



## Horticultural therapy: Former Jets player has 'Anew' beginning

*Anew Wellness in Somerset aims to create a path to wellness for individuals and families experiencing mental and behavioral challenges for adults and adolescents.*



**Anew Wellness, Jerome Mitchell, CEO, Candice Deglon, Managing Director, and Vernon Gholston, Executive Vice President, connecting with plants in a Horticultural Therapy activity facilitated by Laura DePrado of Final Touch Landscaping, LLC., in preparation for March 10th in-house workshop. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)**

Vernon Gholston is starting Anew. The former Ohio State football phenom was selected by the New York Jets with the sixth overall pick in the 2008 National Football League Draft.

Today, following four years in the NFL, the former defensive end/linebacker who grew up in Detroit, Michigan, excelled as a student athlete, ran countless yards and took and gave hit after hit, is pursuing a passion to destigmatize mental health, change the industry standards and better the lives of people dealing with mental health issues.

He teamed up with Jerome Mitchell, a native of New Jersey practicing law, to defend the most important play of his new career, founding in 2014 the Somerset-based Anew Wellness. Their goal is to work with clients to create a path to wellness for individuals and families experiencing mental and behavioral challenges for adults and adolescents.

In an interview earlier this month, we talked about what inspired the creation of Anew Wellness, their approach to mental health, the tool kit of multiple programs offered, and perspective on the role that horticultural therapy can play in treatment of mental health and dual diagnosis.

"Too many football player retire early because of head injuries," said Gholston, executive vice president of the enterprise. "Football takes a toll on your body. I wanted to do something that could help people. Two years out of football I met Jerome. We were coming from two different perspectives and professions, but it was natural to start Anew. The biggest component at Anew is that we want to be inclusive of all treatment modalities. This includes art therapy and horticultural therapy."

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The logo of Anew Wellness of Somerset is the butterfly. The butterfly is viewed as a symbol of transformation because of its impressive process of metamorphosis. From egg, to larvae (caterpillar), to pupa (the chrysalis or cocoon) and from the cocoon the butterfly emerges in her unfurling glory. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)

Research shows that more workers are absent from work because of stress and anxiety than because of physical illness or injury. It is estimated that the prevalence of mental illness and/or substance abuse annually approaches 25 percent in adults in working age. The annual cost to employers for mental health and substance abuse issues are estimated to be \$300 billion.

"We recognize the unique challenges clients face at home, in school, at work and socially," Anew Managing Director Candice Deglon said. "Treatment incorporates clinically proven methods combined with evidenced-based innovative treatment modalities. We provide the tools to help them deal with the mental health issues they are currently experiencing and the many obstacles life may throw at them."

Program types include a mental health track, a dual diagnosis track, an intensive outpatient program, and an outpatient program. Client referrals come from behavioral health hospitals, schools, other outpatient providers and primary care physicians.

Anew Wellness incorporates the following therapies for adolescents: cognitive behavioral, dialectical behavior, psychoeducation, coping skills/social support, interpersonal relationships, healthy communication styles, family dynamics, stress management, anger management, art activities, wellness/mindfulness, music groups, meditation and role playing/acting.

"Horticultural Therapy is unique," Gholston said. "So basic, yet so complex. It gives order to chaos. Connection where there is disconnection. HT offers the flexibility of using as individual sessions, or build as an entire program. It meets the client where they are at and allows for engagement and connection."

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Added Mitchell: "Plants, flowers, their aesthetics, their benefits are very important. Horticultural Therapy is a great avenue to reach clients. It allows people to have self-fulfillment."



Former NFL Defensive End/Linebacker, Vernon Gholston engaged with planting Sunpatients. He is pursuing a passion to destigmatize mental health, change the industry standards and better the lives of people dealing with mental health issues. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)

Horticultural therapy is the process of using nature, plants and gardening as a structured goal-driven vehicle towards wellness. It employs customized activities and programs for individuals in an active process under the direction of a trained horticultural therapist with the non-profit American Horticultural Therapy Association. The process itself is the therapeutic activity, not the end product.

Clinicians at Anew are aware of horticultural therapy and I am going to work with a group of clinicians in a workshop on March 10. This is an opportunity for clinicians to be introduced to the benefits of connecting people and plants.

Of course, this is something recognized statewide in New Jersey, which is the first state in the nation to designate the third week of March "Horticultural Therapy Week," to build awareness about this modality.

Events and activities will be taking place beginning with Proclamation of Horticultural Therapy Week to be presented at the Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders Feb. 28 with state Sen. Christopher "Kip" Bateman. Representatives taking part in a series a horticultural therapy-related activities, workshops, programs and gardens throughout Somerset County, also will be in attendance.

"Designating a week each year to raise awareness of horticultural therapy is expanding opportunities for more people to take advantage of the many benefits it offers," Bateman said in a press statement. "Horticultural Therapy is a time-proven practice dating back centuries that;s helped countless people from children to seniors to veterans to those with special needs. I hope this week in March will now be filled with many events highlighting the importance and value of horticultural therapy."

I asked Gholston if he could draw a parallel between his football career and mental health.

"In football, just as with any occupation, a good bill of mental health and a strong support system is necessary to handle the sometime tough demands," he said. "This can be even more critical in a sport such as football, where the physical, mental and emotional state can shift within a blink of an eye. So many times we see and hear about the mental meltdowns or physical blow ups that happen within or after a game. And these are just the ones publicized. There are so many components to being involved with football. Being equipped to manage, or cope with the highs and lows of these components can be the difference between success, or downfall. For example, there has been numerous players clinically diagnosed with a mental health disease while playing football. But with proper management and a good support system they have gone on to have a lot of success within the sport."

He added: "Our approach to innovative services in treatment are inclusive and unwavering in order to allow people the opportunity to begin Anew. The issue of insurance and coverage for mental health will continue to grow. I am committed to defending the line on this very important issue."

For information about Anew Wellness at 270 Davidson Ave. in the Somerset section of Franklin, contact Candice Deglon at 732-328-2639, or email [c.deglon@anewmenj.com](mailto:c.deglon@anewmenj.com)

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