

## Green Team' seeks to get plant life growing at hospital

Posted by Colin Merry on June 25th, 2019



### **Participants needed to help introduce horticulture therapy at Paul Oliver**

FRANKFORT — Green thumbs and willing hearts are needed to help a Paul Oliver Memorial Hospital “Green Team” introducing helpful horticulture therapy to the facility’s patients, visitors and staff.

“Horticulture Therapy is an evidenced-based program rooted in stress reduction theory,” said Kathy Pilon, an occupational therapist at the hospital and horticulture therapy program facilitator. “Interacting with the health care environment can be stressful, so the idea is to soften the environment through introducing plants, nature, and growing things, or even photos of nature, to help reduce stress and improve recovery.”

Pilon said sometimes patients struggling with dementia issues respond to sensory gardens that help trigger memories attached to the scents.

Pilon has more than 20 years of clinical experience as an occupational therapist, along with advanced certifications in hand therapy and horticulture therapy. She has engaged the Living & Rehab team, community organizations, and Paul Oliver residents to build this new program from the ground up.

The Green Team is open to residents, visitors, patients, staff and community members with an interest in the project. The team is working to create both outdoor and indoor gardens so the therapy can be used year-round. A three-tier lighted plant cart with grow lights is being acquired and the team hopes to work with master gardeners and garden clubs to learn techniques for different plants.

SEEDS Youth Conservation Program Director Jennifer Flynn said she learned of the project through Grow Benzie and sees it as an opportunity for high school Conservation Corps participants.

“As someone who has worked in eco-therapy, I couldn’t be more excited to incorporate the concept of horticultural therapy in our hands-on workforce training,” she said.

Benzie Central High School After School program students will help construct raised plant beds at the hospital. Most opportunities are volunteer, however some student jobs will be paid through a donation from the hospital.

As part of the paid opportunity, students learn to do light construction, such as making raised beds. They also work with public and private land partners to do ecological restoration, such as trail building and invasive species removal, and connect more deeply with their communities.

The hospital’s Green Team will make the decisions related to what plants and green tactics are used. “Whether we grow vegetables, a sensory, smelly garden, annuals, or perennials will be decided by this group,” Pilon said.

As the program develops, the Green Team hopes to give every person admitted to the hospital a plant as part of the welcome package. All residents, visitors, and staff are encouraged and welcomed to plant a seed and watch it grow. Seed trays are available and prepared in the common area of the Paul Oliver Living and Rehabilitation Center.