

news

FALL 2012



Jennifer Childress of the College of Saint Rose and Anthony Jackson, 15, build supports for pole bean plants in the new garden.



In memory of Sarah Lambeth Blabey Rossi

Food for Body and Soul Grows in the Equinox Garden

Vegetables and artwork bloom side by side

A late summer visit to the new Equinox garden behind the Equinox House for Youth (EHY) on Ferry Street revealed not only flourishing plants, but also flourishing creativity. Near the entrance, a whale, covered in grass seed, emerged from the ground as though breaching for air. And at the other end of the garden, was the elongated bright orange “Straw Man” (see page 4).

The whimsical sculptures were the products of an art camp that has been offered to Equinox teens at the College of Saint Rose for the past seven summers.

“Each year, my new Art Education graduate students run the camp,” said Jennifer Childress, associate professor of art education at the College. “We’ve made all kinds of artworks each year,

from portraits to small vehicles to sound-suits to community planning. This summer several of the teens designed and, with the assistance of the grad students, created the two large sculptures for our garden project.”

“I believe any time we can allow kids to express themselves artistically or creatively it’s good,” said Clenard Killikelly, Equinox Youth Outreach Director who championed the development of the garden. “That is what this camp does. It provides them with opportunities to express themselves, to try new things, to go places that they may not have gone before.”

Ms. Childress, an avid gardener, was excited about the chance to incorporate student artwork into the garden and

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CEO's Message



Dear Friends,

Autumn has brought us the chance to celebrate both new ventures and cherished traditions. The dedication of the Sarah Lambeth Blabey Rossi Garden at the Equinox House for Youth was an especially meaningful event. The Equinox family thanks Susan and David Blabey for supporting the garden project. We are honored to be the stewards of this living memorial to their beloved daughter.

The garden's growth has become a wonderful symbol of the growth of our new organization. Staff members from every department, often working alongside teen clients, have been involved in building and planting, weeding and harvesting. Organizationally, the fruits of our labor mean an Equinox that is providing enhanced services to all of our clients. In the new garden, the result is a connection to nature and nutritious food for the urban youth we serve. The garden also embodies our commitment to treating our clients with respect by creating a warm and welcoming place for them.

Preparations are well underway for the 2012 Annual Equinox Thanksgiving Day Community Dinner. We are grateful to all the volunteers, many of whom are already hard at work taking care of the countless details that make this mammoth undertaking possible. We are deeply appreciative of the ongoing partnerships with the NYS Office of General Services (OGS) and the First Presbyterian Church in Albany. OGS allows us, for almost a week, to use their kitchens and storage facilities in the Empire State Plaza, where all the food is prepared, and the Church offers a beautiful dining space for the sit-down dinner. A huge thank you to Price Chopper for again generously donating close to 850 turkeys and for partnering with us on Project Soup, which extends our ability to feed those in need after the holiday. Please consider being a part of this important community tradition! To make a donation, volunteer, or order a meal delivered, call the hotline – 518.434.0131 – open now through Thanksgiving Day.

Dorothy S. Cucinelli

Dorothy S. Cucinelli, PhD

Great Shopping, Great Opportunities ... Great Finds!

Whether it's training volunteers, designing window displays, or engaging customers, Susan Taylor seeks to create a "positive energy" throughout GreatFinds, Equinox's award-winning thrift boutique that she manages. One need only step inside the bright and attractive store to see that she has achieved that – and so much more.

Located on Washington Avenue in downtown Albany, GreatFinds – formerly a ClearView Center program – offers high-quality, gently used clothing and accessories for women in a stylish and welcoming atmosphere. More importantly, it provides hands-on job training for Equinox clients, a source of revenue for Equinox programs, and free clothing for women in need.

GreatFinds Manager Susan Taylor in front of the boutique with volunteers Nancy, center, and Helen.



"I wore shorts to work once," said Nancy, Helen's roommate and co-worker. "Now I know I shouldn't have done that, so I didn't do it again. This job is better than being in the workshop where I used to work. I love working here. I've worked here about five years. Sue is the best supervisor I ever had."

The volunteers learn business practices, how to price merchandise, rotate seasonal inventories, create displays, handle customer requests and more.

"Working here helps volunteers feel successful. One of the benefits is that they can't focus on their illness here. I feel so strongly about the opportunities here. The work ethic piece is so beneficial," said Susan.

Volunteer Helen works the cash register at GreatFinds.



Creating positive energy and a positive shopping experience for customers requires a well-trained staff. Susan works hard to ensure that the volunteer staff – many of whom are clients of Equinox mental health programs – have the appropriate "soft skills" to be successful.

"We look at 'What do you need to be able to work?' It's a different way of being, and we coach volunteers on those sorts of skills and on handling personal issues," said Susan. "These things are a challenge for some of our volunteers."

Helen, a redhead with a winning smile, has volunteered at GreatFinds for about two years. "We learned a lot of skills about what's appropriate to talk to customers about, how to set boundaries and what's appropriate to wear. People ask me why I want to work if I don't get paid. But I *do* get paid – just not with money. I enjoy working here!"

For Helen, her experience at GreatFinds has been profound. "I was in CDPC for seven years, and I trained people at their thrift shop. But here I get to interact with people more. I've grown so much. It's going on four years that I've been out of the hospital, and I think a lot of that is from working here. About having responsibility and having something to look forward to. If I have an urge to do old behaviors, I think 'Who will run the register if I'm not here?'"

GreatFinds depends entirely on generous donations from individuals and organizations. "But I started by treating it as a store – not a thrift store," said Susan who was a vocational training manager at ClearView Center before coming to GreatFinds six years ago. "Customers come in not knowing it's a program, which was a goal. They're expecting to come in and shop and have an enjoyable experience, and that's what we give them."

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Building an Independent Future

Verizon Wireless Grant funds entrepreneurial training for domestic violence survivors

When Sovaira Mall fled an abusive husband in 2011, one of the few possessions she arrived with at Equinox was her camera. A talented photographer, Sovaira had worked in her former husband's photography business, but had no business training of her own.

Today, with the help of Equinox and a grant from Verizon Wireless, Sovaira is turning her love of photography into a small business. "I never thought I'd be able to have a business on my own. Now I can see myself having a business and being a professional photographer." (The photos below were taken by Sovaira.)

Equinox, in partnership with Hudson Valley Community College, received a \$100,000 grant from Verizon Wireless to help domestic violence survivors like Sovaira take a significant step toward self-sufficiency and financial stability.

Chair James Williams. At the session's completion, every student had a written business proposal to help them start or expand a small or home-based business.

"The class was awesome. Everyone looked forward to it. J.J. [Mr. Williams] was great," said Sovaira. "He really encouraged us to have an idea and to go with it. We learned that you don't really need a lot of money at the beginning. You can start small."

Equinox provides the grant management, recruitment and overall support to participants, such as ongoing counseling and assisting with child care and transportation arrangements. "We work to make sure that participants do not have significant barriers as they move toward their entrepreneurial goals," said Maribel Jerominek,



Ahmed, the son of one of Sovaira's friends, enjoying Albany's Washington Park, July 2011. *Photo by Sovaira Mall.*



Men fixing a rickshaw (cab) in Lahore Pakistan, 2008. *Photo by Sovaira Mall.*

The Verizon Wireless Domestic Violence Entrepreneurship Program provides funds to help survivors get a small or home business up and running.

The Verizon program is built on the belief that successfully building a small or home business can bring increased control over survivors' working lives, create important financial and social opportunities, and help ensure their long-term safety and stability.

To provide training in entrepreneurship and small business development, Equinox partnered with HVCC's Workforce Development Institute, which offered three 8-week sessions with classes meeting twice a week. The first session was attended by nine survivors and was taught by HVCC Accounting and Marketing Department

Equinox Transitional Housing and Entrepreneurial Program Project Supervisor. "We work to clear their path."

One of the challenges Sovaira faced early on was the need to upgrade her photography equipment. Maribel is helping her explore funding sources from the community as well as her eligibility for an individual Verizon grant specifically created to help participants with such expenses. In the meantime, Sovaira was able to borrow the body of a camera to use with her own lens from a professional photographer she currently works with. "The entrepreneurial training is helping participants find creative solutions to obstacles," noted Maribel.

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Art in The Equinox Garden



THE GREEN WHALE

The whale sculpture was made of mounded earth, covered with chicken wire and burlap, with plastic pipe and perennial grass for a spout. Next year, it will have flowering mounds of blue and white all around to represent waves, and mosaic tiles will complete the spout and eyes. Michael Harris was the student design leader of the whale.

THE ERSATZ FISHERMAN'S SWING

Devaney Jiminez, 18, an award-winning artist, created the Ersatz Fisherman's Swing (aka the "Straw Man") with assistance from Anthony Jackson. The scarecrow-type man was formed from chicken wire, stuffed with straw, given a can head and athletic shoes, then spray-painted fluorescent orange. When placed high in a tree, he can provide homes and nesting material for the garden's birds. The line from his fishing pole will hang down to a beautifully painted Adirondack chair swing that will hang under the shade of the garden's corner tree.



MEMORIAL GIFTS TO EQUINOX

We are grateful to the generous individuals who recently made a gift to Equinox in memory of those listed below.

Eleanor Abeytia
Phyllis Almy-Cowley
Rudolph C. Bechand
Sarah Lambeth Blabey Rossi
David Chalmers
Bonnie Cohen's Father
Matthew Furlani
Eleanor Hedderman
Mary Lounello
Courtnae Magee
Judge Raymond Marinelli
Claire Plattner
Michael D. Schrock
Jennie Stefanik
James A. Stewart

For a complete listing of the donors who made these donations, please visit www.equinoxinc.org

If you are interested in making a memorial gift, or a gift to honor someone or mark a special occasion, please contact Development & Community Relations at 518.434.6135.

FOOD FOR BODY & SOUL continued from page 1

obtained a \$4,000 Scholars and Artists Grant from The College of Saint Rose to help with the research, planning and start-up of "Food for Body and Soul."

"I've been gardening organically for many years, and find growing food for others to be very satisfying, and organizing beautiful settings with plants and flowers to be necessary for my soul," said Ms. Childress. "It's a kind of living sculpture. I wanted to share that with the Equinox kids. But it was a very unformed idea until I heard Clenard discussing his desire to do something similar."

The vision for the garden came to fruition when former board and staff member Susan Blabey and her husband David stepped in with a special gift. The Blabey's designated the garden project to receive \$10,000 of the donations made to Equinox in memory of their daughter Sarah Lambeth Blabey Rossi. The garden was dedicated in Sarah's memory in a ceremony on October 3. The remainder of the memorial funds will be used to award an annual \$1,000 scholarship for higher education to an Equinox teen for the next six years.

"We are deeply grateful to the Blabey's," said Equinox Board Chair Karen Asher. "Because of their support

and vision, we have been able to create a wonderful place that will nourish the bodies and spirits of Equinox teens for years to come."

Teen clients have been involved since the beginning. After the sunny, 2,500-square-foot spot was fenced in late spring, Equinox staff and teens built eight large raised beds connected by neat pathways, and planted a variety of vegetables and flowers – which they tended daily. Inaugural crops included tomatoes, eggplants, collard greens, mustard greens, squash, peppers, and basil.

"The garden is such a good opportunity for us to connect our youth clients with nature, to show them where food comes from, and to provide food – food for body and soul," said Clenard as he picked fresh rosemary that he would use that evening to season pork chops he was cooking for residents at Equinox House for Youth.

Future goals include cooking instruction for healthier eating, linking with local chefs, and participating in area farmers' markets. As the garden continues to grow and evolve, Clenard hopes it becomes a well-used place for Equinox staff to have meetings, bring clients, and reflect. "It's a beautiful space." ●

GreatFinds *continued from page 3*

Among the shop's many customers are some who are in the process of re-building their lives. Equinox gives GreatFinds vouchers for free clothing to nonprofit organizations that provide support to women in need and to those in its own programs – such as someone who has fled a violent domestic situation with only the clothes on her back. GreatFinds staff helps them find fashionable clothing as they move forward on their path to independence.

"Everyone's got a style!" noted Helen.

GreatFinds, located at the corner of Washington Ave. and Henry Johnson Blvd. in Albany, is open M-F, 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Donations of high-quality, gently worn women's clothing or accessories are appreciated. For more information, please call 518.449.7715. ●

GREATFINDS NAMED BEST IN AREA

Capital Region Living magazine named GreatFinds first place winner of "Best Bargain Shopping" in 2011 and third place in 2010.

"This cool thrift store with amazing window displays sells women's fashions ... vintage items, wedding dresses, accessories, shoes, even a few knickknacks and books."

– *Capital Region Living*, May 2011

Verizon Grants *continued from page 3*

"The students have been very happy about the services they've received from us and from the training program. Even those who had not worked with Equinox before want to continue working with us," she added.

A second eight-week training course began in mid-September and a third will be offered during the winter. Between 30-35 survivors are expected to benefit from the course. When the last group graduates, Equinox will have an event to give the budding entrepreneurs a chance to network with one another.

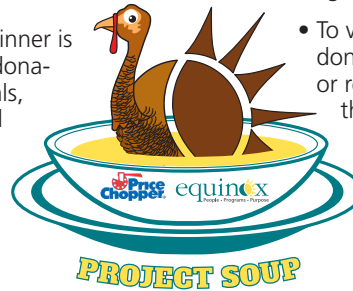
"Most of the clients referred to the entrepreneurial program are already involved with Equinox. But all of the students will continue to have counseling and support services from Equinox. The idea is to establish a network with the participants so they can share information and referrals," said Maribel, who provides case management to the clients in the program and also leads support groups in English and in Spanish.

The one-year grant ends in spring 2013. "Even if it's not renewed, we'll still try to help participants get what they need to realize their dreams of owning a small business." ●

ANNUAL equinox

Thanksgiving Day Community Dinner

- This year, volunteers will serve 500 dinners at First Presbyterian and deliver 9,000 to individuals and families who are homebound, lonely or in difficult circumstances.
- More than 3,600 volunteers will play a role in this cherished community tradition.
- The Thanksgiving Dinner is entirely funded by donations from individuals, groups, schools and businesses.
- **PROJECT SOUP**, a partnership between Equinox and Price Chopper, provides soup kitchens and food pantries with turkey and ham bones, vegetables and other ingredients to make soups and stews that will feed those in need beyond Thanksgiving.
- To volunteer, make a donation of cash or goods, or request a dinner, call the "T Day" Hotline – **518.434.0131**.



Equinox in the community



In September Chemical Dependency Counseling Center staff created a banner, marched and encouraged individuals to **be a hero** in their own recovery adventure.



Almost 150 people walked, ran or provided valuable information about mental health services at the *Race Away Stigma* event at HVCC in October.

HOW YOU CAN HELP!

- **Monetary Donations** may be mailed to Equinox, Development and Community Relations, 95 Central Ave., Albany, NY 12206; or made online at equinoxinc.org.
- **Honor or Memorial Gifts** to Equinox are a wonderful way to honor someone special, mark an important occasion or remember a loved one's legacy.
- **Hold a Drive** to collect frequently used items by clients of Equinox programs. These everyday items (e.g., personal care items, school supplies, gifts for the holidays) make a big difference to someone who needs them. Many area schools, congregations, friends and businesses hold drives for Equinox.
- **Donate Clothing to GreatFinds** (see "Great Shopping, Great Opportunities ... GreatFinds!" page 2). If you are interested in making a clothing donation or sponsoring a drive, contact the store's manager at 518.449.7715.
- **Donate Used Cell Phones**, which can be used by domestic violence victims to call 911 even without a cell phone plan or service.
- **Make a Planned Gift** of cash, real estate, stocks, bonds, personal property, or life insurance to leave a legacy that will help sustain the work of Equinox.

For more information about any of these giving options, please contact Development and Community Relations at 518.434.6135.

UPCOMING EVENTS

November 22 Annual Equinox Thanksgiving Day Community Dinner. Hotline open mid-October through Thanksgiving: **518.434.0131**

December Holiday Gift Drive. Join this annual effort and help make a brighter holiday for someone in need. Call today for more information.

May 3, 2013 Save the date for the 2013 Equinox Celestial Celebration at the beautiful Albany Country Club.

Call 518.434.6135, ext. 311 for information about any of our events.

EQUINOX WISH LIST

Equinox has an ongoing need for items for our clients. With your help, we can provide basic necessities and other modest comforts. If you would like to donate or have any questions, please visit equinoxinc.org.



Donate on line
www.equinoxinc.org



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