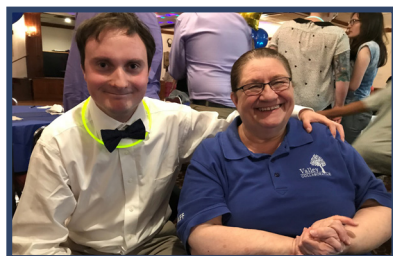




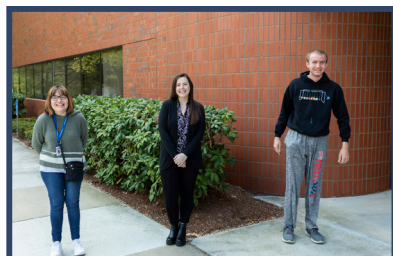
We are: Headed Up

■ Page 3: The Alternative High School mountaineers are back in the wild,.



We are: Saying Farewell

■ Page 4: Transitional Middle/High School teacher Pat Diglio is retiring. She'll be missed by staff and students alike.



We are: Individuals

■ Page 5: For Individuals in Valley's Today & Tomorrow Program, pandemic-related changes brought challenges and opportunities.

Positive Feedback

Dear Valley Community:

Finally, the 2020-2021 pandemic school year is in the rearview mirror. I know that it has been a challenging year with many losses experienced. I would like to thank our dedicated staff and the Valley Board of Directors for their commitment to Valley's mission and those we serve. As things return to normal Valley pledges to continue to work hard to provide excellent programming.

In the spirit of continuous improvement, throughout the pandemic we surveyed our staff, students and their families numerous times in order to get feedback on our performance. I share with you below some of the highlights from these surveys. The complete results can be found on our website at www.valleycollaborative.org. The feedback has been very encouraging and supportive of the Valley team – Thank you; we are proud to serve.

We are all looking forward to the beginning of the 2021-2022 school year. I wish you all a happy and safe summer holiday. If I can ever be of assistance my door is always open.

My best to you,

Chris

Chris A. Scott, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Staff Survey Results

- 93.4% of staff agree or strongly agree that their principal/administrator promotes a culture that affirms and values individual cultural, linguistic, racial, gender and other identity differences
- 97.3% of staff agree or strongly agree that their principal/ad-



DR. CHRIS A. SCOTT AND INDIVIDUAL OF THE YEAR MICHAEL KEMPTON

ministrator implements effective school-based programs that support students' social and emotional well-being.

- 94.7% of staff agree or strongly agree that teachers have access to digital and technology tools (e.g. learning management systems, teaching and learning apps) that cultivate a safe and supportive online learning environment for students.
- 96% of staff agree or strongly agree that our building has systems (e.g. entry and dismissal routines, meals, class, transitions) in place to ensure that the school runs in a safe and efficient manner.
- 93.4% of staff agree or strongly agree that our building administration provided clear and direct communication to them during the pandemic regarding closure, reopening, and protocols.

*continued on back page

Elementary School: Celebrating Inclusion

Inclusion and representation are issues that Valley Elementary teacher Amanda Aprile has long been passionate about. But with the school where she's worked for nearly a decade now home to an increasingly diverse staff and student body, Amanda decided it was time to translate passion into action. Her goal: to help the elementary school celebrate and recognize Black history throughout the entire month of February.

"My 5th and 6th graders are seeing what's going on in the world and we were able to have some pretty open and honest conversations in class," says April. "But there's still a lot of work to be done. Putting together some resources for Black History Month seemed like the least I could do."

She started by reaching out to music teacher Bryan Thomas. He leaped at the challenge and immediately got to work putting together materials to showcase the contribution of Black artists to so many of the songs students know and love today. Bryan also created a music video featuring the elementary school staff, singing and playing the music to Bill Withers' *Lean on Me*, dedicated to Valley students.

Amanda also recruited volunteers to read an excerpt over the loud-



STUDENT ART PROJECTS FROM THIS SPRING'S BLACK HISTORY CELEBRATION AT VALLEY ELEMENTARY. TEACHERS ACROSS THE SCHOOL WORKED TO INCORPORATE LESSONS FROM BLACK HISTORY INTO THEIR CLASSES.

speaker each day from the book *28 Days: Moments in Black History That Changed the World*. Every day during lunch time, the entire school got to hear and learn about important leaders such as Cripsus Attucks, Shirley Chisholm and Daniel Hale Williams. Later in the month, students were asked to complete an art project that asked how they would change the world.

And to assist her colleagues who wanted to incorporate Black History Month lessons in their classrooms, Amanda put together resources including virtual libraries and presentations explaining Black History Month and biographies suitable across grade level and student populations. Amanda says that she hopes

the resources will become a regular supplement to Valley's curriculum, used throughout the school year.

Amanda has been an advocate for inclusion and representation for as long as she can remember. She joined the Center for Multicultural Affairs as a mentor while attending Bridgewater State, and spent every Saturday morning volunteering at a physical development clinic for children and young adults with disabilities. These days her passion is personal. This fall she'll be welcoming a multiracial child into the world. "It's really important for me to continue to educate myself for my own family, for my students, and for the school community." ■

RAISING AUTISM AWARENESS

FOR THE FOURTH YEAR IN A ROW, VALLEY HELD AN AUTISM SPEAKS WALK. ON APRIL 7TH, STAFF AND STUDENTS DRESSED IN BLUE AND PARTICIPATED IN A THREE-LAP WALK AROUND THE SCHOOL IN SUPPORT OF AUTISM AWARENESS. THIS YEAR, SOME SPECIAL GUESTS WERE IN ATTENDANCE: SCHOOL RESOURCE OFFICERS WHO JOINED IN WITH THEIR PATROL CARS AND BLUE LIGHTS. A SPECIAL THANKS TO BRITTANY PICHETTE AND JACLYN CROCKER FOR HELPING MAKE THIS SUCH A GREAT EVENT!



Alternative Middle/High School: Rising to Great Heights

Last spring, students at Valley's Alternative Middle/High School were preparing for their most ambitious mountain climbing adventure to date: a cross-country trip to Washington's Mt. Baker. "We had arguably the greatest plan for outdoor ed in history. And when we shut down for COVID that went out the window," says Assistant Principal Glen Costello.

Fast forward a year and Valley students are reaching new heights. In recent weeks, they've scaled New Hampshire's Mt. Monadnock, Mount Cardigan, and Mt. Washington. Then, on a recent spring weekend, the group of six students—four seniors and two sophomores—pulled off their most arduous climb to date: a 14-mile walk that summited Mt. Flume, Mt. Liberty and Little Haystack. The hike took nearly 12 hours over half-frozen terrain known as a "monorail." The conditions were really tough, says Glen. "You slip, you sink, your boots get soaked. It made for strenuous stretches. Kids were amazing with their perseverance and their team mentality."

The overnight-adventure with its challenges, setbacks and ultimate triumph, could also serve as a metaphor for the past year at Valley. The pandemic forced a pivot to online learning and required students and staff members to adapt on a dime. And just as hikers who encounter obstacles along the way need a contingency plan, so did Valley staff during the past year. "Being an alt ed teacher, you just adapt and overcome," says Glen.

When COVID restrictions kept students from participating in a basketball league with other collaboratives, Guidance Counselor Todd Fletcher came up with first-floor



VALLEY'S FIRST-FLOOR MOUNTAINEERS REACH THE SUMMIT OF MOUNT LIBERTY ON THE WAY TO HAYSTACK, BEFORE THE FRANCONIA RIDGE ON A RECENT HIKE.

leagues for soccer and basketball that included teams, practices and games. Like a number of Valley staff members, Todd is a former star athlete—he played hockey at UMass Lowell. And while his job usually entails helping students with career planning and resume building, the challenges of the pandemic have given him new appreciation for the rewards of outdoor education. "It's not just physically but mentally challenging," says Todd, who has joined forces with Glen and IEP Coordinator Bobby Nimblett to accompany students on the overnight hikes. "Students come away feeling 'if I can hike Mt. Washington or Mt. Monadnock, I can do anything.'"

A recent spring day found the Valley mountaineers atop Mount Washington. They'd hiked all day and made it to Lake of the Clouds in time to take in a breathtaking sunset at an elevation of 5,000 feet. While the original plan had been to camp, then spend roughly 14 hours covering the

range known as the Northern Presidentials, a bad weather forecast had already forced the group to change plans once. Now stiff winds and dropping temps forced another adjustment. Instead of hiking on, they made the decision to head back down the trail. While falling short of their ambitious goal was disappointing, Bobby says that the experience was full of valuable lessons. "You have this big lofty goal and then it doesn't work out and you have to make some quick decisions and adapt."

For seniors in particular, says Bobby, the experience of being part of the mountain climbing group has been really important. "They have this sense that 'we're the first kids to do this.' Not only do these trips give them a feeling of connection and accomplishment but they have a sense that 'we're the first kids to do this,' and it inspires them to want to push further," says Bobby. ■

Transitional Middle/High School: A Favorite Teacher Says Farewell

When asked what she'll miss when she retires from Valley at the end of the school year, Pat Diglio answers without missing a beat. "Everything." Pat, who has worked with students in Valley's Transitional Middle/High School for the past thirteen years, plans to spend more time with her grandkids once she's retired. Still, saying goodbye to her Valley students won't be easy. "They're just so honest and genuine. What you see is what you get," says Pat.

Pat came to Valley after a long career as an educator, one that included public, private, parochial and vocational schools at every level. When she stepped down as principal of a K-8 school in Beverly in 2008, she'd planned on retiring for good. But Pat quickly realized that a life of leisure wasn't for her. When her husband spotted a job listing for a job coach at Valley, he encouraged her to apply. "He said 'you know, you might just like it.' And he was right. I get up every morning with a smile on my face."

In her time at the Transitional Middle/High School, Pat has tutored students and helped them prepare for the MCAS, as well as teaching a range of what she calls functional academics. Pre-pandemic, she made cooking classes a specialty, using the sessions to instill academic skills and life lessons for students to draw upon after they leave Valley. "We do math in the kitchen but they're also learning to cook and take care of themselves. As much as we know they'll use the box and the microwave, we did it from scratch. We tried to raise the bar and push their limits," says Pat.

Occupational therapist Maggie Curran has worked with Pat for the past seven years, in-

cluding in the kitchen. "She has so much knowledge about cooking and shared it with staff and students alike. She's shared recipes for Japanese steak, delicious meatballs and her school-famous homemade french fries! She cares so much about all of her students, and they can feel it," says Maggie.

Pat's tradition of remembering the birthdays of students and staff members, and preparing their favorite dessert, will be especially missed, says Kristen Davidson. For Kristen, an SLP in Pat's classroom for more than a decade, that's meant enjoying plenty of fresh-baked chocolate chip cookies. "Pat is a thoughtful and caring member of our Valley community and will be missed by all," says Susan.

Transitional Aide Susan O'Brien began working with Pat in November 2018 when she was hired as a one-on-one aide for one of Pat's students. A former graphic designer, Susan says that Pat has helped her realize her dream of working with special needs children. "She has taught me so much about working with our students, getting to know exactly what they each need and how best to provide it, and through it all, how to love every minute of it," says Susan. "She is an amazing teacher and a very special lady."



PAT DIGLIO PICTURED WITH STUDENTS (FROM LEFT) ANDREW FOUKAS, JACK SABA, COLBY FOSTER, TRISTEN DE SOUSA, BRENDAN REIBEL; STAFF SUSAN O'BRIEN (FRONT ROW) AND MIKE FEDAK (FAR RIGHT)

Transition Specialist Karen Rowe has known Pat since she first began working at Valley and describes her as 'one in a million.' Says Karen: "She has a way of nurturing and caring for her students while also fostering their growth and independence. As if that weren't enough, she also provides that same level of nurturing to the staff here as well. If you go to talk to Pat, it's never quick, because she is so warm and open to others. She never makes you feel rushed or gives you the 'brush off.'"

That combination of calm, consistency and firmness when called for is what has made Pat so invaluable, says Principal Nicole Noska. "Students really respond to that. She's able to build relationships with staff and students so easily." Nicole met Pat when she arrived at Valley thirteen years ago, after her previous retirement. "She's had quite a life. This was her calling and she saved the best for last."

We'll miss you, Pat! ■

Adult Services: Keep Calm, Carry On

Valley Adult Services staff had a problem. The disruption caused by the pandemic—to lives, schedules and daily rhythms—was taking a toll on individuals in the program. Instead of going out to a work site three to five times a week, the individuals were now in the building working through employment skills lessons and activities for the duration of their day. The natural breaks that came with going out to the job sites were suddenly gone. “The individuals were struggling and having some anxiety and we really didn’t have anywhere to take them,” says Christine Joslin, a direct support professional.

Valley staff have adjusted programming throughout the pandemic, and now it was time for another change. With her colleague and fellow direct support professional Cristen Tryder, Christine looked for ways to address the individuals’ needs. They found their solution across the street, at Valley’s middle and high school sites. “They have these amazing sensory rooms where students can go and take a break when they need one. We decided to do something similar over here,” says Christine.

Christine and Cristen utilized their knowledge of the individuals and their needs to create a quiet, safe space where they could escape to help refocus and recenter themselves in order to have the most productive day possible. They also coordinated with the teachers at the school to determine what practices work well in a sensory room. Through this collaboration and their own research, Christine and Cristen spearheaded the effort to create the sensory room and provide the individuals with some



respite from their daily schedules. Now the Today and Tomorrow Program has a welcoming, calming area, where individuals can go to regroup when the day becomes too difficult. What used to be a technology room has become a soothing space featuring dark walls, soft lights, bean bags and an array of “calm-down” aids, including fidget toys and yoga balls. A projector beams ocean images on the walls, which will soon be painted with a variety of underwater themes.

“Especially for our non-verbal individuals who were really struggling, having this space has been a huge help,” says Christine.

While the Sensory Room was created to support the needs of individuals during COVID, it will remain available even after group employment sites re-open, continuing to serve as a resource for individuals who just need a break from the stresses of the day. And the resource isn’t just for individuals. “Staff can use it when they need to decompress when they start to feel overwhelmed,” says Christine. ■

DIRECT SUPPORT PROFESSIONALS CRISTEN TRYDER AND CHRISTINE JOSLIN SHOW OFF ADULT SERVICES’ BRAND NEW SENSORY ROOM. MODELED ON SIMILAR CALMING SPACES IN VALLEY’S SCHOOL FACILITIES, THE SENSORY ROOM IS A QUIET, SAFE SPACE WHERE INDIVIDUALS CAN GO TO REFOCUS AND RECENTER THEMSELVES WHEN THEY NEED A BREAK.

At Home and Out in the World

This spring, Valley Collaborative started working with families in the DESE/DDS Residential Prevention Program. The goal of the program is to help students be more active participants in their communities by providing their families with supports and opportunities, explains Service Navigator Tricia Sicard. “It is a fabulous program that can really make a difference in the life of a student and their family,” says Tricia.

Funded through a DESE grant and managed through DDS, the program helps increase a family’s capacity to support their individual student at home, including access to a Service Navigator to help identify services and supports in the family’s community. Also provided: a budget to use on approved expenses such as adaptive/replacement clothing, educational materials, community outings—even respite hours to give a caregiver some much-needed time to recharge.

»continued on next page

At Home and Out in the World

**continued from previous page*

Explains Tricia: “We help the families find skills trainers, help them manage their budgets, and make suggestions on different activities that they can use those funds for.” For example, the family of an individual who loves to go to the zoo might use part of their funds for a zoo membership. For a student who loves to dance, Service Navigators work to identify local dance facilities that have a track record working with students with special needs.

In order to be eligible for the program, students must be between the age of 6-17, living at home and attending school. Families should speak with their DDS Service Coordinator if they are interested in enrolling. While participating in the program used to be quite difficult, the state recently increased its funding. Tricia says that she hopes that will enable Valley students to join. “By working with skills trainers, families are able to keep kids at home rather than having them go into a residential facility. It’s just an amazing program that really helps families and gives students get the opportunity to be in the world.” ■

For more information, contact Tricia Sicard at (978) 437-7002 or email at PSicard@ValleyCollaborative.org.

Spotlight on Valley’s Today & Tomorrow Individuals

In each issue of the Valley newsletter, we spotlight Individuals who are part of our Today & Tomorrow program.

Erin McGrath

Erin McGrath has seen a number of transitions in the Valley community over her years in the program, but nothing quite like the changes that COVID-19 brought. Upon reopening in person in August, Erin was one of the first individuals ready to jump back into a routine. She now spends her days onsite at the program engaging in various job skills lessons and activities, health and wellness groups, recreational groups, and enrichment activities. She sits front row in the milieu each day with a positive attitude and willingness to learn. With her annual ISP meeting just a few weeks away, she’s started working with staff to develop new goals to work on. Erin had two objectives that she met with flying colors- increasing her laundry skills and advocating for herself.

Not only does Erin help do laundry around the program, she’s recently started mentoring other peers who are interested in learning more adult living skills. She helps walk them through the process of measuring detergent, hitting the correct buttons for the load, and transferring items to the dryer. She never hesitated when staff asked her to help and continues to be a mentor for other individuals in the program. Erin also speaks up for herself more regularly now while maintaining polite and appropriate interactions for the setting. Her positivity, flexibility, and willingness to help makes her an extremely valued member of the Valley community.

Joseph Gonsalves

Joseph Gonsalves has only been a part of the adult program for a few months, but if you met him today you would think he’s been a part of the community for years. Starting a new program during COVID-19 is less than ideal, and few folks have handled the transition better than Joe. The first few weeks of Joe’s time at the program involved quiet observation while getting adjusted to the routine, but it was clear that he had a great attitude. He is now an active participant in all the groups offered onsite and greets almost everyone by name each day. He also does well helping to complete recycling around the building and volunteers whenever staff need a hand.

Joe recently had his first ISP meeting and looks forward to working on his conversation skills and staying focused on new tasks going into the next year. He already has a great foundation of skills and doesn’t hesitate to stand in front of a group and read aloud during daily job skills lessons. He also contributes to discussions, eagerly participates in walking groups outside, and even leads his room in singing the national anthem every morning. Joe’s motivation, kindness, and flexibility are appreciated by staff and peers alike.

With the track record he’s had so far, staff are more than certain that he’ll jump into our worksites and volunteer opportunities with the same determination. ■

Valley Collaborative Awards Corner

VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL
STAFF OF THE YEAR: STEVE GOULAKOS.
STUDENT OF THE YEAR: ROBIN TATE.



THE EVERETT V.
OLSEN, JR. AWARD
FOR HIGHEST
ACADEMIC HONORS:
LUIS ALGARIN

VALLEY ALTERNATIVE PROGRAMMING MIDDLE
AND HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENT OF THE YEAR: LILYANA KIMBALL-HILL
STAFF OF THE YEAR: TODD FLETCHER



VALLEY TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMMING
MIDDLE AND HIGH SCHOOL
STUDENT OF THE YEAR: NICHOLAS
GILBERT
STAFF OF THE YEAR: DANA WATFORD



VALLEY ADULT SERVICES
INDIVIDUAL OF THE YEAR:
MICHAEL KEMPTON
STAFF OF THE YEAR:
KATLYN WINCH



VALLEY STAFF OF THE YEAR: GAIL DEGREGORY (ABOVE
LEFT)

THE DR. ANTHONY BENT LEADERSHIP AWARD: JESSICA
SCALZI

COMMUNITY LEADERS:
BILLERICA BOARD OF HEALTH
TYNGSBOROUGH BOARD OF HEALTH



MICHAEL KEMPTON
AND CHRIS DUNN

Valley Collaborative Leadership Team



Chris A. Scott, PhD

Executive Director,
Finance and Operations
cscott@valleycollaborative.org



James George

Business Manager/Accountant
jgeorge@valleycollaborative.org



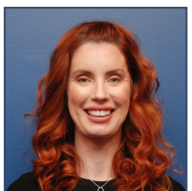
Joia Mercurio

Deputy Director
jmercurio@valleycollaborative.org



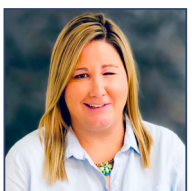
Kari Morrin

Director of Human
Resources
kmorrin@valleycollaborative.org



Jennifer Bergeron

Co-Principal, Valley
Elementary School
jbergeron@valleycollaborative.org



Heather Mackay

Co-Principal, Valley
Elementary School
hmackay@valleycollaborative.org



Nicole Noska

Principal, Transitional
Programming,
Valley Middle School,
Valley Transitional High
School
nnoska@valleycollaborative.org



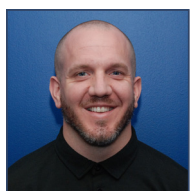
Julie Fielding

Principal, Alternative
Programming,
Valley Middle School,
Valley Transitional High
School
jfielding@valleycollaborative.org



Heather Valcanas

Director of Adult and
Transitional Services
hvalcanas@valleycollaborative.org



Matthew Gentile

Assistant Director,
Transitional Services
mgentile@valleycollaborative.org



Jessica Scalzi

Lead Nurse
jscalzi@valleycollaborative.org

Feedback

**continued from cover*

StudentSurvey Results

- 76% of students/individuals across the Collaborative feels Valley Collaborative is focused on the needs of students.
- Across all programs, 72.2% of students/individuals felt as though staff implemented the appropriate policies and procedures to keep them safe during the pandemic.
- 81.6% of students/individuals always feel that staff treats all

individuals respectfully, regardless of an individual's race, culture, family income, religion, sex, or sexual orientation.

- 86.8% of students in the Transitional High School feels that their staff shows them how to respect different opinions in class
- 93.3% of students in the Transitional Middle School program feels that their staff shows them how to respect different opinions in class
- 86.8% of individuals in the Today and Tomorrow program believe the expectations for COVID safety were clear.
- 90% of Alternative High School students feel that their teacher is interested in their well being beyond just their class work.
- 77% of students in the Alternative Middle School program felt like they had the appropriate technology

Valley Collaborative Board

Chair: Mr. Timothy Piowar

Superintendent, Billerica Public Schools

Dr. Jay Lang

Superintendent, Chelmsford 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

Mr. Christopher Malone

Superintendent, Tewksbury Public Schools

Dr. Michael Flanagan

Superintendent, Tyngsborough Public Schools

Mr. Everett (Bill) Olsen

Superintendent, Westford Public Schools

ogy to access their remote learning while they were home during the pandemic.

Family Survey Results

- 78.5% of families felt as though they were connected to and supported by their Valley team during the pandemic.
- 74.5% of families were satisfied with the alternative programming that was provided during the pandemic.
- 86.4% of families felt properly informed about the policies related to the pandemic that were implemented.
- During the pandemic and if their student/individual returned to the in-person model, 82.4% of families felt comfortable with the procedures that were implemented to keep their students safe.
- 76.4% of families felt that Valley Collaborative effectively communicated with them about the status of their student/individual's programming during the pandemic. ■