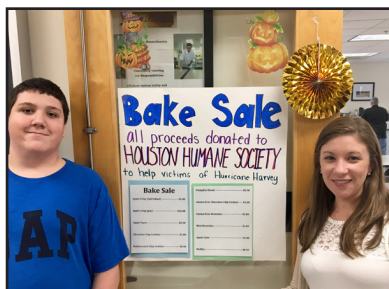




VALLEY COLLABORATIVE

Volume 6, Issue 1 News for the extended Valley Collaborative community Fall 2017

Celebrating, Connecting and Inspiring



We are: Giving Back

■ Page 3: Valley Middle School students raised more than \$250 for victims of hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria.



We are: Giving Back

■ Page 4: Valley students explore nature and health, thanks to our new greenhouse.



We are: Improving

■ Page 11: Valley kicks off the new school year with a facelift, starting with a new and much improved reception area.

Dear Valley Collaborative family and friends:

Valley had very successful Open Houses for its Elementary School, Middle School, High School and Adult Programs. We had over 100 people tour and meet with our staff. It was an inspirational night with a great deal of positive feedback from parents and caregivers. Valley staff needs to be commended for all of their hard work and care.

On a sunny Sunday in October, the Valley Elementary School staff raised funds and awareness for research and lifelong programs for people with Autism. Staff came together as a community to celebrate, connect, and inspire at "The Greater Boston Walk for Autism." Our dedicated, passionate staff raised \$3,925 towards the cause.

Valley's schools continue to enjoy strong enrollment trends and as such we are currently expecting to have to return a significant amount of revenue to our member school districts at the end of FY'18. This would make it the 4th consecutive year that Valley has been in a strong financial position where its net assets exceeded the 25% rule; resulting in a refund to its member districts. In FY'17, Valley returned \$2,201,859 to its member districts and tuition rates remain at approximately FY'11 levels.



Our STEM Lab is up and running! We now proudly have a state of the art lab which is equipped with 3 zSpace units and a 3D printer. We are one of a handful of "school districts" in the Commonwealth who has this technology. Sixteen teachers across the collaborative completed an intensive 6 hour training. We can now add virtual/augmented reality to our teaching toolbox.

I would like to wish everyone a Happy Thanksgiving and thank you for all of your ongoing support for the work we do at Valley. ■

My best to you always,

Chris

Chris A. Scott, Ph.D.
Executive Director

Elementary Students Skating into School Year

Valley Elementary School had a wonderful start to the school year. Valley staff spent the summer engaged in thoughtful planning for our students for the 2017-2018 school year. We are eager to get started with some new curricula adventures and projects!

We are excited to implement new curriculum and associated tools that will elevate our students' learning through the use of hands-on materials. The elementary school is committed and fully dedicated to implementing the STEM/zSpace lab and Greenhouse classroom into the curriculum maps and school. As such, our teachers have been trained and student's classes have been scheduled to access these hands-on initiatives. In addition, our physical education teacher used time over the summer to create and integrate our new wellness program and skate pass curriculum into our school's curriculum maps. Valley Collaborative is the first school district in the state to implement the skate pass curriculum, wherein students

will be using skateboards and snowboard items to learn balance, coordination and teamwork.

Additionally, students voted on elective choices. As such, electives will include hiking with our therapy dog, loom knitting for the homeless, engaging in recycled percussion and chorus, as well as studying an introduction to Spanish. Family events have been planned and our first event will incorporate parent exploration of our new hands on curriculum tools.

Technology is on our minds this year as well. Chromebooks have been integrated into the classrooms and students are using them for writing as well as tools to access our online curriculum options. Addition-



KELLI BUOTE'S AND HEIDI SANDLER'S CLASSROOMS ENJOY APPLE PICKING ON A FIELD TRIP THIS FALL.

ally, student portfolios and work samples will be available to parents digitally as we hope to showcase the amazing work our students accomplish as well as promote the relationships between families and Valley staff.

We are excited for the upcoming year! ■

Dr. Scott's Clinical Corner: Social Anxiety Disorder and Smartphones

Editor's note: welcome to the first installment of "Clinical Corner." Each issue, Executive Director Dr. Chris A. Scott will address a clinical crisis or issue. First up: The Rise of Social Anxiety Disorder and its Connection to the use of Smartphones.

At Valley, we are seeing an increase in the number of children who suffer with a Generalized Anxiety Disorder and the numbers continue to rise. Children experiencing anxiety may appear restless, irritable, fatigued, have poor concentration, and experience difficulty sleeping. This anxiety and the resulting symptoms

often make it difficult to carry out day to day activities and responsibilities. In particular, students with elevated anxiety levels often have difficulty maintaining healthy relationships with others (Mayo Clinic October 2017). At Valley, we often see students with elevated anxiety and stress which interferes significantly with their normal routine, occupational/academic functioning, and/or social relationships. More specifically, Social Anxiety Disorder is very prevalent in our student population.

>continued page 10



REBECCA NOONAN AND VANESSA SEBASTIAN NAVIGATE TARGET DURING THEIR LIFE SKILLS OUTING.

Middle Schoolers Lend a Hand to Hurricane Victims

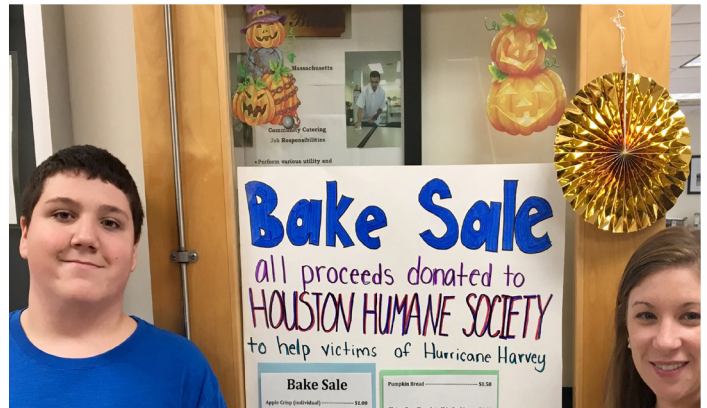
Autumn is here and things are “falling” into place! Valley Middle School has had a great start to the 2017-2018 school year. A therapeutic space, known as “The Blue Room,” is being constructed to address, diminish, and prevent challenging behaviors such as self-injury, property destruction, and aggression. Joanna Abate, Valley Middle School’s Occupational Therapist, reported, “This will be an incredible, soothing space for middle school students to help promote independence and self-regulation skills, which is crucial for student learning and success.”

Through the use multi-sensory stimuli such as fiber optic lights, a variety of comfortable seating options, soothing music, slow-moving projections, and a calming bubble tube feature, students will be able to achieve a sense of calmness in

order to promote and sustain attention skills, auditory awareness, focus, and visual tracking necessary for learning.

In the tragic aftermath of Hurricanes Harvey, Irma, and Maria, the Valley Middle School wanted to help the victims affected. The initiative was driven by Special Education Teacher, Shana Dunlevy and Occupational Therapist, Joanna Bond. As the students in Shana’s class learned about the state of Texas during the month of September, all the staff and students were saddened to hear about the destruction in many areas of Texas and wanted to help.

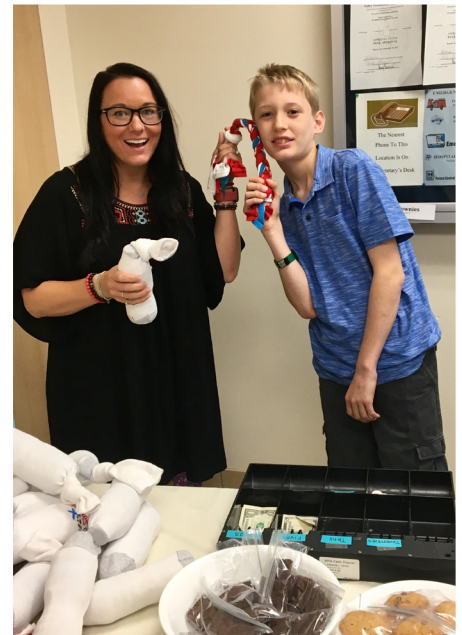
As animal lovers, the students voted to help their furry friends in Texas at the Houston Humane Society. The staff and students planned and executed an amazingly successful bake sale on Thursday October 5, 2017. Not only were these efforts educational, but over \$250 were raised to help animals in need! Valley Middle School would like to give a huge thank you to all of the staff, students, and local customers who contributed to the success of this event. ■



JOEY BAUER AND JOANNA ABATE, VALLEY OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST, EAGERLY GREET ‘SHOPPERS’ DURING THIS FUNDRAISER.



VALLEY MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHER, SHANA DUNLEVY, WITH MATT LAMPARELLI AND JOANNA ABATE, VALLEY OCCUPATIONAL THERAPIST, POSE WITH SOME OF THE ITEMS FOR SALE.



JACKIE SQUEGLIA, VALLEY SOCIAL WORKER, AND NICK SCHWEFLER, AS CASHIERS, SHOWING OFF SOME NON-FOOD ITEMS FOR SALE TO RAISE FUNDS FOR THE HOUSTON HUMANE SOCIETY.

VALLEY COLLABORATIVE

The The greenhouse at the Valley Elementary School is **THRIVING!** Our greenhouse is tremendously beneficial to Valley students because we are able to use it as a tool to explore nature and health. The greenhouse is incorporated into Valley's Health and Wellness Curriculum, called The Great Body Shop, by showing students the connection between health and nutrition, equaling overall wellness. Our greenhouse garden provides limitless possibilities for learning science, math, language arts, social studies and more! We are also able to use it for STEM projects throughout the classrooms.

Our greenhouse is currently transitioning to winter crops. The summer tomatoes were delicious (both large tomatoes and small cherry tomatoes). The students have finished using the summer harvest in our kitchen and enjoyed the products served with lunch. With the help of Vivi, our wonderful school chef, students turned tomatoes and cucumbers into pickles and tomato sauce, which were made from our crops! In early fall, cooler weather crops such as



GIACOBBE VINCETT, TRISTIAN THEROUX, AND ADRIEN GALARZA PROUDLY SHOW OFF THE LEAVES THEY HAVE NURTURED TO GROW IN VALLEY'S GREENHOUSE AS PART OF THEIR MATH AND SCIENCE LESSONS.



carrots, garlic and three different types of lettuce were successfully grown.

In addition to growing crops, the Valley greenhouse is also home to aquatic life and habitats. Three strong goldfish found a home in our pond and love being fed by the students. Our students love to watch these fish eat. Snails and water plants are the next additions to the pond. Their job will be to help keep the pond healthy and clean.

Students will be accessing the green-

house throughout the year, not only for gardening purposes, but to connect and extend our science curriculum. Additional STEM lessons will focus on activities that relate to state curriculum standards, such as heat transfer with the solar panels and soil composition. Also, our physical education teacher will be sure to incorporate the wellness classroom lessons into the growth and nutritional values of the food. Finally, our parents are getting involved in the hands on nature and planting with their students at the next event! It is an exciting time for our students to engage in hands-on learning through our Greenhouse! ■



Site 1: Palpable Positive Energy

This fall, Valley Transitional High School's vocational programming on Site 1 has instituted several exciting changes that have already enhanced student learning, both academically and vocationally. Specifically, we have transitioned from a "daily" academic-vocational schedule to a "weekly" academic-vocational schedule. In the past, the number of days per week a student worked was based on their grade level. For example, a sophomore worked two days per week whereas a junior worked three



NATE GRIDELLI, AN UNDERCLASSMAN ON SITE 1, VISITED HARVARD'S MUSEUM OF NATURAL HISTORY WHERE STUDENTS CONTINUED THEIR STUDIES ON NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE AND AMERICAN HISTORY.

days per week. Now, students partake in one whole week of academics, followed by one whole week of vocational experience. This biweekly vocational schedule reflects what students at traditional technical high schools experience and as such, it is important to Valley to replicate a true high school experience for our

students, whenever possible. With this scheduling shift, we are hopeful to see an increase in independent student internships. We are looking to work with companies willing to take a student every day, every week. This consistency would allow us to send one student to an employer one week, and another student the next week.

While this may seem like merely a procedural adjustment, we have already seen a remarkable increase in student output, engagement, and morale in the classrooms and the vocational shops. In fact, the cause-and-effect of this new programmatic adjustment has been positive in numerous ways.

The schedule provides students and teachers with five consecutive class days, which:

- Provides more time on learning for students within the classroom
- Helps increase teacher efficiency in generating weekly lesson plans
- Increases consistency from day-to-day for students who struggle with organization and executive functioning challenges
- Increases the retention of information and recalling previously learned concepts
- Increases MCAS readiness due to exposure to concepts potentially targeted by the exam

The schedule also provides students and vocational coaches with five consecutive vocational days, which:

- Allow coaches to focus on specific projects that can be completed, from start to finish, within a week's time. In our woodshop, for example, our coach can work with the same students all week. This allows the coach to intro-



LUCAS FLORES HELPED REPLACE A FLOWER POT ON THE FRONT DECK AT VALLEY COLLABORATIVE TO DECORATE FOR THE FALL SEASON.

duce projects on Monday, work with them throughout the week, and finish a project by Friday. This way, our students can feel accomplished through seeing the fruits of the labor in setting short term goals.

- Our coaches can also create timelines within the curriculum, allowing them to teach the skills necessary to learn a vocation in a more organized, structured manner, seemingly following a practical scope and sequence of each profession.

Our new schedule has also allowed us to incorporate more PBIS incentives within our programming. As such:

- Students can earn vocational "fill-in days" toward the end of an academic week if they have gone above and beyond in the classroom, combined with little to no behavioral issues. This incentive works well for our students who simply do not enjoy academics and/or a classroom environment.

The Latest Valley Teaching Tool: Virtual Reality

Valley Collaborative is honored to support Glen Costello and Heather Mackay, Valley STEM coordinators

as we move forward in advancing our science, technology, engineering and mathematics curricula, collaborative-wide. Students and staff across Valley Collaborative are taking steps towards increasing their STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Mathematics) fluency. Throughout the Collaborative, teachers have made a strong effort towards incorporating simple STEM activities inside of their curriculum to increase student engagement. Overall teacher attitude to mathematics, which is the highest factor in student engagement, has never been higher here at the collaborative!

Last year, Valley teachers began to use an online mathematics curriculum titled ST Math, which aims to focus on math concepts and eliminate barriers to mathematics les-

sons, including (but not limited to) reading abilities. To date, 126 students collaborative wide have used ST Math. On average, students are receiving between 45-90 minutes per week of individualized, rigorous math instruction thanks to ST Math! We are happy to report ST Math is meeting the needs of our diverse learners in many of our programs.

Over the summer, Valley proudly constructed a state of the art STEM Lab, which is equipped with three 'zSpace' units as well as a 3D printer. Valley Collaborative is one of only a handful of school districts in the Commonwealth who



VALLEY'S STEM DEPARTMENT LEADS, GLEN COSTELLO AND HEATHER MACKAY, POSING FOR A PHOTO DURING THE OCTOBER ZSPACE TRAINING.



COREY SHEPARD GUIDES STUDENTS OF SITE 2 "EAST" USING THE STEM LAB THROUGH A VIRTUAL REALITY LEARNING ACTIVITY.

the Collaborative completed an intensive six hour training targeting the use of this innovative STEM Lab equipment. Thank you to the widespread support in each of our programs who provided coverage for our teachers to be able to receive this necessary training. We can now add virtual/augmented reality to our teaching toolbox! The next training for teachers will be offered in early November. ■



VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT OWEN MCMAHON, ALONG WITH AMY ROSS, BCBA AND JEN BERGERON, CLASSROOM TEACHER, DURING A VIRTUAL REALITY LESSON.

has this technology available to students to access the world of virtual reality learning in order to teach our diverse learners. 'zSpace' combines "augmented reality" and "virtual reality" to create the ultimate learning experience. Valley's 'zSpace' Learning Lab is comprised of three stations, with each station including a suite of educational software, hundreds of learning activities ready for integration into our curriculum, and zSpace all-in-one PCs.

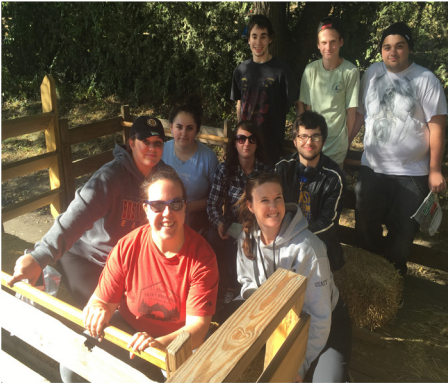
This Fall, sixteen teachers across



STUDENTS OF SITE 2 "EAST" AT A LOCAL MICROSOFT STORE AFTER A 3D MODELING CLASS.

Alternative High School: Unique & Distinct Approach

As the 2017-2018 school year begins, Valley Transitional High School's alternative programming on Site 2 is excited to offer three distinct and unique programs taking place for the second year! Given our ability to serve children with so many diverse backgrounds, Valley has reached an even wider scope of students and school districts! Valley Transitional High School's alternative programming on Site 2 includes programmatic distinctions labeled the "West," the "North," and the "East."



HANNAH MORIARTY, MCKAYLA NIEVES, BRITTANY BRITTON, SAMANTHA CARDONA, BRITTANY MAIURI, ANDREW FERRIE, JOE KOSTIKOV AND SETH KNOBLAUGH ENJOYING A HAYRIDE ON THEIR WAY TO PICK APPLES.

Currently, our "West" program is entrenched in developing relationships between peers, and between staff and students. As such, students recently visited MetroRock Gym for rock climbing and a high ropes course, aimed to provide the footing for fostering the development of these relationships! Students climbed through obstacles and pushed themselves to the limits 60 feet above the ground with nothing more than a harness and a rope for safety! Valley students ended the 20 minute aerial workout with a "leap of faith" and zip lined 80 feet across the course. The West program is hoping to continue

its efforts in encouraging our students to take positive risks with additional rock climbing and rappelling trips, as well as overnight camping and hiking trips.

In the newly designed "North" program, students have control over their week and are an integral part in developing his/her program. A program which relies on a high level of investment from its students, North has begun a democratic approach to choosing trips, cooking classes and menus, as well as honoring their own top students. Every Friday, students and staff together discuss the week, plan out future opportunities and students have equal vote with their staff to make decisions on site. As such, the "North Star" is chosen weekly by staff and students and the recipient receives double PBIS points and is recognized by the school community. So far, North has enjoyed trips to Portsmouth and Newburyport, as well as a recent apple picking trip to Honey Pot Apple Orchards and a Halloween trip to Salem, MA.

Finally, Valley's "East" program has enjoyed a successful beginning to the school year. The East is focused on setting up college tours and STEAM programming, with new robotics, coding, and "Arts in Science" additions. STEAM is an educational approach to learning that uses Science, Technology, Engineering, the Arts and Mathematics as access points for guiding student inquiry, dialogue, and critical thinking. The end results are students who take thoughtful risks, engage in experiential learning, persist in problem-solving, embrace collaboration, and work through the creative process.

These are the innovators, educa-



STUDENT KAYLA BLIZZARD HOURIHAN AND TEACHER COREY SHEPHERD EXPERIMENTING IN OUR NEW STEM LAB.

tors, leaders, and learners of the 21st century! Valley students are working with Microsoft and Umass Lowell Sound Engineering departments in these areas.

On September 11th, 2017 "East" side visited the Haverhill Firefighter Museum to tour the museum. They were then invited to a private session with the creator of the 9/11 memorial, who discussed the inspiration that led to the memorial dubbed "Clambering Upward". Students were interviewed and this experience was highlighted in a tremendous article by the Eagle Tribune of Lawrence, MA. Valley is so proud of our students who took part in this experience, not to mention the appreciation our "East" side students demonstrated to the men and women of the Haverhill Fire Department.

Site 2 has already incorporated its new students and staff into the fabric of our day to day programming. The focus from Valley's amazing teachers continues to prioritize creating and fostering positive trusting relationships with our students. Valley Transitional High School's Site 2 programming would not be what it is without the teachers, aides, and social workers who build our children up every day and allow them to access the amazing programs Valley has to offer. ■

Site 3: Planning and Preparing for the Year Ahead

The programming on Valley Transitional High School Site 3 has provided the backdrop to begin another great school year! Our programs are continuing to grow and we have added a new classroom in our School and Life Skills program. All of our students continue to work and learn valuable vocational skills out in the community. We thank all of community partners who always welcome us into their businesses so that Valley students can gain the skills they need to be as successful as possible. In the classroom, students are focusing on functional academics and independent living skills.

Our afterschool recreation program started October 2 and has many exciting activities planned by listening to the student's wants and needs. Based on a feedback survey completed by the students at the end of the school year in June, we have incorporated additional sporting activities into our after-school programming. This November, students will develop, increase, and refine their soccer skills at a local gym. Throughout the year, students will be able to participate in other sports-based activities such as gymnastics, basketball, and swimming. In addition to adding more sports-based activities, we have created scene study classes where the students will be able to practice their dramatic appeal in order to prepare for the upcoming spring play!

As it's never too early to think globally, we are eager to begin preparations for our annual school trip! This year, we are planning to travel across the country in order to focus on exploring San Francisco. This great city offers a variety of learning experiences, where we plan to take a sightseeing tour, travel to see the Redwoods at Muir Woods, explore Alcatraz, and enjoy a San Francisco Giants baseball game. There is already a buzz about this trip from Valley students as students and staff alike are excited to experience another part of the country together!



MONICA BRUNI PROUDLY
DISPLAYS HER ART PROJECT.

AMIE HOWARD (LEFT) AND
MARY-ALICE JACKSON (RIGHT)
AT MINE FALLS PARK ON A
HIKE IN THE AFTER-SCHOOL
PROGRAM.



Palpable Positive Energy

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- “Academic Recovery” exists for students who incur two or more absences in an academic week. This means that a student is required to spend time making up missed assignments at the beginning of their vocational week before they are able to rejoin their shop. Additionally, students are rewarded at the end of each month if their attendance is exemplary.

Aside from our scheduling changes, a few other modifications have been made to our programmatic offerings, including:

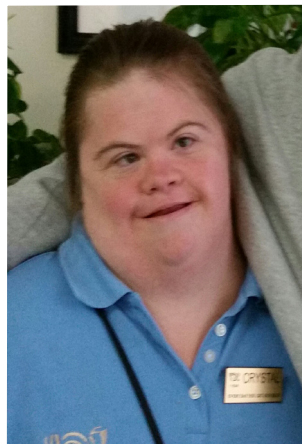
- “Civics and Media Literacy in America:” a new senior class examining American government and political structure, current political climate, and civic responsibilities for our young adults, where political speeches and social media are explored.
- “Transitional Living:” a class that ensures students are working towards transition planning goals on his/her IEPs, while also preparing upper-classmen for their journey into adulthood.

The positive energy within our school is palpable as the beginning of the school year already seems like a distant memory. Student success and confidence is booming and we look forward to continued accomplishments throughout the entire year! ■

Adult Services: Recognizing Vocational Independence and Excellence

This fall, Valley Collaborative's Adult Service program has many individuals to honor with his/her commitment to excellence and dedication in the workforce and workplace.

The Today and Tomorrow Program would like to acknowledge three outstanding examples of vocational independence and excellence. Crystal Dwyer recently celebrated three years of employment with Wegmans, an upscale regional grocer with a history of excellence in the marketplace, which is a true accolade of her performance and her dedication to her job. Ryan Poisson was promoted to working five days a week at Chelmsford High School as a result of his excellent work ethic and commitment to all things Chelmsford. Additionally, Mike Krawczyk will be honored for his ten years of service to the Lowell National Historic Park (LNHP), and as such, LNHP awarded him with a VIP centennial coin in recognition of his years of unwavering service. In addition, Kenneth Bonnell, a student from Valley Transitional High School's programming in School to Work on Site 3, joined Valley's Today and Tomorrow Program after gradu-



CRYSTAL DWYER RECENTLY CELEBRATED HER THREE YEARS OF EMPLOYMENT AT WEGMANS IN BURLINGTON, MASSACHUSETTS.

ation. We are excited to have Ken join our Adult Services team!

Valley's Adult Services program also welcomes Joe Venskus and Melina Seitzinger to join its staff! Joe Venskus has worn "many hats" over his twelve years of service with Valley and it was only a matter of time that his wealth of experience and knowledge would lead him to our Adult Services program. Staff from the Today and Tomorrow Program, in addition to contracted services through DDS and MRC, will surely benefit from his leadership as both the staff and individuals being served welcome Joe to his new role as Adult Services Coordinator.

Valley's Adult Services program, in order to meet the needs of the Individuals they serve, identified an ever-growing number of Individuals with disabilities who are experiencing emotional barriers to their ability to reach/sustain their independence. In an effort to ensure each Individual in our adult program receives access to services and resources aimed at increasing their skills and potential, a social worker position was added and filled by Melina Seitzinger. Melina has been with Valley Collaborative for nine years and will bring her clinical knowledge as a Licensed Independent Clinical Social Worker (LICSW) in addition to her programmatic experience working with government agencies to the Adult Program. Melina and Joe will work together to incorporate diverse programming for the individuals served through Valley Collaborative Adult Services. We are excited to have Joe and Melina combine all of their talents in these roles!

In addition to providing vocational experiences, Adult Services offers Individuals the opportunity to learn and practice a variety of adaptive life



RYAN POISSON HARD AT WORK AT CHELMSFORD HIGH SCHOOL.

skills that will enhance their independence. The Community Based Day Services (CBDS) has been addressing health and wellness within the context of their programming and incorporated these learning opportunities by bringing awareness to and support for Breast Cancer Awareness Month this past October. CBDS made and sold pink ribbons for \$1 to donate all proceeds to support The Cancer Center at Lowell General Hospital.

Please stop by and visit our program—our door is always open! Our goal is to be visible and productive members of the Valley Collaborative community. ■



ADULTS AND VALLEY STAFF CELEBRATED THE KICKOFF OF THE NFL SEASON BY HOSTING A "PATRIOTS" DAY, SHOWING OFF THEIR NEW ENGLAND PRIDE.

Dr. Scott's Clinical Corner

»continued from page 2

The current DSM-5 definition of Social Anxiety Disorder is:

A persistent fear of one or more social or performance situations in which the person is exposed to unfamiliar people or to possible scrutiny by others. Students suffering from Social Anxiety Disorder fear that they will act in a way that will be embarrassing or humiliating. Exposure to the feared situation almost invariably evokes anxiety. The individual almost always recognizes the fear is excessive. The fear situation is either avoided or endured with intense anxiety or distress. (The American Psychiatric Association 2013)

While this definition is clearly the most definitive and precise official definition produced so far, “social anxiety disorder” has only been officially recognized since 1980, and the problem did not become adequately explained until the 1987 version of the DSM-III-R. Thus, the definition of social anxiety disorder is becoming clearer and more precise with each edition.

According to Wikipedia, on June 29, 2007, the first iPhone was released. The rise of Social Anxiety Disorder and its connection to the use of smartphones definitely has our attention at Valley. Between 2011 and 2013, the percentage of teens nationwide who had smartphones increased from 23 percent to 37 percent. In 2012, 81 percent of teens used some form of social media.

Alexandra Ossola, in her article titled “A New Kind of Social Anxiety in the Classroom,” explores the rise of Social Anxiety Disorder and its connection to the use of smartphones. “An estimated 15 million Americans have social anxiety disorder, according to the Anxiety and

Depression Association of America, and symptoms usually start around age 13. More than just shyness, social anxiety causes people to fear the judgment and scrutiny of those around them. People with social anxiety often have concurrent disorders like depression. The disorder can affect every aspect of a person’s life, from academic performance to self-esteem; in severe cases, social anxiety can be debilitating, keeping sufferers in bed and out of public places to avoid confrontation.” Either way, though, she hypothesizes that teens are using social media as a crutch, a replacement for the in-person interactions that help them develop socially. “It’s going to take a lot more research because, as I’ve seen in my other research about social media, due to excessive use of cell phones, teens and young people alike are not talking face to face. It’s hampering their social skills,” she said (The Atlantic January 2015).

Jean Twenge, a professor of psychology at San Diego State University, in an article titled “Steve Jobs, Apple and Social Anxiety,” states that we are addicted to our phones and as a result, she concludes that our mental health and relationships may be suffering. The iGen generation, born after 1995, is the first generation to spend their entire adolescence with smartphones. Twenge declares, on the tenth year anniversary of the iPhone, the iGen is now becoming adults and there are serious adverse side effects of smartphone technology being used to supplant face-to-face interactions and relationship building. “More and more studies suggest that electronic communication—unlike the face-to-face interaction it may replace—has negative consequences for mental health.” (Newsweek July 2017).

As such, I believe it behooves us to take seriously the amount of time spent using smartphones and other ‘screen time’ technologies. In other words, too much exposure can



VALLEY'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR,
DR. CHRIS SCOTT, Ph.D., M.Sc., M.Ed, B.Ed., BA.

make us unhappy, socially disconnected, or according to the experts, one could develop anxieties in social settings, perhaps leading to a social anxiety disorder. In the age of social media and technology, it is important to teach our children what an appropriate amount of use of screen time looks like. At Valley, our programming provides students many opportunities to build meaningful, authentic relationships with peers and staff with a focus on fostering relationships. At Valley, we help our students establish, enhance, and practice social skills in targeted skill building groups lead by Speech Language Pathologists on the basis of Michelle Garica Winner's Social Thinking strategies, as well as by incidental learning through common, typical classroom interactions. We believe social connectedness is a precursor to all learning. ■

Sincerely yours,

Chris

For more information on this topic, please contact us. We are here to educate/serve.

Facilities Report: Building for Success

Valley's Operations and Facilities Department, along with the help of our contractors and vendors, had a very productive and exciting summer. We met each timeline set forth for various projects and are proud of the hard work it took to accomplish our many goals. In each of our programs, we accomplished interior improvements and updates to refresh all of our classroom and treatment spaces in addition to larger renovations at 25 Linnell Circle and 40 Linnell Circle.

At 25 Linnell Circle, a reception area was constructed in order to create an appropriate greeting space for all who enter and serve as a directory for Valley's Adult program, as well as Valley's Central Offices. The reception area is a very welcoming addition to help the flow of traffic on the inside of the building. As for the outside of this location, two reflective entrance signs were added to help identify this site as a Valley Program. Lastly, a mailbox was added to 25 Linnell Circle.

At 40 Linnell Circle, the restrooms located on the second floor were renovated, which enhance personal care and activities of daily living lessons, as well as the general functionality of the facility. Corian countertops were installed with built in sinks and faucets to help the usability of this area. The partitions between stalls were replaced and contain new toilet paper dispensers. Additionally, the paper towel dispensers were replaced and full-sized mirrors were installed to finish these enhancements.

At 40 Linnell Circle, all of the tile floors received a "facelift" and were refinished. We welcomed the fall season by planting mums and pumpkins around the entrance. While the temperatures remain a little warm, we are festively decorated and ready for the fall season! Our department is excited to begin another successful school year! ■



VALLEY COLLABORATIVE

Valley Collaborative Leadership Team

Chris A. Scott, PhD

Executive Director

cscott@valleycollaborative.org

**Nicole Noska**

Principal, Valley Middle School

nnoska@valleycollaborative.org

**Joia Mercurio**

Assistant Executive Director

jmercurio@valleycollaborative.org

**Chris Cowan**

Principal, Site 1
Valley Transitional High School

ccowan@valleycollaborative.org

**Sean Glavin**

Director of Finance and Operations

sglavin@valleycollaborative.org

**Julie Fielding**

Principal, Site 2
Valley Transitional High School

jfielding@valleycollaborative.org

**Kari Morrin**

Director of Student Services

kmorrin@valleycollaborative.org

**Kristine Bonsack**

Principal, Site 3
Valley Transitional High School

kbonsack@valleycollaborative.org

**Paul Donovan**

Director of Technology

pdonovan@valleycollaborative.org

**Jessica Scalzi**

Lead Nurse

jscalzi@valleycollaborative.org

**Mark Morreale**

Operations and Facilities Manager

mmorreale@valleycollaborative.org

**Joe Venskus**

Adult Service Coordinator

jvenskus@valleycollaborative.org

**Annie Willis**

Principal, Valley Elementary School

awillis@valleycollaborative.org



Valley Collaborative Board

Chair: Mr. Timothy Piwowar

Superintendent of the Billerica Public Schools

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