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# Green Readiness, Response, and Recovery: A Collaborative Synthesis

Forest Service Northern Research Station General Technical Report NRS-P-185

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## Abstract

A collection of case studies, interviews, and personal reflections inspired by a national workshop, *Green Readiness, Response, and Recovery: A Collaborative Synthesis* includes lessons learned from a diverse group of practitioners and researchers about the ways in which environmental stewardship has served as a catalyst for revitalizing communities. Its focus is on practical solutions from various sectors on how to best prepare for, respond to, and recover from disturbances. The book contains a wide range of examples, including social and environmental disturbances and disasters, urban and rural geographies, and various modes of action, from small nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) to government agencies. This volume is a shared endeavor by the USDA Forest Service and the TKF Foundation as they work to understand, cultivate, and celebrate the persistence of community, nature, and the human spirit.



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Cover: A young boy takes part in spring planting as residents and volunteers steward a community garden in Queens, New York. Photo by Giles Ashford, used with permission.

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# Green Readiness, Response, and Recovery: A Collaborative Synthesis

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Forest Service Northern Research Station General Technical Report NRS-P-185

# Foreword: Invaluable Resources

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Over the past 150 years, a blink of an eye in terms of human history, our experiences in relation to nature have changed radically in much of the world. Dramatic migration to cities—coupled with urban planning and design that emphasized gray over green infrastructure, inequality, and perhaps an overvaluing of technology—has led many people to be divorced from nature, with little access to nature's social and ecological benefits. At the same time, stress levels are rising. Though medicine has made incredible advances in recent decades, life spans that had for many years been lengthening are now contracting in some communities (Squires 2017). Our communities continue to face old and new challenges: some human-made, some natural, and often a mix of both—as with Hurricane Sandy in 2012 in the New York metropolitan area.

In the United States, we are quick to acknowledge the destructive power of nature. But our confidence in gray infrastructure and technology can also lead us to under-recognize nature's capacity to both address ecological challenges and heal and promote well-being. Greater investment in green and blue infrastructure—and the social mechanisms that can create and nurture them—has the potential to combat a host of personal, ecological, and societal challenges. But we must to act to increase this investment.

I think that what is often forgotten is the fact that we are a part of nature. Our need to connect with it is innate. When it's lost, we suffer. This is why, we at the TKF Foundation have worked for more than two decades to give people the opportunity to connect with nature; to restore this essential, sacred bond. A simple concept, yet wholly profound when exercised.

In addition to our involvement with the Landscapes of Resilience gardens, we have supported the creation of more than 130 meaningful greenspaces that comprise the Nature Sacred Network, places where individuals can pause in an organic setting; one designed to encourage moments of mindful reflection and feelings of peace and well-being. Most of these spaces reside in communities hard hit by poverty, despair, stress, and other persistent challenges, including prisons, hospitals, and underserved city neighborhoods—places where hope is needed most.

These projects vary in size and complexity, but what unites them in success is a unique formula we've honed over the years in partnership with people and places. It is an approach that is deeply rooted in the communities each project serves—tailored to reflect and celebrate the community's unique culture and values. From this source springs an authentic kind of pride: a restored sense of community and promise. Invaluable.

As we look to the future, it is our hope that we as a "community of communities" reimagine our cities and societies through a social-ecological lens. Small, nearby places of green infused into urban landscapes offer more than

**beauty. They serve to reorient us in powerful ways—offering a moment of solace; asking us to pause, reflect, and refocus. In today's frenetic world, that moment can change everything.**

## Literature Cited

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The content of this paper reflects the views of the author(s), who are responsible for the facts and accuracy of the information presented herein.

# Meaningful Nature Places: Experiencing Sacred in the Everyday

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## In the Beginning

Kitty and Tom Stoner traveled to London some years ago, but arrived too early to check into their hotel. Deciding to take a walk, they discovered a small park. The modest but beautiful garden was nestled within a ring of buildings near the city center, similar to spaces found in cities throughout the world.

The Stoners were enthralled by this simple place and chance encounter, and made follow-up visits. The space offered a comforting enclosure, and distinct entryways marked transition from a hectic streetscape to a quiet enclave. Informal paths encouraged movement throughout the space, while benches were comfortable places for visitors to rest and reflect. Bench plaques shared stories about generations of users, and how this place of safety and stillness was a destination across historic times of stress and destruction.

The epiphany may have had its origin in the altered state of jet lag, but the garden experience tapped deeper reckonings. The Stoner family has enjoyed a variety of nature outings and experiences, even seeking out wilderness in times of personal challenge. Meanwhile Tom, from his career in mass communications, had observed the emergence of new information technologies that make lives busier and people more isolated.

Philanthropic organizations hold a unique position in civic society. As start-ups they can address a perceived need, often preceding public awareness of an issue, and step out to define the concern and act. That remarkable green space in London prompted long discussions about nature, what is sacred and vital in life, and the need for contemplative spaces that are in everyday settings, and accessible to all.

Thus began a plan of action and founding of the TKF Foundation. After consulting with people representing many disciplines and communities, the Foundation's mission was articulated: to provide the opportunity for a deeper human experience by supporting and inspiring the creation of public green spaces that offer a temporary place of sanctuary, encourage reflection, provide solace, and engender peace.

> "A quiet place! My soul grows still. This is indeed a balm for the weary, a shelter for the beaten. I am so grateful for this quiet place. I am now renewed."
>
> —Western Correctional Institution, Cumberland, MD[3]

## Nature and Sacred

The family-based philanthropy supports mostly smaller, community-based outdoor spaces that offer solace to people experiencing a wide range of challenges and stressors (Figure 1). Described as Open Spaces Sacred

3. Quote taken from a garden visitors' journal. See page 274 for source description.

**Figure 1: One of more than 130 Open Spaces Sacred Spaces, created to offer a space of respite and contemplation.**
Photo by Len Spoden , used with permission.

Spaces (OSSPs), they are designed and built to involve local people and respond to local needs. "Open" means publicly accessible and without restrictions, so the gardens might benefit all in a community. The Foundation's programs align with belief in the human need for respite in nature, sometimes overlooked in the broader schemes of urban planning and city design.

> "This place is a midday antidote to phones and hard drives [and] flickering fluorescent light. I love the way the stems and branches lean out of their confined spaces, reaching every way at once. I love the way a flowering bush becomes a bouquet of butterflies and bees. I love how the boundary between earth and sky is not a straight line, marked instead by the individual curves of trees and leaves. I keep coming back for more."
>
> —Mount Washington Arboretum, Baltimore, MD[4]

A sense of the sacred within nearby nature experiences is fundamental. Public organizations often shape the spaces and character of communities, but discussions about the notion of the sacred are not common. Yet few other words aptly describe the qualities that make certain gardens and green spaces memorable and particularly satisfying. Sacred spaces are alluring, have a quality that

4. Quote taken from a garden visitors' journal. See page 274 for source description.

**Figure 2: Each of the gardens contains a bench, and a journal welcomes visitors to share their reflections.**

Photo by Len Spoden, used with permission.

inspires thoughtful introspection, and provide respite from the stresses of daily life.

> "People travel around the world looking for a place like this. I'm happy that I only have to travel around the block!"
>
> —Mount Washington Arboretum, Baltimore, MD

Across more than 20 years, the Foundation has partnered to create more than 130 OSSPs, mostly located within cities of the U.S. mid-Atlantic corridor (Stoner and Rapp 2008). They are at schools, hospitals, places of worship, prisons, office buildings, and within neighbourhoods. Many are proximate to places that harbor people who hurt, such as those grieving for loved ones, reconstructing life following trauma, or restarting after a major loss.

The spaces have been designed and constructed using participatory processes involving community members, design professionals, and foundation staff. Eligibility for funding is dependent on the commitment of a "Firesoul," an individual who is passionate about the garden's creation and facilitates all the moving parts. Every site includes a bench, providing a comfortable place to sit and relax (Figure 2). Tucked under the bench seat is a journal where visitors are invited to record their thoughts. The handwritten entries are periodically scanned and sent to the foundation's offices. This chapter includes a selection of these reflections, just a sample from thousands.

> "So much having to let go, let go. Hope I'll not have to let go of this sacred space too. True, all space is sacred, if we only knew, but we need spaces of retreat and special beauty like this to help us awaken to the sacred everywhere."
>
> —Whitman-Walker Clinic, Washington, D.C.

## The Experience Flow

Across the years and gardens, the Foundation began to recognize patterns of experiences. The staff read bench journal entries as they arrived, and books about the topics of spirituality and sacredness. They also reached out and interviewed civic leaders across the United States who have observed how people react when spending time in public gardens, and how the sacred can be expressed in everyday nature.

What was learned? It seems there is a progression of experiences; immediate reactions are followed by feelings that linger even after leaving the site. Details of these discoveries are found in "The Sacred & Nearby Nature in Cities" (Wolf and Housley 2016b), and are highlighted here:

## Design and Space

Certain physical traits and characteristics elicit a sense of heightened awareness and inner reflection. The terms used to describe physical space capture spatial perceptions that differ from most urban spaces (Table 1). An important aspect is a feeling of comfort or security, making it possible for one to let down one's guard, being mindful of the surroundings and loved ones, and nurturing one's thoughts.

## Sensory Encounters

These are perhaps the most direct and memorable experiences, the rare opportunity to be in the moment and enjoy the simplest pleasures that nature provides. Some reactions are physical, such as the sun's warmth, bird sounds, the change of seasons, or simply quiet. Other terms describe personal reactions, such as calm and peaceful. Others are about engagement, about being drawn into the character of the space, such as fascination and stimulating.

> "Gentle, peaceful breeze blows the cares away. Isn't it profound how nature can calm the spirit and refresh you? It is no wonder God created nature."
>
> —Mount Washington Arboretum, Baltimore, MD

> "The cool breezes blow against my tear-shed face, and my eyes will soon close. I shall let the sounds of the waterfall fill my soul, the bright colors of spring blooms chase away my blues for just a little while."
>
> —Garden of Little Angels, Franklin Square Hospital Center, Baltimore County, MD

## Experiences Within

Accompanying the appreciation of built form and associated sensations is a conscious awareness of a different frame of mind or mood from when one first entered the space. The visitor's experience morphs from a reaction to physical place to a broader mindfulness and introspection. Meditation, reflection, and contemplation are often part of the evolution within a sacred encounter.

> "Always a quiet and restful place, no matter what is happening around and inside me. Peace is in the air here. I breathe it in when I am here, and I can smell it in the wood of the bench."
>
> —St. Anthony of Padua Church, Falls Church, VA

> "This is a reservoir of peace in a busy world. It gives one the possibility to hear the spirit within."
>
> —Kids on the Hill Sculpture Park, Baltimore, MD

## Initial Restorative Affects

A shift to a contemplative mood is accompanied by a realization of benefit to mind and body. Many studies about nature and restorative experiences show that fairly brief encounters with outdoor spaces (just minutes actually) can reset a sense of satisfaction and boost mental function. While in the nature space, the visitor experiences a cleansing of mental clutter and body tenseness. One transitions to more calm, less stressed mental and physical states.

> "This is the most healing place I know...I listen to the trees say "shhhhhhh" and I trust the quietness. I feel my hair brush my face, and I realize how affected I am by things I can't even see, things greater than me."
>
> —Chesapeake Bay Foundation, Annapolis, MD

## Enduring Change

The restorative mood often continues after one leaves the space and re-enters the busyness of life. The effects of the sacred space experience are portable, and continue for some time beyond the direct encounter. Some people will "self-dose" with intentional experiences, seeking to set up a continuous flow of positive outcomes across multiple visits. While having the occasional, or a single sacred space in a community may be beneficial, having a system of such spaces is a valuable community asset (Wolf and Brinkley 2016).

> "I leave feeling more peaceful, refreshed, better than when I arrived. How thankful I am."
>
> —Thanksgiving Place, Washington, D.C.

> "I am going to believe in myself today and make something happen. It's time."
>
> —Garden at Cedar Hill, Washington, D.C.

## Community and Culture

Most sacred spaces also have a social dimension. This is expressed in two ways. First, sharing the experience with loved ones (friends, family, and appreciated neighbors) is important. Journal entries often express appreciation for the closest personal relationships. On another level, being part of a community of people (be they neighbors, or members of an organization) that work together to steward a site enhances the experience. Shared land care, celebrations, and recognitions are all joint experiences of place that promote greater social cohesion, and may facilitate interactions of people who may not normally engage with each other.

**Table 1. A Civic Sacred Vocabulary**

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| **refuge**<br>**compatible**<br>**comfort**<br>**safety & refuge**<br>**sense of place**<br>**sanctuary** | **quiet, intimate**<br>**sun shining** (brightness & warmth)<br>**sounds (wind, birds)**<br>**water coolness & sound**<br>**nature episodes** (spring bloom, bird return, fall color)<br>**alive** | **peaceful, calm**<br>**stillness**<br>**meditation**<br>**reflection**<br>**immersed**<br>**(re)connect**<br>**sense of guidance**<br>**ponder**<br>**deep breathing**<br>**safe mourning**<br>**playground for the soul** | **serenity**<br>**calming**<br>**revitalized**<br>**cleansing**<br>**mindful**<br>**deeper awareness**<br>**mind and body "reset"**<br>**restorative**<br>**creative beginnings**<br>**short retreat**<br>**reconciliation**<br>**reverence**<br>**respite** | **self-discovery**<br>**de-stress**<br>**healing, health**<br>**affirmation of cycles of life & death**<br>**renewal, hope**<br>**memories**<br>**refreshes creativity**<br>**feel cleansed**<br>**connect to something bigger than self**<br>**universal** | **celebration**<br>**familiar**<br>**inclusive**<br>**cherished**<br>**commitment**<br>**stories**<br>**friendship**<br>**memorial**<br>**sharing differences**<br>**respect**<br>**legacy**<br>**monument**<br>**cultural cues**<br>**ceremony** |

> **"We saw a bird that we tried to catch. A fun place to dig with sticks, looking for worms. We came here to see other people in the neighborhood."**
>
> **—Kids on the Hill Sculpture Park, Baltimore, MD**

## A Civic Sacred Vocabulary

**The Foundation's explorations revealed words and phrases that embrace the notion of the civic sacred (Table 1), and are some of the most thoughtful and symbolic in the English language. As would be expected, some of the words align with more traditional interpretations of spirituality or religion. But many expand understanding of how people encounter and experience sacred space in an everyday way, and thus are appropriate in secular settings.**

> **"...with my work colleagues I'll say something, and they hook into it or they don't. That lets me know where to take the idea, or just drop it. Usually I don't use the word 'sacred', but use beauty, serenity, relaxation. They can connect to these words and then we can talk more directly."**
>
> **—Environmental planner in public agency**

## Design Recommendations

While in the London garden Tom and Kitty Stoner immediately recognized that character of space affects mood and emotion. That experience sparked an exploration of the physical forms that can contribute to contemplative, mindful nature settings. In the early years, the Foundation founders and staff read the writings of garden, landscape, and urban design professionals. In the first garden-funding cycles of the 1990s, the foundation also observed that spatial patterns were emerging across the gardens, the result of interactions between design professionals and community members who participated in the design process. In time, the foundation crafted design recommendations for new projects. These design elements foster the flow of experience, and are found in cherished urban green spaces all around the world.

**Portal:** An archway, gate, stand of trees or other marker indicates a clear transition (Figure 3). One moves from urban bustle to a calmer, reflective space.

**Path:** Whether linear, or more meandering, a path allows one to focus attention and achieve mindfulness within the surroundings (Figure 4). Labyrinths promote contemplative walking, and can be installed in fairly small places to expand the use of a modest site.

> "I experience the labyrinth...it honors a need for introspection and stillness. It is a place to acknowledge illness and healing, death and birth and pain, a place to face fear, listen to an inner voice, seek hope or faith or perhaps take a breath."
>
> —Amazing Port Street Sacred Commons, East Baltimore, MD

**Destination:** An appealing focus or end point draws a person into the welcoming space. Carefully crafted features can encourage quiet, fascination, joy, and spiritual connections. This might be a distinctive planting, a water feature, or art (Figure 5).

**Surround:** Materials, such as plantings, fencing, or trees, help create a sense of boundary and enclosure (Figure 6). Portal, path, and destination invite one to experience a space; the sense of surround promotes a sense of being away.

These elements are not meant to be a design formula. Unique interpretations are seen across the completed OSSP gardens. There is a sense of variety within unity, that is, there are infinite possibilities of design and nature expression. For instance, participatory design has revealed meaningful details that recall unique characteristics or remembrances of a community, or the symbols and important messages of different cultural groups. Or there can be a linked set

**Figure 3: A portal marks entry into a meaningful nature space.**
Photo by Len Spoden, used with permission.

**Figure 4: A path encourages one to focus attention and movement.**
Photo by Dave Harp, used with permission.

**Figure 5: An appealing feature or object draws a person into the welcoming space.**
Photo by Len Spoden , used with permission.

**Figure 6: A sense of boundary and enclosure can promote a sense of being away.**
Photo by Dave Harp, used with permission.

of civic sacred spaces within a community, all connected in concept, but each having somewhat different features, characteristics, or user groups.

The Foundation provides a bench for each of its sponsored gardens. The seating invites visitors to pause, sit, breathe, and to be present in the moment and space. The benches are built by inmates in a job skills program at the Maryland Western Correctional Institution and are made from reclaimed wood. A notebook, tucked in a shelf under the bench seat, encourages visitors to write about their experience. Thousands of journal entries have been transcribed. The anonymous writings share reflections that attest to the values of having a place to connect with loved ones, to be able to take time to reflect on emotions and needs, and to be in nature.

> "No signs, no fences, no restrictions. Just a lovely place to sit."
>
> —Garden at Cedar Hill, Washington, DC

## Turning to Research

The Foundation has provided fiscal support, but is equally committed to being an active partner in the planning and construction of the gardens, including design consultation, interactions with Firesouls, participation in design charrettes, and attendance at garden dedications and celebrations.

It became abundantly clear from these experiences, and from the journals, that spiritual, mental, and physical well-being, and community cohesion benefits emerge when people have access to nearby nature. Visitors confirmed that even the smallest urban green space can provide respite from the daily stresses of life, as well as offering the space to cope with more significant challenges. Further, the benefits of nature can be realized across all socioeconomic demographics.

The Foundation eventually became interested in the empirical studies that might align with their observations. They wanted to know: "What can science tell us about the Nature Sacred experience?"

> "I may not be cured when I leave here, but time in this garden has healed me."
>
> —University of Maryland Baltimore Washington Medical Center, Glen Burnie, MD

## Research Briefings

The first step was to scan across completed studies that relate to the health benefits of small-scale nature experiences and publish a series of research briefings. The reports sort findings by topics that correspond to garden and user observations (Figure 7).

**Figure 7: A collection of topical research briefings for urban professionals and thought leaders.**
Photo by TKF Foundation, used with permission.

**Feeling Stressed?:** Demonstrates how frequent, short-term experiences of nearby nature can help reduce both mental and physical stress (Wolf and Housley 2013).

**Reflect and Restore:** Describes how brief encounters with nearby nature can improve our short and longer-term mental capacities, including greater mindfulness, reduced depression, and improved cognitive performance (Wolf and Housley 2014b).

**Older Adults Benefits:** Reviews current knowledge about older adults' health and lifestyles, nature access, and community design (Wolf and Housley 2016a).

**Environmental Equality:** Encourages communities to commit to equal access to nearby nature for all residents to assure better health and wellness (Wolf and Housley 2014a).

## National Program of Integrated Design and Research

After decades of philanthropic work, the family Foundation faced critical decisions about its future. In 2010 the board of directors made the decision to sunset the organization and use remaining funds to launch a set of projects that would integrate design and research, and gain attention of thought leaders and urban policymakers. A national announcement for planning grants resulted in 12 awards selected from 167 applications. A later call for full project proposals generated more than 40 applications, and six projects were selected. The

**Figure 8: This healing garden serves patients and staff at a Legacy Health hospital in Portland, Oregon.**

Photo by Legacy Health, Portland, Oregon.

**Figure 9: A walkway floats above a historic cemetery, restored to a native meadow in Brooklyn, New York.**

Photo by Menelik Puryear, used with permission.

**Figure 10: Space frames in a Joplin, Missouri, memory garden symbolize tornado-destroyed homes.**

Photo by Giles Ashford, used with permission.

**Figure 11: Military patients and loved ones have access to a wooded ravine during treatment at the Walter Reed National Military Medical Center in Maryland.**

Photo by Lisa Helfert, used with permission.

national Nature Sacred program was launched!

Designers have worked with user communities to create new gardens, and each has an associated team of researchers that are studying social and therapeutic effects. Some of the sites are intended to be a place of respite for people who encounter challenges in everyday life, while others are places that are built in direct response to a destructive event. At this time (mid 2018) the gardens have been built and dedicated, and the associated research is underway. Here are highlights of the portfolio:

## Green Healing—Legacy Emanuel Medical Center

Legacy Health is a nonprofit health system with six hospitals serving the Portland, OR, community and emphasizes patient, family, and employee centered care. A new four-season terrace garden serves multiple patient groups (Figure 8). Research questions focus on hospital staff health, patient healing, and how users engage with the space.

## Metro Biodiversity— Brooklyn Naval Cemetery Landscape

The historic Brooklyn Naval Cemetery is located at the intersection of the Brooklyn Greenway and the Brooklyn, NY, Naval Yard redevelopment project. High school students and residents of a nonprofit supportive housing center are collaborating in the restoration of the 1.7-acre site, introducing a native plant meadow (Figure 9). Research questions focus on student learning and life skills, as well as changes in nearby community services clients.

## City Resilience—Joplin, Missouri

In May 2011 an EF5 multiple-vortex tornado struck Joplin, MO, devastating wide swaths of the city. Cunningham Park commemorates the energetic and innovative reconstruction of the community (Figure 10). Social scientists are exploring how a nature place aids people who have experienced an acute (that is, rapid and dramatic) crisis in their community.

## PTSD & Recovery— The Green Road at Walter Reed National Military Medical Center

Many of the men and women who served in Iraq and Afghanistan are suffering from severe physical injuries, as well as traumatic brain injuries and stress, including post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). More holistic treatments and therapies are emerging that incorporate patient-centered care, healing buildings, nature, art, and spirituality (Figure 11). Physical, mental, and social measures are being used to determine outcomes as military patients access a wooded ravine and immerse in nature.

**Figure 12: Public housing residents and volunteers restore a cherished community garden in Queens, New York.**
Photo by Giles Ashford, used with permission.

### Hurricane Recovery—Queens, New York

Hurricane Sandy ripped through New York City in October 2012. A beloved community garden has been reconstructed by New York public housing residents in Rockaway, Queens (Figure 12). Similar to the Joplin garden, research is exploring how nature, using a user-based participatory design and construction process, can contribute to community resilience and support individual recovery from crisis.

### Urban Distress—Exploring Cognitive and Immune System Outcomes

No garden is being built for this project. The team is using imagery from existing OSSPs to conduct several studies that explore the underlying patterns of how the human brain reacts to nature settings. Using cognitive and neuroscience methods, research is exploring why human health improves with nature experiences and how to optimize those outcomes.

## What Has Been Learned?

Tom and Kitty Stoner, in their initial garden experiences, sensed the importance of contemplative green spaces for individuals and communities. The Foundation's purpose and activities have evolved. Here are some key discoveries, and these apply to many communities:

### Health and the Sacred

While acknowledged intuitively for centuries, details of the healthful influences of nature are now confirmed by extensive scientific evidence (University of Washington 2016). In the specific context of OSSPs, time spent in nature can ease the stress of modern lifestyles, particularly in cities, and support mental health and wellness. Yet, there can be so much more to these encounters, as the "thick experiences" of particular nature settings move one to another dimension, including feelings of the sacred. While some people may acknowledge the sacredness of wild spaces beyond the city (Lindland et al. 2015) or religious centers, the TKF Foundation has actively explored and supported how small gardens and nature within community can nurture the civic sacred in everyday life.

> "No matter where we go in the world, no matter how much 'progress' our society achieves, we will always need open places filled with nature that let us recharge our soul and see the world in a fresh light."
>
> —Amazing Port Street Sacred Commons, East Baltimore, MD

## Diversity of Life Challenges

**The enthusiastic response to the Nature Sacred call for integrated design, and research revealed the scope of challenges that people experience in modern life. In addition to the awards, proposals included projects that addressed the needs of underserved communities, patients in medical care and treatment, refugees attempting to integrate in a community, rehabilitation centers, and schools serving both traditional and high-needs students. Across these situations people face life challenges that are both short-term and persistent. It is likely that millions of people are attempting to cope with similar circumstances. The experience of nature, even if brief, can introduce a state of mindfulness that helps one to sort through ideas or challenges, and prepare for what needs to be done.**

> "Just for today I am grateful for being alive. I am blessed to be able to think clearly without the use of a drug regulating my mind. Thank you, God, for your many blessings and for your strength to make it through this day."
>
> —Amazing Port Street Sacred Commons, Baltimore, MD

> "I am a survivor of traumatic brain injury. My life was changed 2 ½ years ago by a careless driver. It is not over; it is just different. I am still becoming acquainted with the new me and trying to discover where I should be and what I should do."
>
> —Kernan Rehabilitation Hospital, Baltimore, MD

## Design for Meaning

**Each of the gardens supported by the TKF Foundation is a unique physical form that has emerged from a complex and engaging process. Some gardens have been launched by deep hurt within a community, while others are offered as a gesture of care by a local organization. Firesouls are the people who mobilize resources and people and act as the interface between community interests and foundation programs. The design elements of portal, path, destination, and surround are a starting point for design, and have been the attributes of ageless sacred spaces. Given recent interest in nature and health, cities may introduce parks, trails, and gardens to provide options for physical activity or food growing. Observations from more than 100 OSSPs suggests that there is also a need for places that generate deeper meaning and restorative potential.**

> "A place for thought. A place for bliss. A place to reflect on the past. A place to contemplate the future."
>
> —Western Correctional Institution, Cumberland, Maryland, MD

## Need for Greater Investment

The initial garden projects and Nature Sacred research (while still underway) indicate that it is important for people to have access to nature spaces that are within close proximity to homes and accessible from other everyday places of urban life. Small green spaces are not just pretty; they are essential places that can help people cope with adversity and can support social resilience. And from an economic standpoint, it is likely that OSSPs are a modest expense for the degree of public benefit they provide. The Foundation has several visions for the application of its work. More health organizations may come to recognize the importance of small, intentionally designed parks as social determinants of health and be more open to funding outcomes research. Policymakers may be compelled to include OSSPs in planning and investment for public services, incorporating gardens into city systems (such as transit or schools) so that small parks are readily available throughout a city (Wolf and Brinkley 2016).

> "Today I begin a new chapter in my life—a chapter of healing, not from pains, sickness or wounds, but from my internal world. The garden represents peace and comfort. I come here to…find purpose in life, and the garden helped."
>
> —Whitman-Walker Clinic, Washington, D.C.

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