



Horticultural therapy program at Somerset Adult Day Center celebrates anniversary
Laura DePrado, Correspondent Published 12:00 p.m. ET Sept. 18, 2017



Three years ago this month the Horticultural Therapy program at the Adult Day Center (ADC) of Somerset County in Bridgewater was introduced. ~Courtesy of the Adult Day Center of Somerset County

Three years ago this month, the horticultural therapy program at the Adult Day Center (ADC) of Somerset County in Bridgewater was introduced.

The program was named "Horticultural Connections" by the members of the nonprofit agency committed to providing affordable day services for disabled and elderly residents of Somerset County. Through the seasons members, caregivers, staff, students and volunteers plant, connect, and benefit from the hands-on activities using materials from New Jersey growers.

The programs' overall successes in the seasons of autumn, winter, spring and summer have progressed from individual activities to include team and group activities where up to 22 participants with various abilities grow plants and green fingers together under my direction with the dedicated, passionate team from the ADC.

It was also three years ago that Gannett New Jersey invited me to author a column about horticultural therapy to bring exposure and awareness to the viable field. The exposure of Horticultural Connections and horticultural therapy through this media shines the sun on the benefits to people through the process of connecting with plants in purposeful and meaningful activities.



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New Jersey is the first state in the nation to designate the third week of March as "Horticultural Therapy Week." On behalf of the ADC and myself, thank you Paul Grzella and Gannett for the exposure, and thank you Sen. Christopher "Kip" Bateman for advancing the legislation.

As the population of older adults grows, more individuals face the risk of experiencing a dementia-related illness. Many families turn to adult day service programs like the ADC, or find themselves in need of residential care provided by an assisted living or nursing home. Horticultural therapy is appropriate for dementia care programs serving adults with a wide range of cognitive, physical, and social needs, and it should be considered as a viable alternative to more typical dementia care program activities.



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Horticultural therapy is used across the lifespan for individuals with a range of physical, social, and cognitive abilities. Older adults make up a large group of participants in horticultural activities.

Horticultural therapists are trained to use plants and the cycles of nature to teach and influence life skills and explain and implement social and psychological concepts like nurturing, responsibility, the importance of strong “roots,” as well as the value of rejuvenation.

“All of our activities are designed to give a sense of purpose to our members,” ADC Executive Director Diann Robinson said. “The Horticultural Connections projects do exactly that. Members create products they can share with the loved ones at home and grow flowers and vegetables they can harvest and share with fellow members. We are pleased with the outcomes of our program and look forward to many more years of this collaboration.”



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ADC member Louise Mazzariello enjoys horticultural connections because she loves to garden and it makes her think of her home where she has a fish pond and huge vegetable and flower garden. If she can't be there during the day, she is happy to be busy with plants while she is at the ADC.

Over the past three years support and visitors to Horticultural Connections include the Secretary of Agriculture Douglas H. Fisher, Senator Bateman, Somerset County Board of Chosen Freeholders, The New Road School, The Grotta Fund, CareOne, Peapack-Gladstone Bank, Provident Bank Foundation, Middle Earth, New Jersey Nursery and Landscape Association, Somerset County Board of Agriculture.

“Community Connections through Horticultural Therapy” is the theme of the 2017 Annual Conference of the American Horticultural Therapy Association in Burlington, Vermont, this month. Hosted by the Northeast Horticultural Therapy Network, the conference will bring together attendees from around the world including myself.

To learn more about the ADC and Horticultural Therapy program, or to become a volunteer or donor, contact Hilary Kruchowy at hkruchowy@aduldaycenter.org or 908-725-0068.