

barn are painted in a multiracial mix of black, white, yellow and red. The Farm includes many ambassadors from the natural world. Oliver the llama, Grace the donkey, four Nubian goats, and a multicultural group of Chinese, white and African geese live together and are part of many Farm programs. They help anchor the natural milieu. Teaching respect for the natural world helps visitors learn to respect themselves and others. One facilitator calls the human-animal bond "the chemistry of caring."

A nature trail borders a lush pond. A greenhouse and potting shed are being built for horticulture therapy, butterfly garden and environmental education programs for developmentally disabled students.

On a warm Friday afternoon, seniors from a local high school are challenging themselves and learning trust and self-confidence on the Farm's Ropes Course. The teens are part of Project Change, a student-led initiative formed after the Columbine High School shootings. The students realized that Columbine-type violence could happen anywhere, so they set out to reduce harassment and improve respect among the cliques that are inevitable in school.

The course develops intergroup communications, builds self-esteem, and teaches them how to apply teamwork and respect for their school environment.

"It gives people the opportunity to confront the limitations we impose upon ourselves, and to learn what we can accomplish as a group," says Mehnert.

"Fellowship Farm's approach to reducing school violence involves the development of youth to move beyond tolerating diversity to becoming activists for a society where they play a role in helping to appreciate and support differences."

The students agree. "I don't think I have ever seen so much idealism and optimism in one place," wrote one. "Suddenly everyone felt empowered, like we really could make a difference. We felt that we could honestly change the whole school and turn it into a better place for us and future students."