



The Virginia Thurston

Healing Garden Cancer Support Center

Providing education and therapeutic services to those affected by cancer

ANNUAL REPORT 2021-2022

ART & PHOTO BY RACHEL BENSON



6/2
healing garden

A message from **OUR LEADERSHIP**

Here at the Healing Garden, we know providing support to people living with cancer and their caregivers is at the heart of our work, whether opening the door or opening Zoom, we approach each interaction with kindness. While facing many changes this year, we remained focused on our core strength - care for our community of clients, volunteers, supporters, and staff.

Dear Healing Garden Friends,

We were excited to welcome clients back on-site for bodywork, programs, and support groups. It truly brings us joy when we hear the chatter and laughter from an Expressive Arts class participants working on their projects. It bolsters us when clients come to visit for the first time in two years with smiles and hugs. Creating moments of joy and connection through any format makes the Garden special.

While we are thrilled to see people at the Healing Garden, we know how important accessing our services virtually is to many clients. Since we've expanded our reach, we will continue to offer options to ease access for those who may not live close by, may not feel up to trekking to the Garden, or are squeezing in a class or group for relaxation or connection.

The Healing Garden is on a journey to finding a "new normal." While we experiment with formats and programs to improve how we serve our community, we know that care for our clients is unwavering. I am reassured that we continue to care for the Garden by donating talent and time through volunteerism, participating in efforts to raise critical funds, and working with our staff to co-create a vision for our future. The Healing Garden will continue welcoming clients back (safely) to the building and look forward to hosting the Annual Perennial Walk & Ride Celebration/Open House along with other exciting activities.

You have demonstrated that the Healing Garden is important to you and that you care - for our clients, providers, and all in our community. By strengthening your relationships and partnerships with us, the Healing Garden will continue to offer our clients the support they need. I want to thank each of you for continuing with us on this journey.

I hope to see you soon!

With care,
Kelly Marchand
Managing Director



Kelly Marchand, Managing Director

Spotlight on Healing Garden Client TRIS W.

Living on the Horizon: An Interview with Tris W.

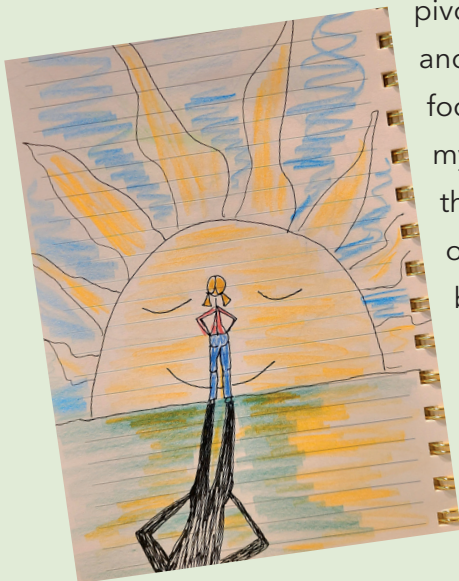
After surviving cancer 18 years ago, managing autoimmune diseases, and, most recently, two rare diseases, Tris W., an active Healing Garden client, claims she is now truly living her life. "I've realized I wasn't living before my cancer diagnosis. Cancer and chronic illness made me so much more aware of the joy and happiness I was missing out on," she says. Tris believes her health journey provides her with the skills and tools for dealing with life's challenges and how to live in the moment.



Before her cancer diagnosis, Tris lived an active and healthy lifestyle. She had a career as a professional interior designer, project architect, construction administrator, and part-owner and crew chief of a professional race car team. In 2005, after a year and a half of medical review, Tris received a final diagnosis of stage 4 non-Hodgkin's lymphoma. Post-treatment, she endured a six-month period of on-and-off paralysis from her chest down. She lived with medical reviews and tests for two years before doctors deemed her in full remission. In, 2008, her life returned to 'normal' once again; she began working and enjoying all her previous activities.

In addition to cancer, Tris manages two rare diseases, interstitial lung disease (ILD) and pulmonary arterial hypertension (PAH), as well as autoimmune diseases (Sjogren's, CREST, and Reynaud's). When diagnosed with ILD and PAH in November 2017, doctors told Tris, after her six month hospital stay, she had two years to live, but she remained optimistic, even though she knew survival was going to be an uphill battle. After navigating the medical system during her complex medical journeys, and all the changes that came with them, Tris learned to be a self-advocate, which also transferred to all other areas of her life.

Tris's health journey also initiated a strong spiritual connection to the universe and nature. She describes a pivotal moment when she realized she had a choice; she could either be bitter and unhappy, or she could choose joy and happiness. Tris happily chose to focus on the light rather than the dark. She says, "I can't explain it. I just knew my direction at that point. There was a level of acceptance. These are the cards that I have been dealt and I can't change or control that, but I do have control over my psychological wellbeing. I am alive in this moment, why not make the best of it?" She describes her current preferred way of being as "living on the horizon," a concept she explores in a Music and Imagery class at the Healing Garden. The drawing, which I did in the Music Therapy class, depicts me facing the sun resting on the horizon. My shadow/darkness is behind me. If I continue to go toward the Sun, it will always be right there on the horizon, timeless.



Tris finds her spark by engaging in various programs at the Healing Garden, helping advocate for patients battling similar medical journeys, creative writing, enjoying nature, patio visits with friends, and taking micro photos of plants and bees.

Participating in Healing Garden virtual programs is critical to Tris's wellbeing. Tris is very immunocompromised from treatments, in-person meetings and classes are not an option. The Music Therapy for Wellness program helped improve her breathing capacity through singing and breath work that were compromised by her limited lung function; the class also helps her to be more centered and relaxed. The Writing Your Way Through Cancer class

helped improve her handwriting skills, which had been compromised by her shaking hand. Tris is now an avid creative writer and hosts her own creative writing/storytelling group as well. Tris also was able to hone her drawing skills in the Art and Nature class, which combined Mindfulness practices and nature to create art from her experiences during class. The Healing Garden virtual classes and the participants were a lifeline for her during the pandemic, allowing Tris to participate without compromising her 'stabilized' health. She has established several very close friendships at the Healing Garden—friends she meets for 'patio visits' outside of organized classes.

Tris says what she loves most about the Healing Garden is how community is created through shared life experiences, creative

endeavors, and real and raw conversations about what it means to live a life alongside cancer and chronic illnesses. Tris said, "I don't know if Virginia Thurston had this in mind, but the name 'Healing Garden' implies growth; seeds are planted, weeds are removed. It's pruned, watered, and fed. It's an ecosystem of living and occasionally, sadly, dying, but there is replenishing that's always happening in the garden and there is a lot of beauty in this cycle." Tris says: "Everyone at the Healing Garden is an inspiration, especially those who fought so hard to stay with us. Each week I'm always looking forward to seeing everyone's smiling and hearing their laughter. The Healing Garden is a place I can just be me."





Spotlight on Advisory Council Member **IRIS BARTEN**

My journey with the Healing Garden is rooted in relationships. Planting the first seeds twenty years ago, I supported several neighbors who participated in the annual walk by honoring my mom and aunt who survived breast cancer. I valued The Garden's open-heartedness and I decided to continue connecting with the organization because I felt a mutual connection. I saw their genuine caring expressed in many ways and most especially in the unique quality of the integrative services offered by dedicated clinicians and other staff. In the spring of 2016 after I completed treatment for pancreatic cancer, I decided to expand my relationship with The Garden and I became a client. With gratitude, I crossed that threshold. I appreciated the opportunity to be with other individuals who were also on a fruitful path, seeing cancer in our lives as a way to cultivate even more life-affirming qualities. As a counselor by profession, I resonate with the Garden's therapeutic offerings that feel right with who I am and my values. I support The Virginia Thurston Healing Garden as fertile ground for life to unfold as each of us nurtures our seeds of growth and goodness in community.

With Appreciation



In April, after more than 10 years of hard work and dedicated service as our Executive Director, Margaret Koch retired. Meg made many outstanding contributions to the Healing Garden.

Some of the positive changes under her leadership included: expanding therapeutic programs and services along with staff to support those services, eliminating the organization's debt, creating the Hindle Family Giving Society, establishing multiple endowment funds, growing, and nurturing relationships within the broader Healing Garden community, and transitioning to virtual operations swiftly and successfully in response to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The board joins me in expressing gratitude to Meg for her years of service and for the difference her work made in the lives of our clients.

David Martin
Board Chair

Spotlight on Healing Garden Supporter

PAM SAWYER

A Desire to Give

Over 20 years ago, Pamela Sawyer saw a local flyer advertising a plant sale. An avid gardener, she was in search of large pots for her garden and planned to check it out the following weekend. Saturday morning, she set out from her home, in Acton, to the neighboring town of Harvard - her green thumb leading the way. She saw a sign for The Healing Garden and figured this must be the place.

Pam didn't find the plant sale or her pots - but she found Betsy Tyson-Smith, the co-founder of the Garden. After Ginny Thurston died in 1999, her husband Bill approached Betsy to help him create an entity in her memory that would benefit others with breast cancer.

Out of his request emerged the Virginia Thurston Healing Garden, with its mission to "provide a community of support for women experiencing breast cancer without financial barriers." The Healing Garden opened in May 2001.

As Betsy explained what the Healing Garden did, Pam realized this was where her friend Ellen received support. Ellen was battling breast cancer. Together Pam and Betsy walked the grounds and watched the mice scurry about in the corner of "Ginny's Little Cottage." Pam left with a closing comment of "If you need anything, give me a call." Three months later she was on

the Board.

Through the years, Pam volunteered her time and talent to all areas of the Healing Garden organization - from Board leadership to being one of its most loyal philanthropic supporters. When asked what keeps her involved, she says "It has always been a safe haven for people and their families living with cancer. I have told many people, it's a place where you can cry, laugh, scream, sing or throw something and no one is going to stop you. It is a sanctuary where you are accepted unconditionally."

Pam was the Healing Garden's second Board chair and served from 2010-2018. One of her first actions was to ask the Board to open the Healing Garden doors to all people struggling with all types of cancer (*regardless of gender, race, or socio-economic status*). At the time, Pam received a colon cancer diagnosis, and realized that she was not eligible to use the services at of the Healing Garden. Special note: up until this time the Healing Garden only served women diagnosed with breast cancer. The Board unanimously agreed to open its doors, and this marked the first milestone of Pam's Board career.

In her youth, Pam learned philanthropy begins with a desire to give. It was instilled in her, and she passed it onto her children and grandchildren through community service, local leadership, and giving to organizations close to the heart. Deeply connected to the work of the Healing Garden



and its clients, Pam understands the need for supporters who can contribute to the Healing Garden. She brought supporters to the Garden through her friends and family. Pam ensured her friend Ellen's legacy would carry on when she passed, by helping Ellen's family direct a large gift of support to the Healing Garden. Pam is one of the Garden's strongest connectors and champions.

She steadfastly believes in our mission and the dedication of Board leadership and staff both past and present. As a cancer survivor herself, she knows that being medically treated is only half the

challenge to beating cancer. "The Healing Garden is not a hospital, no white coats, IVs, radiation equipment, it works with the medical side of clients' treatments focusing on everyday struggles of life, i.e., pain, self-image, stress, work, financial difficulties, housing, and family. I have said this many times, cancer does not discriminate it could care less if you are male, female, what color of the rainbow you are, who you love etc. - the Healing Garden's mission is to accept all and provide the care, guidance and help that people with cancer need."



Meet our **CLIENTS**

Every Client Has a Story. We are moved and inspired by the stories of the people who come to The Healing Garden.

"After receiving my cancer diagnosis, I was worried that my life would alter drastically. Turning for support to family was natural; however, it placed undue stress upon my relationship with my loved ones. Then I was referred to the Healing Garden, a place where I could share my odyssey with others and know that I was not alone. Most beneficial for me is individual cancer counseling, the men's group, and qigong exercises." - Dennis C.



In the short time I've been welcomed by and involved with the Healing Garden, the more I've been able to accomplish in gaining important information, and receiving support, that was timely and greatly needed for my healing. The various ways of offering support, whether by group Zoom meetings, or by attending the in-person Creative mindfulness classes, where you can actually forget your cancer symptoms for a few hours, has been so welcome and appreciated. A place where everyone there understands what this journey is like, and to get help with learning how to travel the various cancer treatment paths. I have sincere gratitude from my heart to all the staff, for their dedication and calming presence. -June L.



The Healing Garden staff continues to assist me even a year plus after my breast cancer surgery. Brianne was great, resourceful, and genuine. Meredith is kind, sweet, and very knowledgeable. She makes me feel important and validated. Meredith spoke with me about Unite for Her about three weeks ago. I have never heard of it. I contacted them. They responded promptly and sent me a box with resources and an amazing book about the light in me-us. I love the book and what they have to offer. I wish women wouldn't get cancer but if they do I want them to know about the Healing Garden and its mission and assistance. -Noemy V.

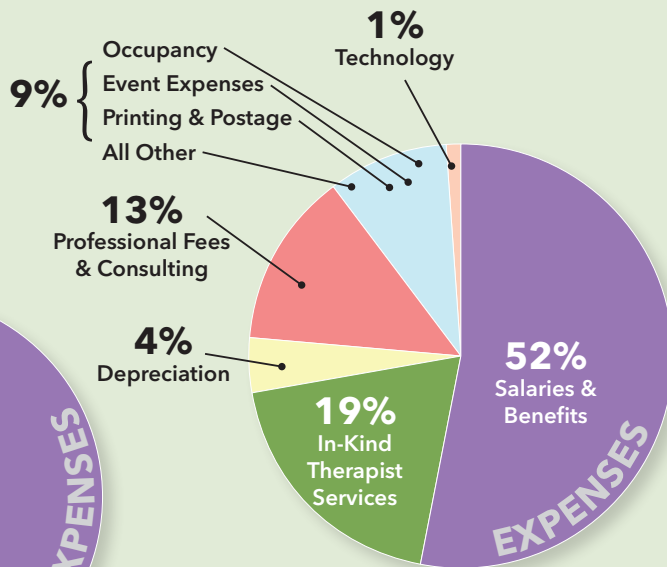
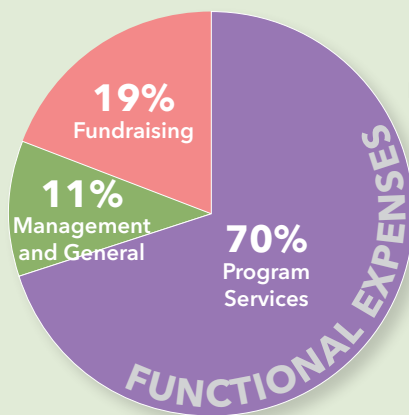
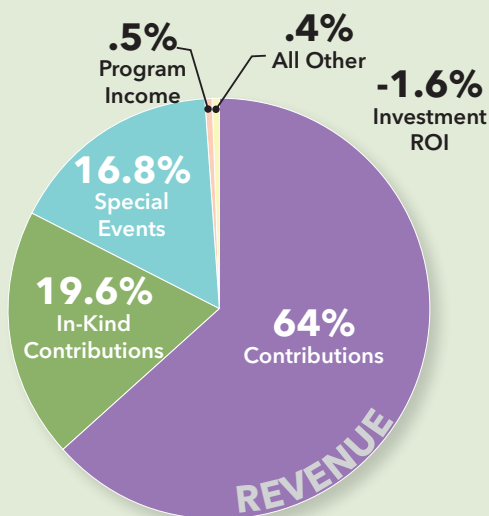


FY22

Our Financials

REVENUE \$1,012,554

EXPENSES \$830,626

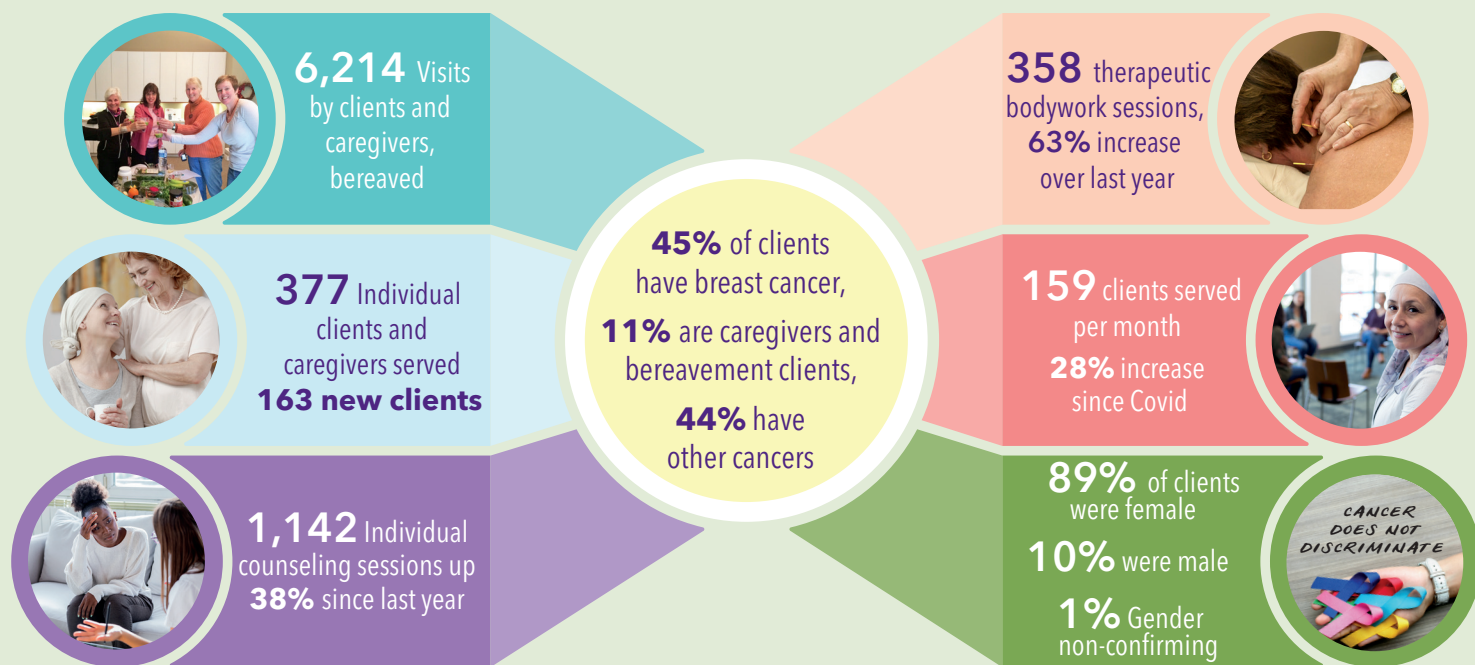


In FY22 The Healing Garden served over **377** clients from **6** states, **107** different towns, **99** in Massachusetts

Our overall reach:

Towns with ten or more households served

Acton	39	Concord	12
Arlington	17	Groton	11
Harvard	16	Sudbury	11
Stow	13	Bolton	10



OUR DONORS

On behalf of the clients we serve, we thank you all for helping to provide a unique community of compassionate understanding and support.

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The Healing Garden's Floral Leadership Giving Society recognizes those individuals and corporations who demonstrated extraordinary commitment to the Healing Garden through their accumulated gifts of \$1,000 and above.

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The Virginia Thurston

Healing Garden Cancer Support Center

Providing education and therapeutic services to those affected by cancer

145 Bolton Road | Harvard, MA 01451

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Spotlight on Healing Garden Volunteer

CHARLIE MAXWELL

Charlie Maxwell, Troop 32 Acton Eagle Scout selected the Healing Garden as a recipient of his service project. Charlie likes working with wood and his hands, and he enjoys being outdoors in nature. Yet, his connection to the Healing Garden began with his grandmother, Mary Maxwell. Mary went to the Healing Garden while recovering from breast cancer and chemotherapy. Charlie thought it would be a good way to tie his Eagle Scout project into something meaningful for his family, and also give back to an organization that helped them so much.

"The Garden gave me the freedom to build a structure that is high quality and well-designed. It is important to me, that this shed is around for many years to come, and is worry free," Charlie said. "I'm very happy with the quality of the project as well as how it has been received; it was a group effort and my friends and family made it enjoyable."

