

Nature's Edge Therapy Center

Christmas 2020

Dear Friends,

As I write this letter I wonder how many thoughts and memories each of you have of this 2020 year.



At Nature's Edge, we started 2020 with hopes for a productive, fulfilling year, beginning with our *Evening in Elegance Gala*. This event is our major fundraiser and involves a great deal of time and effort, and although it occurred this year on less than an ideal weather day it was still successful, thanks to each of you!

Then we learned of the start of Covid-19, and this soon engulfed my thoughts and concerns completely. March 17 specifically is the day I recall our schools going virtual and the start of our efforts at Nature's Edge to try to ensure that we could employ practices that would allow us to consistently see our patients and families at our setting. We closed briefly for two weeks to ensure proper cleaning and that PPE would be readily accessible.

With our school districts and outpatient pediatric clinics closing, our families had to learn a new way of living, with their children home all day trying to learn curriculum virtually. Often our parents have multiple children in a variety of grades. Some of our patients had already been struggling in school while trying to maintain effective parent and sibling interactions at home, and this new situation definitely began to impact them in a negative way. We knew our parents and families were challenged by tight quarters of living space, limited internet stability, and sometimes limited training for teaching.



In this new environment, our families were grateful for the calming setting provided by our ranch. Our welcoming, nonjudgmental animals promote communication, direction-following and cooperation. A 65-acre ranch provides plenty of opportunities for social distancing, including a forest with trails, a trout stream and a pond, and we try to conduct therapy outdoors whenever we can. When therapy must move indoors we follow strict mask and social distancing protocols.

We have been honored to be able to continue to provide therapy to all of our patients and families this year despite the challenges and will continue to do so, either in person or virtually via Zoom for those families unable to attend our therapy onsite. We will also continue to provide patient/family care to anyone regardless of their financial situation.

Unfortunately, though, we have been unable to conduct any onsite fundraising this year. In view of the continuing uncertainty, our board has agreed that for the safety and well-being of all, there will be no *Evening in Elegance* in 2021. We ask those of you who have attended and would otherwise attend or donate to our *Evening in Elegance* if you could possibly help us fill the financial void that will result.

So as we look back on 2020, we see a year that in many ways we will be happy to leave behind, but one that has also brought some unforeseen rewards. Please read on to learn about some of the many positive things that have happened at Nature's Edge this year!

May you all have a safe, healthy and joyful Christmas Season!



Becky L. Payne MATCCC/SLP/HPCS - Director

2020 at Nature's Edge

January- The year got off to a great start with another successful *Evening in Elegance* Gala. Sadly, there will be no *Evening in Elegance* in 2021, but we look forward to seeing you all when it returns in 2022!



April- We enthusiastically welcomed two new members to our staff. *Catherine Raj*, Occupational Therapist, is a 2019 graduate of the University of Mary Master of Occupational Therapy Program in Bismarck, North Dakota. Catherine has quickly settled in and taken on a full schedule of patients. *Everett Harder* joined us with a degree in Landscape and Architecture and is our full-time Facilities Supervisor. He's worked magic with our gardens and grounds and has helped us expand our Horticulture Therapy program.



May- This month brought two more exciting additions to the Nature's Edge family...and this time they are four-legged! *Dee*, age 12, and her son, *Sonny*, age 7, are both registered Icelandic Horses. Dee has already stepped into therapy mode, and Sonny will join her after undergoing further training. Dee and Sonny were generously donated by Wanda Ducommun.



SUMMER. . .

... and Nature's Edge has never looked better! The vegetable community garden flourished with a variety of lettuce, tomatoes and peppers. We added green beans, beets, squash and pumpkins as well. Our tire planters and the flower beds near and around the barn were abloom, as was the very beautiful Memory Hill, which honors our animals that have passed on. Our butterfly garden allowed us to explore our senses - smell the diverse herbs, touch a variety of plant life and appreciate colors galore. Our patients LOVE our horticulture as part of Occupational and Speech Therapy for language expansion, sensory experiences and exploring new and different tastes!



We hosted three groups for our popular "Reminiscing on the Farm," through which seniors from area respite, assisted living and developmental health programs come to visit us for an afternoon. Interacting at the ranch with our animals brings back memories of farm experiences or recollections of pets and always results in lots of stories and laughter.

Our series of outdoor Social Skills Groups, one for ages 7-12 and the other for ages 13-18, enabled participants to use our beautiful summer days to unplug from technology and learn how to interact with their peers through team work and effective communication skills.



August- We were gratified to be once again awarded a matching grant from the Rice Lake Community Health Foundation (RLCHF) to provide therapy scholarships for our patients in need. RLCHF will match donations up to \$20,000 at the rate of 1.5 times. Not only that, but another private foundation will equal RLCHF's match! Please call us or see our website for further information on how you can help us "max out" these two generous grants!



September- Nature's Edge earned a spot on GreatNonprofit's 2020 Top-Rated List, thanks to the inspiring stories our community has shared about our work. You can read our stories at greatnonprofits.org.

Best of all, throughout the year we continued to provide our regular therapy services to our patients and their families despite the pandemic, offering much-needed respite to parents -- and giving kids a chance to be kids!



A YEAR OF CHALLENGES...AND ACCOMPLISHMENTS!



VOLUNTEER SPOTLIGHT - Tom Fankhauser

Tom Fankhauser has been a part of Nature's Edge Therapy Center for the past 15 years or so. We first met Tom as our grader to assist in the maintenance of our driveway. As many of you know, our driveway can be a beast to drive on. It washes away easily with rain and floods near our bridge. Tom also has helped us move dirt and remove manure as it piles near the barn. For the past two years, our patients have relied on Tom's kindness and caring attitude as he has assisted us with sidewalking in hippotherapy. Tom, aka "grandpa," is in excellent health and is TALL, so that helps us use every horse with any patient for therapy!



We appreciate all our volunteers, but this Christmas we spotlight Tom for his ongoing dedication in a multitude of venues, helping us grow Nature's Edge.

IN LOVING MEMORY



We recently had to say 'goodbye' to a dear friend and former patient of Nature's Edge. Gene Cater passed away on August 21 due to Huntington's Disease. Gene was a patient for Occupational and Speech Therapy for three years. His family also was very involved. He loved our staff as we loved him! He especially enjoyed working with Tom, our volunteer, and Simba, the horse that assisted in his freedom to have better mobility. Gene, we will miss you immensely.

"Nature's Edge Therapy Center is an amazing organization with caring and knowledgeable staff... Even though it was about an hour drive one way, every visit was worth it for the smile my dad would get! Nature's Edge changed our lives for the better. My family now fosters a rescue horse, Phoenix. We are forever grateful to have Nature's Edge in our lives!" -- Sarah Cater, Gene's daughter



"The ranch is an amazing place, it helped my son out greatly with his behavioral problems, social interactions, along with physical. When the Covid pandemic hit with my family size it was hard to do in person sessions and keep social distance at same time without a lot of bodies around. The ranch out at Nature's Edge is splendidly big enough to do outside sessions or inside and use of wifi on tablets. I worked with different options for my son to get his therapy sessions in and I can honestly say the best way was in person and working with the animals out there on the ranch! I am truly glad my son had help from Nature's Edge; without them he wouldn't have progressed like he did. Thank you Becky and the other staff we are so grateful for all your help and everything you have done. We are forever blessed for Nature's Edge."

— Tabitha, Constantine's mom



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