



# VALLEY COLLABORATIVE

Volume 7, Issue 2 News for the extended Valley Collaborative community January 2019



## We are: Making Music

■ Page 4: Vlad Stoicescu, Valley's music coach, accompanies students Elizabeth Haynes and Jacob Dumais.



## We are: Pilgrims

■ Page 5: Students and staff from Valley's School and Life Skills Training Program headed to Plimoth Plantation.



## We are: Leading

■ Page 6: What does Disney World have to do with leadership skills? These Site 2 students explain.

## The Valley Way: 325 Educational Programs

Dear friends and families:

It's that time of year when we reflect upon our strengths and weaknesses so that we can improve upon programming and embrace best practices. In keeping with the spirit of continuous improvement, we will be sending out surveys in the coming weeks to students, staff and families for their feedback. We are hoping our response rate will be at least 80 percent. Your feedback is important as it will help us to better serve the most vulnerable in our community in the best manner possible.

At Valley we embrace the notion that each of our 325 students requires customized, individual programming to meet their typical and atypical approach to learning. This allows Valley to reject the cookie cutter approach to programming for a particular profile of a student and instead embrace the notion that we are responsible to educate and serve each Valley student and their unique needs. Valley's student-centered budget ensures that the students and adults we serve and educate receive the most effective curriculum as well as state-of-the-art resources to meet their special needs. On average our staff to student ratio remains between 1:1 and 1:5.

This year Valley has expanded its literacy program across all grade levels. We now offer reading assessments for students K-12. We are proud to see that our balanced



Literacy Readers and Writers Workshop model is fully supported by leveled libraries across all grade levels. In addition, many of the students who arrive at Valley read many grade levels below and now have the opportunity to learn to read using Read 180 and System 44. In addition, we have expanded our high school electives to include an elective in journalism. Our students will now help to develop our quarterly newsletters, the school newsletters, year book and contribute to future additions of the Annual Report.

I'm also pleased to report that Valley remains in excellent financial health. Thanks to sound fiscal management, Valley returned an additional \$2 million to our member districts and once again fully funded its \$1.5 million Capital Fund. In 2018, Valley served more than 70 school districts across the Commonwealth and New Hampshire.

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# At Valley Elementary, Hatching Great Ideas

Valley Elementary School has gone to the birds. Last year, three new residents — Goldylox Redsox, Shadow Ninja and Buckbeak — came to the Tyngsborough school as chicks. Hedwig (also known as Peepers), the youngest of the brood, arrived in an egg.

But Valley's newest additions aren't just a novelty item. By interacting with these feathered friends, Valley students are also getting a hands-on science lesson about life cycles. Fifth and sixth grade students in the school's social and emotional/behavior classroom have been responsible for raising the birds since they arrived as chicks. Valley students feed the chickens, keep their house clean, and even read to them on occasion.

"It's a great example of how we're able to get creative here," says Principal Annie Willis. "Because our classes are so small, teachers are really freed up to try different things."



GOLDYLOX REDSOX, SHADOW NINJA, BUCKBEAK AND HEDWIG (AKA PEEPERS), GET PLENTY OF CARE AND ATTENTION FROM STUDENTS.



VALLEY ELEMENTARY'S FEATHERED FRIENDS, WHICH ARRIVED AS CHICKS, ARE BEING CARED FOR BY STUDENTS.

These days, teachers are coming up with a seemingly endless array of ways to get students thinking about science. In addition to the hen house, Valley Elementary also boasts a greenhouse, complete with its own compost heap, and a STEM lab. On one recent day, fifth and sixth graders were learning about circumnavigation, students in the lab were reading up on life cycles, while a group of younger students was headed out to the greenhouse to check on some seedlings.

Principal Willis says that this adaptive approach to learning is reflected in the new facilities. "The greenhouse can be the site of a science lesson or it can be a place for our SEL students to recharge." It's not a coincidence that some of the school's most popular new offerings are outside. Valley Elementary has a growing focus on outdoor education. In addition to the henhouse and the greenhouse there is a year-round playground, as well as specialized courses in outdoor education, including hiking and mountain biking.

This spring, the school hopes to add yet another item to a growing

roster of outdoor attractions: an art studio where students will be able get creative, work off steam and get some fresh air.

Principal Willis describes Valley Elementary's philosophy as "exploring possibility." Teachers and skilled staff, including art and music therapists, provide a baseline of support in the classroom, as well as instruction in literacy, math, language, writing, science and social studies. Beyond that, students are encouraged to explore, following their own interests, inside and out. "There's no such thing as a typical student here," she says. "And that means that we have to get creative, and constantly try out new things."

The henhouse, now home to Valley's most popular attraction, represents this philosophy in a nutshell—or rather, an eggshell. ■

## The Valley Way: 325 Educational Programs

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Historically, student enrollment has been higher in June than it is in September. However, this year Valley's enrollment was almost the same in September as it was in June. As the year progressed Valley continued to receive many referrals because our programs are of the highest quality and tuition rates are most competitive. This success can be attributed to the most caring and dedicated professional staff in the Commonwealth, and a supportive, knowledgeable Board of Directors. ■

My best to you always,

*Chris*

Chris A. Scott, Ph.D.  
Executive Director

# Recognizing Valley Excellence



## Employees of the Month

Speech pathologist Laura Badger McGloine and occupational therapist Nicole Brouwer, pictured above, were recently named Valley employees of the month for their work in helping to lead the Northeast Professional Educators Network. NPEN aims to maximize regional resources to provide high-quality, inter-district professional development, fostering a culture of collaborative inquiry in order to improve student learning for low-incidence professionals in 30 school districts within the Merrimack Valley. This fall, Valley Elementary played host to more

than 180 speech pathologists, who spent the day in Tyngsborough learning from Valley's own experts as well as staff from Mass. General Hospital. Congratulations!

## Giving Back

Valley Collaborative has been recognized for its ongoing support and financial contribution to Lowell General Hospital's annual Walk for Cancer Care. Valley was presented with the award from the Cancer Care Center at Lowell General in November. Valley donated \$175.84 to the Cancer Care Center in 2017.

## In the Pink

During the month of October, the Individuals in Valley's Adult Services Community Based Day Supports (CBDS) programming had the opportunity to use their organizational skills to compile a list of supplies needed to make pink ribbons for Breast Cancer Awareness month. CBDS then worked as a group to make unique handmade ribbons. The Individuals sent fliers home to family, friends and caregivers,



TODAY & TOMORROW PROGRAM SUPPORTS BREAST CANCER AWARENESS (LL-R) DENNIS WALSH, KATHERINE POULIN (CBDS TEACHER) SANDI GARCIA (CBDS JOB COACH) DEREK PORCARO, MATT PETERSON, BOB PERKINS (1:1), COREY CHARLAND, ALISON DUNBAR (1:1), MATT STACHE, KAREN DOLAN, STEVE HEASLEY (CBDS JOB COACH), CRYSTAL SURPLUS, SOPHANNA SAM, MEAGHAN CROUCHER. (FRONT WITH CHECK LGH REP AND MAGGIE KING)

posted them in the common areas of 25 and 40 Linnell Circle, and then took the ribbons out into their communities and sold them as a fundraiser for the Lowell General Cancer Center. On November 13, 2018 the Individuals hand delivered a check for \$250.00 to the Cancer Center. ■

# High School Site I: Donating Toys to Tots

This holiday season, students in Valley's High School Site 1 Vocational Program took part in the Toys for Tots toy drive in association with Boston Children's Hospital. Children's collects toys and donations for its patients and families every holiday season. Families can then "shop" for the toys and other items for their children.

Valley students had the opportunity to choose from a list of approved toys. The students then used their own hard earned money to go out and purchase some of these items to donate to the Children's toy drive. Because of the generosity of the students, many of these children got to experience a much more joyful holiday season. ■



FAITH RUIZ SHOWS OFF SOME OF THE ITEMS SHE PURCHASED FOR DONATION TO THE ANNUAL CHILDREN'S HOSPITAL TOY DRIVE.

# The Sound of Valley Music

In its former life, the space that's now home to Valley's music program was a loading dock for a small Billerica manufacturer. These days, the sounds of fork lifts and idling engines have been replaced with guitars, drums and the voices of Valley students enjoying a brand new music room affectionately known as the "School House rock and dock" in honor of Valley's most recent school play.

At the center of it all is Vlad Stoicescu, who has spent the last five years helping to create a music program for Valley students to access. "This isn't your typical type of music education," Vlad explains. "At a school with so many different populations of students, I have to be very adaptable with what I'm teaching."

When Vlad arrived at Valley back in 2013, the school barely had a music program. But each subsequent year has meant more musical offerings. On one recent day, a group of students gathered in the music room to write their own version of a Christmas carol for the holiday sing-along. Another class focuses on more traditional music education; students learn to play instruments and master the basics—notes, strings, keys, rhythm. Yet another class is exploring the nature of sound. Vlad brings a lesson to life with a quick demonstration using a red cup and slinky. The result: the room fills with a Star Wars-style sound effect.

"This kind of demonstration plants a seed of curiosity," says Vlad. "The students go home, still thinking about what we've learned, and they come back with more questions."

If Valley's ever-evolving music program isn't exactly typical, neither is the teacher at the center of it all. Vlad, who is a native of Romania, began his own

musical training at age 5 ½, studying the violin in music school. Then came piano lessons, musical composition, jazz and violin performances. After college, he wrote soundtracks for film. "I can write just about any kind of music," says Vlad, who plays and performs at local venues with a jazz fusion group



called The Wild Versatile.

And when he's not on stage, Vlad is working hard to ensure that Valley students have their time to shine. He's the musical director for the annual play, and supports the students in their singing, offering accompaniment on the piano and plenty of encouragement. "They're very capable and the experience of getting up on stage and performing really gives them a lot of confidence."

Valley's music program now extends well beyond the four walls of the loading dock. In addition to Vlad, a team of music therapists—Bryan Thomas at the elementary school, Sarah Knauer, who works with middle and high school students, and speech pathologist Abbie King, who co-treats with Knauer—use music with students in individual and group settings to address a range of



ABOVE: MUSIC COACH VLAD STOICESCU ACCOMPANIES JOE DISTEFANO DURING THE VALLEY HOLIDAY SING-A-LONG.  
LEFT: VLAD IN VALLEY'S NEW MUSIC ROOM.

student needs, from communication and cognition to behavior and social skills.

While Vlad isn't trained as a therapist, he says that his work at Valley has helped him to see what a tool music can be for reaching students. "They come to my class because they have some interest in music and that leads them to be able to open up about other things," he says. "Music is an ideal medium for building connections because everyone likes music."

Vlad hopes that in the future the program expands even further. He's currently thinking about how to use music as a means of teaching students the basics of computer coding. Then there's the electronic drum set he is attempting to craft using PVC pipes and sensors. Vlad is the first to admit that there may not be room at 40 Linnell Circle for all that he hopes to accomplish. Which is why he is hoping to move at least part of the show outside, to an outdoor sensory musical area that will allow students to experiment on supersized instruments including a xylophone and a keyboard big enough to dance upon.

Sounds like a great idea! ■

# High School Site 3 ‘Pilgrims’ Hit the Road

The recent trip to Plimoth Plantation taken by students in Valley’s School and Life Skills Training program was no ordinary field trip. For one thing, the living history museum is almost 70 miles south of Billerica—an hour and twenty minute drive. Eight middle and high school students made a ‘pilgrimage’ to Plymouth to experience life from yesteryear.

“They all loved it, especially meeting the different guides at Plimoth Plantation,” says teacher Tina Carabba. Tina, who has been at Valley for six years, leads the students on monthly outings into the community so that they can work on their life and social skills; frequent destinations including a local athletic facility where students play soccer on the indoor turf, Parlee Farms in Tyngsboro, or area restaurants where students practice their communications skills. But this adventure was their most ambitious to date, says Tina. “It was a significant undertaking.”

Eight students were joined by program staff as well as a physical therapist, an occupational therapist and a speech pathologist. That’s because Valley’s model of integrated therapy extends to activities including field trips, explains speech pathologist Laura Badger McLoine.

“A number of these students communicate via alternative means and this was an opportunity for them to work on their vocabulary and their social skills.”

In preparation for the trip, students studied the official Plimoth Plantation map and learned new vocabulary words, including ‘Pilgrim,’ ‘visit,’ ‘thankful’ and ‘mash.’ Laura also prepared visual supports for the trip, plotting out the adventure through images on a chart so that students would know what to expect.

Trips like this require such extensive planning because they are structured around the goals and abilities of the students, says Laura—much like their educational experience at Valley. “There’s no textbook for students who need to acquire social skills—we make those materials. Whether we’re in the classroom or on a trip, it’s a highly individualized experience.”

And while the trip to Plimoth



FROM LEFT: REBEKAH GIBB, CASSIE LYNCH, REBECCA NOONAN, AND AUDREY XUE AT PLIMOTH PLANTATION.

Plantation was an unqualified success based on the all-important metric of student enjoyment, Tina says that the outings are part of a larger effort by Valley staff to help the students function better in the wider world when they’re not at school. “The goal is to develop strategies to help each student, and then pass those along to the parents so that they can take over.” ■

## Out and About

Valley speech and language pathologists joined more than 15,000 of their peers at the annual convention of the American Speech-Language-Hearing Association in Boston this fall. From left: Alyson Shaheen, Vicki Samborski, Abbie King, Jillian Francis, Laura Badger McGloine, Dianne Giron, Kari Morrin, Kristen Mansfield and Bryanna Reddy.



## High School Site 2: Learning to Lead, Disney Style

When Valley closed its doors for the Thanksgiving holiday, five Site 2 students headed south, to Disney World. But this trip was about far more than fun in the sun. Nicole Porter, Caroline Burg, Luis Algarin, Robert Garcia and Marissa Silva spent four action-packed days participating in the Student Leadership Institute, part of the Blue Ribbon Schools of Excellence. With the magic of Disney as their backdrop, the students practiced their teamwork, critical thinking and problem solving skills.

The BOLT program focuses on the key question of ‘What makes a good leader?’ Through hands-on activities, students are introduced to the building blocks of leadership. The Valley students said that one key lesson they learned was the importance of making a good first impression. “We’d start out by greeting students we didn’t know and

shaking their hands,” says Robert. And there were plenty of hands to shake. Valley was one of many high schools, from all over the country, participating in the Student Leadership Institute. Luis says that the experience of having to interact with students he’d never met was eye-opening. “I learned a lot about building relationships with students I didn’t know,” he says. “People would try to stay in their own groups but the whole point of the Institute was to get us to talk to each other.”

A typical day for the Valley travelers started first thing in the morning, and stretched into the afternoon as the students participated in training sessions like ‘Taking Steps: Leading Yourself First’; ‘Discovering the Possibilities of Positive Leadership’; and ‘Teamwork Makes the Dreamwork.’ Once the official programming wrapped up, the students got to put their new skills to the test as they navigated Disney, Epcot Center and other attractions.

Nicole, the group’s resident Disney “expert,” says that the Site 2 students had plenty of opportunities to work on communication

and patience as they navigated long lines and big crowds. “Sometimes you have to wait for a really long time. I’ve been to Disney many times so I had to explain to the other kids what was going on.”

All of the students said that they came away from the experience



SITE 2 STUDENTS NICOLE PORTER, MARISSA SILVA, ROBERT GARCIA, LUIS ALGARIN AND CAROLINE BURG POSE WITH THEIR NEW FRIEND CHEWBACCA.

convinced of the importance of maintaining a positive attitude, even when circumstances are stressful—something that Blue Ribbon staffers stressed and modeled. “If you start off the experience of meeting new people being negative, that’s going to affect the whole trip,” concludes Luis. “Be positive about the experience.”

The final BOLT session of the trip was appropriately entitled ‘Leading into the Future.’ The program coordinators emphasize that while the jobs of the future are changing rapidly, the skills to be successful, including problem solving, collaboration, leadership, and communication and interpersonal skills, are well known now. Five lucky Valley students had an opportunity to work on those skills at Disney World—and to make some memories in the meantime. Says Robert: “I never in my life thought that I would be seeing the statue of Walt Disney and Mickey in person.” ■



NICOLE PORTER, ROBERT GARCIA, LUIS ALGARIN, MARISSA SILVA AND CAROLINE BURG SPENT FOUR DAYS LEARNING THE BUILDING BLOCKS OF LEADERSHIP.

# A Very Special Valley Holiday Season

**H**oliday time at Valley Collaborative means a Thanksgiving feast for everyone in the extended Valley community, from students and adults at every school site, to staff, to seniors at the Bilerica Senior Center. And preparing a dinner with all of the fixings for that many hungry people is an enormous undertaking. Just how much food did Joe Reilly and his helpers have to prepare?

- Turkey breast: 230 pounds
- Butternut squash: 145 pounds
- Corn: 110 pounds
- Potatoes: 130 pounds
- Cranberry sauce: plenty

Joe, the 'Joe' of Joe's Bistro, says that he and his crew spent four days preparing the feast. And when the final vegetable was chopped, and the last drop of gravy poured, then it was time for the clean-up to begin. "I think that we used every pot and pan in the kitchen," says Joe.

The school-wide Thanksgiving meal has been a tradition at Valley going back 20 years. But in recent years, it's grown to an ever more ambitious affair. The meal provides a wonderfully rich opportunity for students and staff alike to gather as a Valley 'family' and reinforce classroom lessons in a real-life holiday setting.

This year's holiday meal earned rave reviews, says Joe, who is beginning his 25th year as Valley's top chef after a career in hotel and corporate kitchens. "There were a lot of clean plates and thank yous."

And compared to the production of an all-Valley sit-down meal, the holiday dinner that Joe still had to cook for his own family seemed easy as pie. "I've only got 22 people to feed," he says. "That's nothing." ■

## Today and Tomorrow



Ninety people, including Individuals from the Today and Tomorrow program and their supervisors, enjoyed a holiday luncheon at 25 Linnell Circle. The delicious meal was served on tables decorated with centerpieces and festive tablecloths. Volunteers offered toasts and thanks with ginger ale. After lunch, a floor area was cleared to allow people to dance and digest their food, or if they didn't want to dance, people were encouraged to join the arts and crafts activities in the adjoining room. It was the best Thanksgiving luncheon ever! ■



CHRISTOPHER SPARKS-FREEHAN AND DYLAN TRAN PREPARE TO ENJOY THIS YEAR'S VALLEY THANKSGIVING FEAST PREPARED BY CHEF JOE REILLY AND HIS MANY HELPERS.

SCHOOL-TO-WORK TEACHER JOHN SHEA WITH SITE 3 STUDENTS ALANNAH CAVALLARO AND REILY LADUKE.



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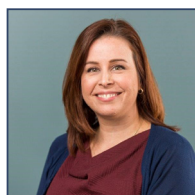
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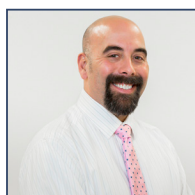
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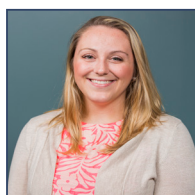
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