

# Hope grows here: COGdesigns builds The Children's Room a garden

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*John J. Crookes/Daily News*

Eileen Michaels, founder of A Yard and A Half Landscaping in Waltham, trims back a Japanese Maple in her yard. Michaels volunteered with COGdesigns to build a garden for The Children's Room in Arlington.

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By Jeff Gilbride/Daily News staff

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ARLINGTON —

A year ago the yard leading up to The Children's Room didn't reflect the warmth found inside the grief counseling agency for children and teens.

"The inside of their beautiful Victorian house was really warm and friendly, but the outside was just a mess," said Lucia Droby, executive director of Waltham-based COGdesigns, a nonprofit that provides landscape design services to community-based groups.

Barbara Clarke, executive director of The Children's Room in Arlington, contacted COGdesigns to help match the outside to what was offered within.

"The outside of our place was really barren and yucky which was uninviting for our purpose, which is to help families after someone has died," Clark said. "Reaching out to the community with a nasty, dried-up lawn and overgrown shrubs was not appealing."

The nonprofit enlisted the volunteer services of two landscapers, Eileen Michaels, founder of A Yard and A Half Landscaping in Waltham and David McCoy, from Geographia Landscape Design in Beverly. McCoy designed a vision for the garden.

"McCoy developed a garden plan that would respond to the emotional needs and types of supports that the nonprofit provides for children," Droby said. "I think the garden will give them solace."

Michaels said the implementation of the design, which involved extensively landscaping the front of the agency's Victorian building on Massachusetts Avenue, took four weeks to complete.

"The whole front yard when we started, it was just a blank space," Michaels said.

The volunteer crew from A Yard and A Half Landscaping, prepared soil, installed a paved walkway and build a retaining wall for the new garden.

They finished constructing the 3,000 square-foot garden Saturday.

"Basically, we were able to put in a new front walkway and a stone retaining wall, along with a keystone path with stepping stones," Michaels said.

Today the garden is filled with blueberry bushes, weeping cherry blossoms and roses provided by Stonegate Gardens in Lincoln. A pathway leading to the garden contains stones with words like anger and sorrow etched in them to symbolize the feelings many go through when grieving.

The path leads to an open area with two trellises, a bench for reflecting and gate that exits the garden.

Michaels said she felt a connection to The Children's Room.

"I lost my brother John when I was 10 and he was 8 1/2. He died from leukemia and basically back in those days, people didn't understand that children grieve like adults grieve," Michaels said. "There was no organization like this at the time. I wish there was because it took me really into my 30s to (recover from) my brother's death."

In the end helping build the garden was reward enough for Michaels.

"It's just great to be able to contribute to an organization that has that as their mission," she said. "It feels good to be able to be in a position to help this group. I know how much they are doing for the kids."

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