

We are: Ready for Winter

■ Page 2: After a fun-filled fall, Valley Elementary students are embracing everything that the holiday season has to offer.



We are: Enchanted

■ Page 3: The annual trip to Jordan's Enchanted Village is a highlight for Valley's Middle School students.



We are: Philanthropic

■ Page 6: The opportunity to give back is something the individuals in Valley's Adult programs look forward to all year.

VALLEY COLLABORATIVE

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Giving Thanks for an Extraordinary Community: The Year in Review



NICOLE NOSKA, PRINCIPAL, VALLEY MIDDLE SCHOOL, VALLEY TRANSITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMMING; HEATHER MACKAY, PRINCIPAL, VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL; DR. CHRIS SCOTT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR; NICK LECLAIR, PRINCIPAL, VALLEY TRANSITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMMING; MATT GENTILE, DIRECTOR OF DDS SERVICES

Dear Valley Community:

I would like to acknowledge the extraordinary amount of care each and every staff at Valley pour into their work as they develop and implement innovative curriculum and programming that engages our students and DDS & MRC supported individuals. I, along with Valley's Board of Directors, continue to be appreciative of the dedication shown by staff to elicit the best possible outcome for those we serve. Valley Collaborative's FY '23 school year was very successful programmatically and financially.

- The financial position of the Collaborative remains very strong. Valley had a surplus of \$1.1 million in FY'23 which was returned to its member districts.
- The total assets at June 30, 2023 were \$20,024,009
- Valley's Capital fund remains fully funded with \$1.5 million in FY '23.
- The balance of the OPEB fund as of June 30, 2023 was \$6,598,707 making the Trust 78.5% funded.

*continued on back page

Capping off a Great Season at Valley Elementary

Students and staff at Valley Elementary have had a busy, fun-filled fall. The arrival of the holidays means the celebration of giving, with gratitude-themed activities and events taking center stage in our classrooms. Here's a look at what our students have been up to.

Curious About George Book Reading

Detective Bethany, former school resource officer and friend of our school, has written about her police dog George! She and George came to visit the school on September 15th for a book reading and presentation.

Clubs and Activities

Throughout the fall students participated in football club on Friday afternoons, coming together across classrooms to have fun, learn about teamwork, and practice sportsmanship and kindness. Now that temperatures are dropping, we've moved indoors for soccer club. Classes have

also been going out in the community for hikes, meals, and other field trips.

Pumpkin Picking Field Trips

Classes returned to Tyngsboro's Parlee Farms in October to pick pumpkins, take a hay-ride, visit farm animals, and enjoy apple cider and donuts.

Halloween Event

On Halloween we had our annual dance and Trunk-or-Treat event! Families and staff decorated trunks and students walked around the school to trunk-or treat in costume.

Bullying Prevention Laser Show

Prismatic Magic returned to the Elementary School on November 17th for the Bullying Prevention Laser Show. The program educated and inspired students with an interactive and musical laser show.

Thanksgiving Events

This year, the Elementary School celebrated Thanksgiving through the week of November 20th with gratitude-themed activities across the school. On the half-day before Thanksgiving break, we hosted families for our annual community breakfast. More than 50 family members joined for a memorable morning filled with food, community, and conversation.

Ammaya Dance and Drum Performance

Ammaya Drum and Dance visited our school on December 4th for an African drum and dance performance and assembly. Students learned about, enjoyed, and participated in West African drumming and dancing.



MORE THAN 50 FAMILY MEMBERS ATTENDED THE ANNUAL COMMUNITY BREAKFAST.

Holiday Event

Students and staff got cozy with a seasonal event featuring cookies, hot cocoa, pajamas, and a community movie.

December Giving Project

Throughout the month of December, classes participated in our annual giving project. With this giving project, students purchase a gift (\$5 or less) from another student's wish list, wrap it up, and exchange the gift at our end-of-the-season gift exchange. It's a great opportunity to teach students the meaning of selflessness and self-worth, and helps them gain the very important insight of perspective-taking and thinking about others.

December Caroling

Music Therapist Meghan Pope and Speech and Language Pathologist Jillian Wendler brought a group of 20 Elementary School students to the Carleton-Willard Village in Bedford to perform for their memory care unit. This event was last held in December of 2019 and we're thrilled to see it return as it is a great chance for students to work towards a goal, and provide a service to individuals in need. ■



THIRD GRADER WILLIAM DESOUSA-DIAZ AT THE COMMUNITY BREAKFAST WITH HIS DAD.

An 'Enchanting' Season for Valley Middle School Transitional Program

For students in Valley's Middle School Transitional Program, the arrival of the holiday season brings with it one of the highlights of the school year. As temperatures drop and snow flurries fall, students head south: to Avon, home to the Enchanted Village. The magical display, run by Jordan's Furniture, gives students the opportunity to immerse themselves in a celebration of all things holiday.

"They really look forward to it all year," says special education teacher Shana Dunlevy. This year two middle school classes totalling 30 students made the trip. Among the highlights of the visit: a showing of the Polar Express. Students put on 3-D glasses, then buckled up for a 4-D viewing experience. "You can even smell the hot cocoa," says Shana.

The final attraction of the trip is a thrilling ride down the Enchanted Tube. Think of a water slide without the water, or a sledding hill without the snow. Students climb aboard rubber floats then glide down a gentle slope, emerging 72 feet later to tell the tale.

This is the sixth year that Valley students have made the trek to the Enchanted Village, which opens its doors an hour early just for Valley. The result is an experience that students can't say enough good things about. "I like the 4-D theater and how the seats move," said one Valley traveler. "I like the animatronics! They were very jolly," added another. "I loved the bakery and the big cookies!" chimed in a third.

Students in Meaghan Norris' class were just as eager to share their "thumbs up" reviews. Andrew said that he loves the Ray Charles display "because I like his take on his Christmas songs." Dylan



praised the Hot Chocolate song from Polar Express. Nick enjoyed the speed of the Polar Express Ride, which Cassidy says is "like a roller coaster." Jessica is a fan of the famous blueberry muffins. Also making the list of fan favorites: the Reindeer races, "because I won a prize," says Cameron.

It's not just the students who rave about the trip. Clinician Jackie Squeglia says that for her, the truly "enchanted" part of the trip is the group picture students and staff take together every year. "We can look back to see how much the students have grown throughout the years."

Like any Valley field trip, this one also offers plenty of learning opportunities. The trek to the Enchanted



ABOVE: SHANA DUNLEAVY'S CLASS POSES FOR A GROUP PHOTO; BELOW: STUDENTS AWAIT THEIR CLASSMATES AT THE BOTTOM OF THE ENCHANTED TUBE.

Village gives students a chance to socialize and to practice their social skills in a community setting. But it's the holiday-themed attractions that are the big draw here. "Of all of the field trips we take, this is probably #1 as far as the students are concerned," says Shana. ■

Ascending Great Heights with Transitional High School Alternative Programming Students

Outdoor education has long been a staple of Valley Middle and Transitional High School Alternative Programs. Students enjoy getting outside as a regular component of their Valley experience. Now ambitious outdoor expeditions, on hiatus during the pandemic, are back too, helping students to climb great heights.

That's how a recent weekend found six students and three Valley staff members scaling Mount Willard, one of New Hampshire's legendary White Mountains. Shane Young was one of the "Trailblazers" making the trek, along with students Austin, Jayden, Brady and Josh. Shane says that it didn't take long for the group to realize that this was no ordinary walk in the woods. "The trails were icy and slippery going up. It was a little sketchy."

Making it up to the top would require every bit of concentration and motivation the students had. Shane says that if one of their group fell behind, the others would cheer him on until one and all reached their destination.

Two-and-a-half hours later, the Trailblazers arrived at the summit, with its staggering views of Crawford Notch and the surrounding range. Shane and his fellow climbers celebrated with a mountain-top photo session, creating an optical illusion that made it look as though they were suspended in the air. "It was a little bit of an optical illusion," says Shane. "It was really cool."

For the Valley staff who accompanied the students on the trip, Cassandra Reitano, Josh Plunkett and Pete Loring, the students' celebration was confirmation about the importance of outdoor education. "It's not just about being in the outdoors

and walking around outside," explains Josh, teacher and outdoor education organizer. "There's a lot of team building that goes into it, including setting common goals, motivating each other to reach those goals, and working through frustration—that's all part of it."

For outdoor education instructor Pete Loring, seeing the satisfaction of students at accomplishing big goals is a key part of the experience. He recalls the first big hike of the school year when students made it to the top of another New Hampshire peak: Mount Major. "I think that was the first time when some of them really pushed themselves and saw that reward. They got to the summit and some of them called family members to say 'I made it to the top. I'm on top of a mountain.' That was so cool," recalls Pete.

By the time the group began its descent of Mount Willard, temperatures had risen, melting the ice that had made the ascent tricky. Before they knew it, they were at the base camp, enjoying dinner at the dining hall, before turning in for the night at their bunkhouse. Even better, the facility had a rec room where the students could compete for prizes. Shane would take home a small stuffed wolf that has since become his personal totem and a club mascot. "It stays with me everywhere I go," says



THE TRAILBLAZERS OF VALLEY'S OUTDOOR EDUCATION CLUB REACH THE SUMMIT OF NEW HAMPSHIRE'S MOUNT WILLARD ON A RECENT OVERNIGHT HIKING EXPEDITION.

Shane.

When students attempt their next climb next spring, the wolf will no doubt accompany them, a small reminder that the effort required to get to the summit is worth it. "Carrying that little wolf up the mountain with us is all part of the team building experience," says Pete. "It's a reminder that we're all in this together. We're a family." ■

Adult Services: Caring for the Community



FROM LEFT: CHRIS DUNN, ERIC HORAN, JACOB BETTENCOURT, ALINE HAUNTON AND ANDREW BLAIS DROPPING OFF TOYS FOR THE TOYS FOR TOTS DRIVE SPONSORED BY THE BILLERICA FIRE DEPARTMENT.

The holiday season is always an exciting time for Valley Collaborative's Adult Programming. The individuals show their support and caring for the community throughout the year, but never does this charity shine through brighter than during the holiday season.

For the past several years during the holiday season, the Adult Program has participated in a food drive and toy drive, with this year being no different. Valley partners with the Merrimack Valley Food Bank to run a food drive collecting canned goods and non-perishable food items. Valley collects the donations on site and then donates them to the Food Bank by the middle of December to ensure that food can be distributed out to community members in need, in time for the holidays. Last year the Valley Adult Program donated 370 pounds of food to the Merrimack

Valley Food Pantry as a result of the food drive and this year

The philanthropic side of the individuals that Valley serves ascends to a whole new level when the holidays arrive.

is shaping up to produce a similar number.

Additionally, the Adult Program participates in a Toys for Tots toy drive sponsored by the Billerica Fire Department. Valley collects all the toy donations on site, then delivers them to the Billerica Fire Department on December 8th to ensure time for the toys to be gifted to children in the community who need a bit of extra support. Valley individuals take great pride in providing less fortunate community members with the things they need to create a more festive and joyful holiday. We regularly see this philanthropic side

of the individuals, but it ascends to another level during the holiday season. The large box used to collect and store these toys has to be emptied on several occasions over our two-week collection period just to be able to fit them all because of the overwhelming generosity.

Beyond just tangible goods, Valley adults also create holiday cards to send to our community partners and others who might benefit from some kind words (who doesn't!). The individuals love to show off their amazing artistic skills by creating holiday cards with kind messages and words of thanks for all the different supports offered to them throughout the year.

While there is never a bad time to thank someone for their support, the holidays offer a special occasion to make sure our community partners understand how grateful we all are for the opportunities and support they provide. ■

Celebrating the Incredible Dedication of Valley Collaborative's Staff

Valley Collaborative is fortunate to have incredibly dedicated staff who are devoted to helping those we serve realize the best possible outcomes. This season we are pleased to recognize our outstanding staff who've been part of the Valley community for five, ten and fifteen or more years. Thanks for all you do to make Valley such a special place!

Fifteen or more years of service

Abate, Joanna
Blackburn, Karen
Casey, Janette
Cronin, Joseph
Curran, Sean
Davidson, Kristen
Donato, Susan
Gamache, Sandra
Glow Tessier, Jennifer
Gounaris, Nikki
Leighton, Vivi
Metrakas, Chrystalia
Mihalek, Brian
Morin, Scott
Noska, Nicole
Rowe, Karen
Thomas, Bryan
Tryder-Carbone, Cristen
Venskus, Joseph
Winch, Katlyn

Ten to fourteen years of service

Aprile, Amanda
Carrabba, Tina
Chamberlin, Angela
Ebert, Libby
Fisette, Angela
Kenney, Brenda
Landry, Robert
MacKay, Heather
Mercurio, Joia
Morrin, Kari
Murphy, Amy
Peterson, Tammy

Quirbach, Chanelle
Scalzi, Jessica
Scott, Chris
Stuart, Denise
Tanguay, Elizabeth
Waters, Meghan

Five to nine years of service

Ayers, Leslie
Bennett, Cheryl
Cain, April
Campbell, April
Christenson, Richard
Clauson, Victoria
Collins, James
Curran, Maggie
Cymbura, Deneen
Davis, Stephanie
Diaz, Kathleen
Diaz, Matthew
Fedak, Michael
Fitts, Kelly
Frazier, Erin
Gentile, Matthew
Goulakos, Stephen
Gray, Zachary
Horn, Sokkhunna
Hutchinson, Shannon
Illg, David
Joslin, Christine
LeClair, Nicholas
Loring, Peter
MacAulay, Ian
Maiuri, Brittany
McNamara, Ashley
McNulty, Pamela
Morency, Sandra

Moriarty, Hannah
Nelson, Tyler
Newman, Ryan
Nutile, Kathryn
O'Brien, Susan
Ouellet, David
Pedreira, William
Perkins, Robert
Ramos, Elis
Resteghini, John
Richard, Kathryn
Shea, John
Silva, Renato
Spampinato, Nicole
Squeglia, Jaclyn
Stoicescu, Vlad
Vangelist, Colleen
Watford, Dana
Wendler, Jillian
Yutkins, Richard



Tis the Season: Celebrating the Holidays, Valley Style



INDIVIDUALS IN THE ADULT SERVICES PROGRAM AT THE BILLERICA FIRE STATION, WHERE THEY DROPPED OFF A MOUNTAIN OF TOYS FOR TOYS FOR TOTS.

BELOW: NICHOLAS SCHWEFLER AND BRITTANY DORNEY, STUDENTS, WITH OUTDOOR EXPERIENTIAL EDUCATION TEACHER PETE LORING ON THE ANNUAL DECORATED TREE HUNT IN CHELMSFORD. THE TREE THAT VALLEY STUDENTS DECORATED IS LOCATED IN DEEP BROOK RESERVATION IN NORTH CHELMSFORD.



ABOVE LEFT: FOURTH GRADER BRODY ROMANO PRACTICES FOR A CAROLING EXPEDITION TO THE MEMORY CARE UNIT AT THE CARLETON-WILLARD VILLAGE IN BEDFORD; CENTER: CAROLING AT THE MEMORY CARE UNIT.

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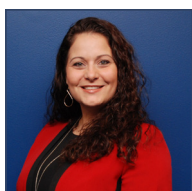
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Valley Collaborative Board

Chair: Dr. Jay Lang

Superintendent, Chelmsford Public Schools

Dr. Kerry Clery

Superintendent, Billerica Public Schools

Mr. Steven Stone

Superintendent, Dracut Public Schools

Dr. Laura Chesson

Superintendent, Groton-Dunstable Regional School District

Dr. Denise Pigeon

Superintendent, Nashoba Valley Technical School District

Mr. Brad Morgan

Superintendent, North Middlesex Regional School District

Ms. Brenda Theriault-Regan

Superintendent, Tewksbury Public Schools

Dr. Michael Flanagan

Superintendent, Tyngsborough Public Schools

Dr. Christopher Chew

Superintendent, Westford Public Schools

Giving Thanks for an Extraordinary Community

**continued from cover*

- According to Valley's OPEB administrator, Valley is fully funded and future contributions could put it in a position to be "super funded." Also, Valley has one of the highest funded OPEB Trusts among Collaboratives in the Commonwealth.
- The Collaborative's net position, end of year, remains solid at \$11 million. This is the result of strong Board oversight, solid financial management, proper billing, as well as collections of receivables.
- In the spirit of continuous improvement, the Collaborative made significant capital purchases in FY '23 for Vehicles, Furniture, Technology and Improvements.
- Revenue for our adult program continues to grow as our DDS and MRC programming enjoys an excellent reputation resulting in increased enrollment. The DDS programmatic and administrative audit resulted in an impressive score of 86%/98% respectively.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter, and for your support of Valley Collaborative. If you ever have a suggestion or need assistance, my door is always open.

Chris A. Scott, Ph. D.
Executive Director