congratulate Bill Fasano, who was recently elected board president. I’ve worked closely with Bill in his prior roles as board secretary, as a member of several committees, as well as chair of our finance committee, and appreciate his steadfast leadership and sound fiscal oversight.

A special thank you to outgoing president, Bob Vetere, as he hands over the reins to Bill. Bob has been a true support and cheerleader in my transition to CEO, and I look forward to our continued work together as he becomes board chairman.



I wish everyone a joyful holiday season filled with peace and gratitude. Please consider a tax-deductible year-end gift through any of our giving programs to support the therapeutic and educational needs of our children and families, and the care of our partner animals. On behalf of the entire Green Chimneys community, thank you for your continued support.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Kristin Dionne'.

Kristin Dionne, MSW, MPA
Chief Executive Officer

New Board Leadership



Green Chimneys’ Board of Directors proudly announces William Fasano as its new Board President. Bill has been a member since 2015, and has served as board secretary for the past six years.

Bill was formerly President and CEO of National Retail Services in Danbury, CT. He brings decades of business development, marketing and promotions experience to his role. As a seasoned executive and financial adviser, he is an important voice in agency administration.

“Bill has been a dedicated advocate of Green Chimneys and friend from the very beginning,” states CEO Kristin Dionne. “He brings a valuable perspective to our work that is at once pragmatic and compassionate.”

“From my introduction to Green Chimneys, I have valued how this organization helps to transform the lives of so many children with the help of nature and animals. It is truly a special place and I love being part of it,” says Bill. “I look forward to leading the board as we work with our administrative team to continue to develop innovative strategies for a bright future.”

Our board members are a key group of volunteers, lending their time and expertise to ensure the sustainability, and the legacy, of Green Chimneys.

See who’s part of the team at greenchimneys.org/board

Challenge by Choice

Every day at Green Chimneys, students have opportunities to build invaluable skills, and in many settings, even among the trees! As part of the specialized groups offered to residential students, Adventure Therapy aims to help youth develop skills in goal-setting, establishing trust, and regulating emotions in potentially stressful situations. The group is led by Green Chimneys recreation therapists trained in high ropes adventure courses, and provides a challenging yet safe way for students to identify an ambitious goal and work with staff, and each other, to achieve it.

Therapeutic groups such as this are developed in collaboration with residents, who are surveyed about what activities they would be comfortable doing in a therapy group. Once selected for a group, residents work with the facilitator to develop



objectives for the group as a whole, and the goals that will be most valuable for each member to work on in their treatment.

At the beginning of each Adventure session, the group discusses physical and emotional safety. Physical safety relates to the course, the element the group will complete, use of required gear, and affirmation that the activity is safe. Emotional safety is more personal—climbing and adventure activities can put people in stressful, and sometimes scary, situations. Climbers not only need to trust their gear, they need to trust the facilitator, other climbers and, most importantly, themselves.

“When we talk about our emotional safety, we talk about what feelings might come up that day,” explains Certified Therapeutic Recreation Specialist Catherine Troiano. “Someone may feel nervous about the height, anxious about the equipment or element, or doubtful of their own abilities. And these emotions are happening 35 feet in the air!” Group members explore what will be helpful to them in these stressful moments—whether it’s regulating their breathing or hearing encouragement from others—and share what they might need from one another. “The process of preparing for the activity is just as important as the activity, itself,” Catherine advises.

Group member Jessie sets her goals high—as high as our 35-foot-tall parachute jump. The element consists of belaying (hoisting by rope) the climber up a ladder to metal staples bolted into the tree, up to a platform. From there, participants transfer to an auto-belay system, where the gear does all the work in supporting the climber, and after ensuring the area is clear, the

participant jumps from the platform in a “free fall” and the auto-belay lowers them to the ground.

The first week, Jessie ascended the tree, noticing how it felt to be so far off the ground. As soon as she reached the platform, she would climb back down, feeling too nervous to proceed to the jump. In the weeks that followed, Jessie went as far as getting set up on the auto-belay in order to make the jump but those nervous feelings kept her from completion.

Facilitators decided that in order to help Jessie realize she had the ability to execute the jump they had to meet her where she was. An A-frame ladder was set up for participants to practice jumping from any height that felt comfortable. Jessie quickly gained a sense of what the jump felt like and how the gear assisted her. Her confidence in the gear, the facilitators, and herself increased with each jump and each subsequent attempt from a higher rung of the ladder.

By week four, Jessie was ready, and went back to the tree. She climbed to the top, attached the auto-belay system, took a deep breath, and jumped! The group cheered, recognizing what it meant for Jessie to have taken that leap, both literally and figuratively. “Having people who supported me was what made me overcome my fear,” Jessie reflects. “After the jump, I felt very happy about myself.”

Jessie was determined to meet her goal and, now that she has, she makes an effort to help other climbers and show the same support she felt. Overcoming this challenge has helped Jessie trust herself more. “I feel more prepared to take on other ‘adventures’ in my life.” Go Jessie!

Individualized Approach

continued from page 1

and why it's important. "I love anything that involves interacting with an animal; touching, feeling, having fun with it," says Luis. "We walked around the horse barn learning different things about the horses, helped a mini by taking him on a walk, and tried out the tack gear to get my parents familiar with the program."

Luis' bond with the horses was evident, and his parents expressed excitement and pride at his abilities and instructions. Staff regularly witness how Luis loves making

sure that the horses have everything they need, and are content. He is very observant of all the animals at the farm, and is forever exploring his curiosity in a safe, respectful way.

"These exercises allow Luis to see how personal connections help him manage challenges and improve his social interactions," says Respite Supervisor Diana Fiumara. "The combination of group work, individual therapy, and hands-on activities have strengthened his confidence and enhanced his coping mechanisms; respite has truly helped Luis to thrive."

A Student's POV: Experiencing the Benefit of Support

Beginning the Work

Luis recalls struggling with communication before entering respite. "Communicating easily with my words was hard for me," he admits. Through respite, Luis feels he found a way to connect with staff and activities that made a difference.

Individualized Approach

When asked about the activities, Luis says, "We do things that are fun, and staff implement coping skills while we're doing it, which makes it fun." Respite support keeps individual needs in mind, and incorporates ways to motivate a student to participate fully.

Lasting Impact

Luis is now better able to express himself. "Communicating when I need a break from feeling overwhelmed has gotten easier," he says. For Luis, the skills gained in respite offer support "all the time, whenever things feel too hard."



Swim to Win

Opportunities to play sports and participate in healthy competition is a valuable part of youth development. Our Brewster campus features a large indoor pool where students learn important aquatics skills; enjoy recreational swim; and now, compete in quarterly swim meets to showcase their growing abilities.

Green Chimneys' Recreation Department oversees an extensive physical education program to help students explore diverse fitness and athletic activities to maintain an active lifestyle and discover new skills. Aquatics Instructor Erik Johnson took notice when students really seemed to be excelling in their swim classes, and decided to motivate them to build their

abilities further. He developed 'Swim to Win' intramural swim meets to provide a competitive experience for all levels of swimmers, and create a goal for participants to work toward.

The first Swim to Win meet was held in February and was followed by another in June. Each event brought together 25 Green Chimneys swimmers to compete in heats, with even some staff jumping in to fill out open lanes. Participants earned medals and, gained the sense of pride and accomplishment that comes from giving your personal best. "If even a little bit of this can be achieved through these meets," says Erik, "we are all winning."

"Our students come from a wide range of experiences with school sports and PE programs, and many have had trouble in competitive atmospheres and organized

athletics, which drives them away from an active lifestyle," says Recreation Director Zac Staszak. "Our goal is to build engagement, help students feel they are part of something, and have them discover what they enjoy... from there, you can teach a kid almost anything!"



A School Steeped in Nature



Homes for Bluebirds

Part of what makes Green Chimneys special is its unique setting, where nature, education, skill-building, and personal growth come together in a single program. A student group focused on developing relationship skills through community-building activities found a meaningful way to connect with nature and contribute to the Brewster campus. Through discussions and consultation with the Wildlife Team over the summer, students identified a shared concern: the safety of birds, especially native Eastern Bluebirds, nesting in unsafe spots on campus. The students set a goal to build birdhouses, providing much-needed shelter for the bluebirds, and embarked on a S.M.A.R.T. process to ensure success by making their project **S**pecific, **M**easurable, **A**chievable, **R**ealistic, and **T**ime-bound. Read about this impactful student-driven project at greenchimneys.org/bluebirds



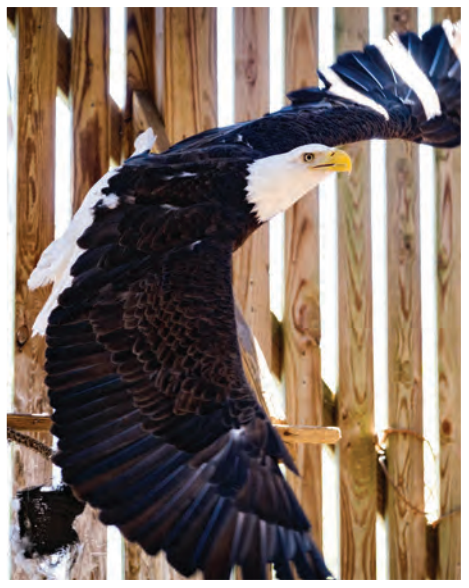
Boni-Bel Builds Practical Skills

Boni-Bel Farm and Country Store is more than just a garden and retail space, it offers important opportunities for experiential learning and community engagement. This summer brought new energy to the farm with new store management and a fresh update to the work-based learning options for Green Chimneys students. At Boni-Bel, our students gain invaluable hands-on experience in real farm and retail roles. As associates in the Country Store, they engage in customer service, inventory management, and sales, building essential workplace skills in a supportive environment. On the farm, they tend the orchard and gardens, tap maple trees to boil sap into syrup, and maintain the fields and grounds using light machinery. As a key component of an enriched academic curriculum, these activities provide foundational learning that helps students prepare for life beyond school. Learn more at greenchimneys.org/boni-bel



Sharing Our Expertise

In August, Green Chimneys hosted Class-Act Camels, a workshop bringing together eight camels, their handlers, and human-animal interaction professionals for three days of intensive training in preparing camels for educational and therapeutic work. Led by visiting experts and the Green Chimneys Equine Team, participants learned practical skills for camel-assisted activities. They spent time mastering key handling techniques, including guiding camels through obstacle courses, while also deepening their understanding of camel behavior and veterinary care. Equine Program Manager Sam Arevalo, who works closely with Green Chimneys' own camel, Phoenix, played a central role, sharing her expertise and ensuring participants left equipped to integrate camels into their own programs. Learn about the benefits of integrating animals into human services at greenchimneys.org/hai-connection



Sponsor an Animal Change a Life

Animal sponsorship at Green Chimneys is one of the most meaningful ways to support our programs, animals, and students.

When you Sponsor an Animal, you are helping to provide food, shelter, veterinary care, and more for the animals that reside at Green Chimneys and are essential to the success of our program.

Through animal-assisted therapy, our students learn empathy, responsibility, confidence and self-worth, while the animals thrive under their loving care.

**Makes a
great gift for
any occasion!**

Receive a special card and photo of your sponsored animal.

Your gift is tax-deductible!



Giving is easy!

Go online to greenchimneys.org/animal-sponsor

Hidden Talents

A seed by itself is just a seed. A tiny piece of untapped potential waiting for the right conditions to grow. With the proper soil, enough water, and plentiful light, that little seed can become almost anything. A beautiful flower. A toweringly tall tree. The most delicious fruit. The potential inside a child is the same; it needs to be supported, fed, fostered, and celebrated. When this happens, the results can be nothing short of amazing.

So many Green Chimneys students possess artistic and expressive skills that often also serve as important outlets. Residential staff are in a unique position to spot such creative potential in the students they work with, and seek to encourage its

development. Learning about students' passions, strengths, and special talents creates a powerful bond that drives staff to inspire and assist in helping these seeds to blossom into something spectacular.

For 16-year-old Jake, writing short stories and performing them with dramatic voices and sound effects is not only a passion, it is a genuine talent. His dorm staff are a loyal and responsive audience, fully engaging in each 'show' and the more laughter and smiles from the staff, the more Jake amps up his character voices and sounds. These moments fuel Jake, and inspire him to keep writing material. Staff take part in supporting Jake's creativity by helping him to research storylines and providing feedback on new ideas.

Noah is a skillful self-taught artist who loves to draw and paint. This high school

senior often takes inspiration from Pinterest, and has a particular interest in figures and body movement. Staff ensure there is always a stock canvases and paints—Noah prefers acrylics as they find them easier to blend. Staff have developed a true appreciation for Noah's expressive style, and provide great encouragement for sharing their visions.

High school senior Ezra has made a name for himself among staff and students, alike, with his craftsmanship in crocheting and woodworking. From an early age, Ezra has been producing a beautiful array of handmade hats, scarves and novelties. Staff actively support Ezra's work with regular trips to the craft store to purchase supplies, offering ideas for new creations, and serving as some of his top customers when Ezra sells his goods at special events.



From writing to painting to crafting, Green Chimneys students are supported in pursuing their passions. Painting by Noah. Large-scale fuse bead creation by Nevaeh. Staff member with jellyfish knitted by Ezra.



Thinking about volunteering?

Join a community committed to children with special needs, and the nature-based setting that helps them grow.

Choose from a range of opportunities to share your time and skills:

- Work with students as a mentor, tutor or program helper
- Assist in care of horses, farm animals, or wildlife
- Tend to the farm and gardens

greenchimneys.org/volunteer



Volunteer Spotlight: Laurie Spens



Laurie Spens' connection to Green Chimneys runs deep. Her journey began about 20 years ago when her sons, Ian and Collin, attended the school. Struggling in class in his home district, Ian found solace and success in Green Chimneys' nurturing nature-based environment, where animal care and hands-on projects like cooking, woodshop, and music, reframed his educational experience. When Collin faced anxiety in preschool, Laurie knew Green Chimneys could help him, too. Collin entered the

school at a young age and flourished, finding a special connection with smaller animals, like the guinea pigs.

Social Worker Toni DeMato, who worked with both boys, and Farm Manager Maureen Doherty, played pivotal roles in their positive experiences. Laurie feels that the impact of Green Chimneys on her sons was profound and even after transitioning back to their school district, the family kept strong ties. There were annual visits to buy their Christmas tree from Boni-Bel Farm and the latest animal calendar, and fond memories of their favorite pig, Jimi Hendrix.

In 2022, Laurie decided to pursue interests beyond her busy life as a professional photographer, and reignited her Green Chimneys connection as a volunteer. She started working in the Teaching Barn, caring for goats, sheep, llamas, and alpacas. "The best part is that the animals are with me as I work and I get to know their personalities. These animals are super special," Laurie explains. Her favorite is Bo Peep the sheep.

Volunteering at Green Chimneys allows Laurie to contribute to a place that supports children and families the way it supported hers. While her role focuses on animal care, she does enjoy capturing small moments with her phone to share with

friends and family. Laurie's journey is a testament to the lasting impact of Green Chimneys, where her sons found support and success, and where she now finds fulfillment in sharing her time.

Today, Ian holds a Master's in Psychology from New York University and even spent a year at Green Chimneys as a Residential Counselor. Embracing his creative side, Collin recently graduated from Ohio University with a film degree. Green Chimneys has served as a meaningful foundation and shared connection for them all.



It's no small task to care for the green spaces and 300+ animal partners that support our students. Volunteers like Laurie help make all of our nature-based programming possible. Learn more about volunteer opportunities for individuals and corporations at greenchimneys.org/volunteer



hai2025
April 25-26

Professionals from across the globe will attend the next Human-Animal Interaction Conference at our Brewster Campus this spring. *People, Animals and Nature: The Restorative Power of Relationship* will focus on the interconnectedness between people, animals and the environment and how to enhance quality of life for all.

Hosted in partnership with the University of Denver Graduate School of Social Work and the Institute for Human-Animal Connection, hai2025 will take place in the "living classroom" of Green Chimneys' farm setting where attendees will learn best practices and exchange ideas with experts and peers in a wide range of professions that utilize animal-assisted and nature-based models, interactive group work, and hands-on learning with animals to facilitate the well-being of people, animals and the natural world through models that bring these elements together.

Space is limited; register today at greenchimneys.org/hai2025



Spotlight on Philanthropy

Be a part of our legacy of providing essential education and mental health services by creating a legacy of your own



If you have thought about estate planning, you've likely considered designating funds to support causes that have been important in your life. Naming Green Chimneys as a beneficiary in your will or trust is a wonderful way to ensure the future strength and viability of the organization and continue the legacy entrusted to us by our founders, Dr. Samuel "Rollo" Ross, Jr., and his wife, Myra. Your generosity will ensure that children with emotional, behavioral, and learning challenges benefit from Green Chimneys' unique blend of nature-based education, residential treatment, and animal-assisted therapy for generations to come.

For over two decades, Mark Lescault has served the Green Chimneys mission as a

member of the Board of Directors. He has seen the organization change and grow over those years while remaining true to its core mission to empower students to reach their full potential. He is an advocate for our students, a leadership volunteer, and he is a planned gift donor, naming Green Chimneys as a beneficiary of his estate.

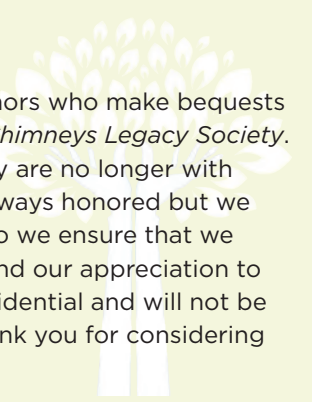
As Green Chimneys celebrates its 77th year and we look toward the future, we know that support from friends like Mark is fundamental to our ability to remain impactful and thrive for the next 77 years.

It's an easy process to name a charity as a beneficiary. "I worked with my attorney to make certain it was done correctly, and let Green Chimneys know of my intention," says Mark. "As a long time board member and donor, I know first-hand that a planned gift helps Green Chimneys plan for the future, while concentrating on providing the best services and care for students and animals *today*. I am proud to be a founding member of the *Green Chimneys Legacy Society* and feel fortunate to be able to support their work and students in this manner."

To learn how to include Green Chimneys in your will or estate plan, please contact Vice President of Development Kathryn Cousins at kcousins@greenchimneys.org or 845.279.2995 ext. 1225.

Plan Your Legacy

We love to recognize all our supporters, and donors who make bequests during their lifetime become part of the *Green Chimneys Legacy Society*. We often only learn of their generosity once they are no longer with us. A donor's request to remain anonymous is always honored but we encourage you to inform us of your intentions, so we ensure that we fulfill your gift exactly as you intended, and extend our appreciation to you. The information you share will be kept confidential and will not be shared with others without your permission. Thank you for considering the children of Green Chimneys.



Holidays on the Farm at Boni-Bel Farm and Country Store start Sat, Nov 30!

Green Chimneys students help to make the season bright! Join us for our annual holiday and tree market starting Thanksgiving weekend with extended weekend hours. Experience the magic of the season with handmade decorations, prepared gift baskets, sustainably grown holiday greens and warm customer service provided by our students. Plus, each purchase supports the children and animals at Green Chimneys.

Get ready for the holidays! Details at greenchimneys.org/countrystore



You can make a difference in the lives of children and animals!

All children deserve the support necessary to learn, grow, and be healthy. Green Chimneys' unique combination of therapeutic education, clinical support, and nature-based experiences provides critical help to children who struggle with social, emotional, and behavioral challenges.

As students care for the animals and gardens, they learn to care for themselves.

Green Chimneys students develop coping strategies and self-regulation skills. They pursue interests in class, outdoors, and beyond. All the while, they're discovering what it means to be a part of a community.

Please consider giving a gift to Green Chimneys. Giving is easy!

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



SAVE THE DATE

Green Chimneys Spring Gala

Thursday, May 8, 2025 • Tappan Hill Mansion • Tarrytown, NY

Each year our 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. Details to be announced at greenchimneys.org/gala

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Green Chimneys 2025

Ring in the New Year

Enjoy 365 days of Green Chimneys! With award-winning photography by Jason Houston, our annual calendar features 12 months of animal partners and their real-life stories. Makes a great gift for yourself or a loved one. \$30, shipping included.

greenchimneys.org/calendar

Stay connected online for holiday highlights, student news, and animal updates:



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Green Chimneys News