



Atlantic Health leading the way in healing arts

Laura DePrado, Final Touch Plantscaping, L.L.C. 12:00 p.m. ET June 19, 2017

Incorporating nature as a partner in creative/expressive arts therapy practices for health and well-being is a growing phenomenon. Creative/expressive arts practices such as art therapy, music therapy and horticultural therapy, are earning a place in treatment and one health system in New Jersey is leading the way in its application in the rapidly changing health care landscape in the state and across the nation.

Atlantic Health System has introduced new programs to enrich the working experience and provide cutting edge resources that allow employees to enhance their careers and maintain a vibrant work life.



Horticultural Therapy with Laura DePrado, Registered Horticultural Therapist of Final Touch Plantscaping LLC, was launched earlier this year. (Photo: ~Courtesy of Laura DePrado)

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Atlantic Health System includes nearly 16,000 employees across the Atlantic Medical Group network of 900 physicians and multispecialty providers, five medical centers, rehabilitation and urgent care, and one of the largest Accountable Care Organizations in the nation. It is recognized among Fortune's "100 Best Companies to Work For."

The arts are an essential component to health, healing and well-being. Atlantic Health System is leading the way in the growing integration of arts and health in New Jersey. This includes an arts and health partnership launched in 2013 with Montclair State University. I learned of the Healing Arts Program launched in 2014 through the Somerset County Business Partnership Second Annual Workplace Health and Wellness Expo.



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My company's exhibit of horticultural therapy was placed right next to Atlantic Health.

Manager of Healing Arts Maria Regina Lupo, a registered art therapist for Atlantic Health System said, "Engaging in the arts relieves stress and builds community in a group setting and nature offers the same benefits as practiced in Horticultural Therapy especially in a nurturing environment. Horticultural Therapy was a natural fit to our Healing Arts Program. It follows in the tradition of the creative arts therapies, since both foster growth and strive to enhance well-being through stress reduction as they tap into ones' creativity.

"Patients and people do better when they see nature and engage in purposeful and meaningful activities," she added. "It is the process of that engagement that draws the benefit and the journey. Success is measured in

engagement of the participants. When you have a wait list for workshops in Horticultural Therapy, you know you have hit on something that uses nature and growth of plants in a healing environment.”

Horticultural therapy is the time-proven practice of utilizing the therapeutic benefits of working in a peaceful garden environment and using horticulture as modality to improve quality of life. It is practiced through social, vocational and therapeutic programs and successfully empowers individual to achieve their maximum independence providing a wide range of benefits to people of all ages in rehabilitative, health care, and residential settings, in addition to its valuable, indirect benefit of encouraging the designation and creation of public and community gardens.

New Jersey is the first in the nation to formally designate Horticultural Therapy Week, established by Congress in 2006 to celebrate the endless benefits of connecting people and plants.

Nature and plant life cycles have built-in and unending benefit to people. Horticultural Therapy brings dignity and enhanced skills through vocational, social and therapeutic programs and successfully enables and empowers individuals to achieve their maximum independence. Concepts like nurturing, responsibility, the importance of strong "roots" and the value of rejuvenation are emphasized.

“Growing a garden and working with plants provides many benefits to people, such as physical activity, focusing on a task and a sense of accomplishment,” New Jersey Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher said. “The department fully recognizes and supports the diverse settings in which horticultural therapy is utilized and the important connection it has to our Jersey Grown plants, flowers, shrubs and other decorative farm products.”

Horticultural Therapy takes place at Atlantic Health System’s Mt. Kemble Creative Open Studio in Atlantic Rehabilitation on Mt. Kemble Avenue in Morristown. It is free to the public.

Creative Open Studio started in October 2015 and it is a model of necessity in the healing arts because it bridges the gap in offering programs for people with limited physical ability, people seeking well-being, people who are curious, artists, and keeping employees healthy by facilitating employee self-care.

“The initial plan for horticultural therapy was two workshops. The response was overwhelming,” according to Lupo. “This is something to expand upon to become larger within our Healing Arts Program ... that we look to nature and horticultural therapy as a healing modality. Nature has so much to offer.”

Healing Arts offers more than 30 programs and events for patients, staff, family and community members reaching over 8,000 people annually. A sample of departments and patient groups Healing Arts works with include Alzheimer’s, Autism, Behavioral Health, Bereavement and Hospice, Cardiology, Chronic Pain and Chronic Illness, Community Health, Oncology, Pediatrics, Parkinson’s, Emergency Department, Stroke and Employee Wellness.

“The success of the Atlantic Health System/Final Touch Plantscaping LLC collaboration is due to the opportunity offered by the Somerset County Business Partnership Wellness Expo,” Somerset County Business Partnership President and CEO Mike Kerwin said. “This is an example of a connection made that is not only beneficial for our member businesses but to serve to improve the quality of life in our communities.”

For information call 973-660-3544, visit www.atlantichealth.org/healingarts or email healing_arts@atlantichealth.org.

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