



We are: Soaring

■ Page 2: Students at the Elementary School capped off their most adventurous year to date.



We are: Giving Thanks

■ Page 4: Students in the Transitional High School served up an elaborate 'Friendsgiving Feast.'



We are: In the Spirit

■ Page 6 Individuals in the Adult Services programs look forward to celebrating the holidays all year long.

Giving Thanks for an Extraordinary Community: The Year in Review

Message from Executive Director Dr. Chris A. Scott:

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'24 school year was very successful programmatically and financially.

The 2023/24 school year has been a very successful year at Valley Collaborative. Valley continues to enjoy a reputation for high quality programming and operational excellence. FY'24 resulted in an overall enrollment increase in our K12 and DDS programs. Valley was inundated with audits this past year. Our small but mighty team excels under pressure and tight timelines. Here's an overview:

- DESE Coordinated Program Review – Mid-Cycle Review: Valley has concluded its Mid-Cycle Review and the feedback from the DESE Office of Approved Special Education Schools (OASES) included, below.



RYAN CURRAN, JOEY MICALIZZI, MAGGIE KING, DR. CHRIS A. SCOTT, AND ALICE MARY JACKSON.

Results: A+/Exemplary

§ Administrative teams had an impressively long tenure. (This is significant because we are in a field where it is typical for key positions to be vacant and/or hard to fill. Fortunately, when people come to Valley, they fall in love with our mission and vision and stay for a very long time.)

§ Students were engaged in rigorous curriculum/programming.

§ They observed Valley's staff interacting with students in a caring and compassionate manner.

Elementary School: Giving Thanks for an Extraordinary Community

The Elementary School had a fall filled with activities and opportunities for students to learn and explore the world. We're looking forward to an exciting and enriching 2025!

Trunk or Treat

On Halloween, the community came together for our annual Trunk or Treat Event. Staff, parents, our School Resource Officer (Christopher Gustafson), and the Tyngsboro Fire Department decorated the trunks of the vehicles and passed out candy and treats to our students as they paraded around the building in costumes.

Thanksgiving Community Brunch

Thirty one families came to our school on the morning of 11/27 for our annual Thanksgiving Community Brunch. Our cafeteria was filled with conversation and smiling faces as caregivers, siblings, and friends joined students and staff to share a meal and connect with one another.

Out in the Community

In October, the Elementary School went on our annual pumpkin picking trips to Parlee Farms in Tyngsboro. Each year, the Parlee family is so kind and welcoming. They remember us and clearly care for our students. We are very thankful to have such a wonderful destination so close by. A group of Valley Elementary School students from across several classrooms formed a chorus and returned to the Carleton-Willard Village in Bedford MA to sing and bring holiday cheer to the residents there. Led by Music Therapist Meghan Pope and Speech and Language Pathologist Jillian Wendler, the group spent

weeks rehearsing beloved carols and performed for the residents on 12/17.

Getting Active

Teacher Matt McCarthy has organized several hikes for students from multiple classrooms. On three occasions students climbed to the summit of Mt. Wachusett. The hikes have connected students with the environment, with themselves, and with each other. They have been a source of motivation and a source of accomplishment and something our students are thankful for.

Students have been out in the community for field trips including several visits to We Rock the Spectrum in Westford, the Ecotarium in Worcester, Horseback riding trips, and life-skills outings. On 12/18 Principal Heather Mackay led a girls-group to see The Nutcracker at the Strand Theatre in Dorchester! The girls decorated their hair with tinsel and enjoyed the seasonal classic.

Annual Giving Project

Throughout the month of December, classes participate in our annual giving project. Students learn that one way to show kindness is to give people gifts. With this giving project, students will buy a gift (\$5 or less) off of another student's wish list, wrap it up, and exchange the gift at the end of December. It's a great opportunity to teach students the meaning of selflessness and self-worth. It helps them gain the very important insight of perspective-taking and thinking about others. ■



TOP RIGHT: PRESTON BITTENCOURT ENJOYS A HAY RIDE AT PARLEE FARMS; CENTER: FAMILIES TURNED OUT IN DROVES TO ATTEND THE ANNUAL THANKSGIVING BRUNCH; BOTTOM: KESHAWN WEINERT AND NATE SKUSE ON A RECENT HIKE.

Valley Transitional High School: Alternative Program – Three Cohorts, One Great Year

The Transitional High School Alternative Programs have three cohorts of students, all of which enjoyed a very successful year. Here's a look at 2024, by the numbers.

Delta – 11/12th graders

This year saw increased participation in our outdoor education programs, resulting in 12 students doing an overnight hiking trip in the White Mountains. The goal for next year is to continue expanding participation with future overnight trips.

Students earned site awards for academic achievement, including awards for core subjects, a most improved, and Honor/High-Honor Roll. They took mid-term and final exams last year and are hoping to continue to practice study skills and managing anxiety during formal testing. Seven students wrote fiction pieces to enter in a 100 word story contest.

Five students are doing internships in fields that include automotive and barn work. The internships have been very successful. We also have frequent participation in community service with the Chelmsford Food Pantry.

Students are making continued progress on transitional skills and activities including going on three campus tours, conducting career research, and working on cooking skills.

Vocational – 11/12th graders

Students in the Landscaping Program have worked hard to improve outdoor spaces, learning valuable skills in the process. The Multimedia Program has produced creative digital projects, while the Restoration Program has focused on bringing furniture and other items back to life with care



DANIEL REARDON, AN 11TH GRADER IN THE VOCATIONAL PROGRAM AT THE ANNUAL STAFF VS. STUDENTS FOOTBALL GAME.

and precision. Our students have also gained hands-on experience through internships at local businesses and organizations, building skills and confidence in real-world settings.

In addition to their vocational work, students have made great strides academically, meeting personal goals and improving key skills in reading, writing, and math. Teachers have been impressed with their focus and determination, as well as their ability to apply what they learn in the classroom to their hands-on projects.

Field trips have added excitement and learning beyond the classroom. Highlights include kayaking in Ipswich, where students learned teamwork on the water, and hiking Mount Watatic, which gave them a rewarding outdoor challenge. They also enjoyed apple picking at Honey Pot Hill, celebrating the fall season, and exploring Boston, where they soaked up history and culture.

This school year has been full of growth and success for our vocation-

al program, both in and out of the classroom. We're excited to see what the rest of the year brings!

PSI – 9/10th graders

We welcomed a new Special Education Assistant, Cristina Iebba, who has been a seamless fit since her start. Students competed in STEAM challenges as part of their science curriculum. Challenges included designing and competing paper airplanes, water bottle rockets, and balloon racers.

They also conducted science labs for units on density, modeling atoms, and finding mass with displacement.

Our students painted pottery at a field trip at You're Fired. Some students created gifts to give to loved ones.

Students celebrated Halloween with staff dressed as Minions and students making their own jack-o-lanterns.

PSI students participated in a mock election with Delta and Voc, voting on state and federal ballots. ■

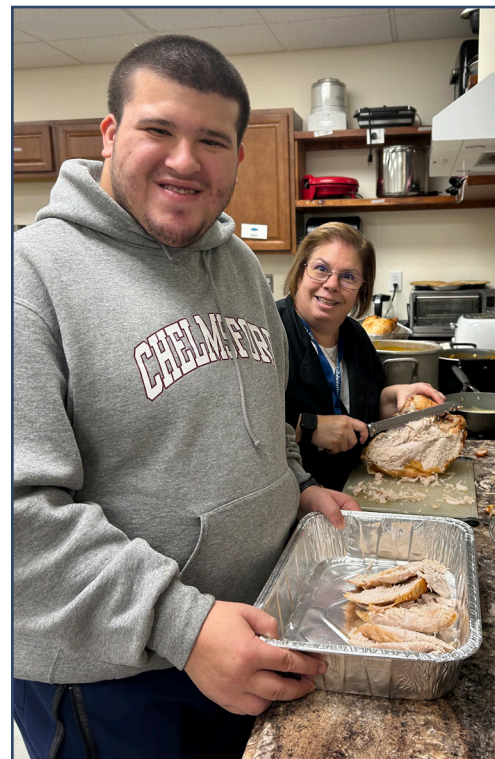
Valley Middle School: An Abundance of Good

Students enrolled in Valley Middle School's transitional programs had a fantastic November, enjoying field trips to the Topsfield Fair, Connor Farm, TD Garden, and the Enchanted Village. During cooking class, students made a variety of interesting dishes including fettuccine alfredo, spaghetti and meatballs, Cuban pastries called pastelitos, flan, and Mexican street corn. In ELA, students are enjoying reading the book *Wonder* by R.J. Palacio. Swimming started back up this Fall and students have enjoyed traveling off site to the Beede Center in Concord for swimming lessons. The classes are putting the finishing touches on their classroom doors for the annual Holiday Door Decorating Contest. This year's contest, sponsored by the Student Council, is Holiday Movies. Students have also been practicing for the annual Holiday sing-a-long which will take place just before the winter break. These traditions are a part of the fabric of Valley, giving students opportunities to collaborate with one another and showcase their talents.

Students enrolled in Valley's Middle School alternative programs have been enjoying being the detectives as they identify suspects in the

murder-mystery book, *The Curious Vanishing of Beatrice Willoughby*. In outdoor education, students hiked Mount Wachusett, Ward Hill Reservation, and Mine Falls. Field trips to Franklin Park Zoo, Rage Cage, and Honey Pot Hill Orchard were among the student's favorite trips this fall. The Thanksgiving feast, prepared by Culinary Arts teacher Bridget Zanni and her classes was an incredible experience for staff and students. Students and staff gathered together around a long table and shared sentiments of thanks while they dined on turkey, stuffing, mashed potatoes, and vegetables. A fantastic meal and a fantastic time was had by all.

"I love the students, I love my job here," says Culinary Arts Instructor Bridget Zanni. The feeling is certainly mutual. In a recent cooking class in the middle school, students prepared a Thanksgiving dinner and eagerly sang Bridget's praises. "Bridget is always cool headed. She has a positive attitude and is always smiling! She helps us with cooking so much. She is always willing to help anyone with anything!" For student Luchien Moore, it's Bridget's ability to teach



STUDENT, ERIK REGO, COOKING UP TURKEY WITH CHEF BRIDGET FOR FRIENDSGIVING.

while at the same time encouraging independence that stands out. "I like that Bridget lets us make edits to the recipes to make the meals our own. I like that she trusts us to use all the kitchen tools and try new things."

Bridget works collaboratively across the middle and high schools, tailoring her lessons to each class and student's ability level. Her ability to work with a diverse student population affords her the opportunity to develop the individual interests of each student. Cooking class is highly motivating with students, often choosing cooking activities with Bridget as an incentive they earn. ■

TEACHER SHANA DUNLEVY AND STUDENTS, JOCELYN KINKADE AND KEEGAN GRAHAM, COOKING WITH CHEF BRIDGET.



Valley Transitional High School: Transitional Programs – Giving Back and Giving Thanks

Roasted turkey, mashed potatoes, squash soup, and pumpkin pie were just a few of the dishes being served up for the Transitional High School's School and Life Skills classroom's 'Friends-giving Feast.' Students planned their meal from start to finish with culinary arts teacher Bridget Zanni. Before heading to the grocery store, students reviewed recipes, checked the refrigerator and cupboards for ingredients and staples such as butter, salt, and chicken stock. Next, they drafted a shopping list for the items they needed to purchase and traveled to Market Basket to shop for items.

Grocery shopping is an important part of the life skills training that students receive at Valley. The opportunity to practice budgeting, comparison shopping, social skills, and community safety are invaluable skills that students have the ability to practice in the natural environment.

Once shopping was completed and the groceries were unloaded, students began preparing the food for their feast. Students manned various stations throughout the kitchen, peeling potatoes, chopping vegetables, measuring ingredients, and setting the tables. Once the food was prepared and ready to eat, staff lined up to serve the students. As the meal began, students and staff went around the room sharing what they were thankful for. Family, friends, and school were the common theme, three sentiments that perfectly describe the environment that Valley fosters.

During the month of November, the Student Council held their annual Holiday Food Drive to benefit the Merrimack Valley Food Bank.

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This was their first community service project of the

school year and by all accounts it was a successful one. Part of being on the student council is the opportunity for members to utilize their talents and interests through the many school spirit and community service events. Gavin Wargo, Vice-President of the student council, lends his artistic talent to create flyers for events and initiatives.

Student Representatives, Jack Gregoire and Caden Berthet, volunteered to sort and box the donations. For Jack, sorting items and checking expiration dates is a familiar task which he enjoys and learned through his job at Walgreen's", explains Jack. "We check the expiration dates there." Jack is as enthusiastic about volunteering as he is about being part of the student council. "My favorite day is when we have our meetings," he proudly proclaimed. All total, students collected 161 pounds of non-perishable food.

Giving Thanks and Giving Back is a theme that extends all year long at the Transitional High School. For Transitional High School Student Council President Corey Erickson, that means leading by example, showing up and doing the work. Corey and his class made approximately 30 pies to share with students for the Student Council's annual Friends-



NATE DUNHAM TAKING A SLICE OF PIE FROM STUDENT COUNCIL MEMBERS CADEN BERTHET AND NATALIE DIDONA.

giving event. The event encourages students from all of the Transitional High School classes to mingle and share sentiments of thanks and appreciation for each other's friendship over a slice of pie served by members of the council.

On the same day that the student council dropped off their donations to the food bank, AIS, a furniture company in Leominster and valued community partner, gave turkeys to all of their employees including the student workers from Valley. The turkeys symbolize the appreciation and respect that our community partners have for our student workers and vocational program. "From the perspective of AIS, our students are a part of their employee family," said Scott Morin, Transitional High School Vocational Coordinator. "That's what makes our partnership so strong. We have a solid foundation of respect and understanding of what our programs are all about. They're a great company!" ■

Adult Services: A Year of Giving Back to Our Communities

Every year during the Holiday Season, the individuals served by Valley Collaborative's Today and Tomorrow Program (Adult Services) have the opportunity to give back to the community that is so supportive to them.

The Valley Collaborative adults take great pride in giving back to their community. We regularly discuss what our community means to us, what we can do as individuals, and as a group, to help contribute to the overall good of everyone around us. We love that during this time of year we are able to provide tangible

The Individuals in Valley's Adult Programs take great pride in giving back to their community.

goods to some of our less fortunate community members. This opportunity to give back falls in line with Valley's overall mission of helping individuals to become contributing members of society and of their local community.

The Today and Tomorrow Program coordinates a toy drive through the Billerica Fire Department in accordance with Toys for Tots. Every year this toy drive is a massive success, with this year being no different. Through the kindness of Valley's Adults and their families, this year we donated over 100 toys, which the Fire Department will be able to disperse into the community with the goal of making someone's holiday season just a little bit brighter.



INDIVIDUALS IN THE PROGRAM ENJOYED A TOUR OF THE BILLERICA FIRE DEPARTMENT AFTER DROPPING OFF OVER 100 TOYS AS PART OF THE TOYS FOR TOTS DONATION DRIVE! BACK ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: CAMERON GANNON, SHARIFAN NAMIGADDE, LUCAS COSTAIN, DAN EASTWOOD AND KYLE COSTAIN. FRONT ROW, LEFT TO RIGHT: KAITLYN MACHADO, GILLIAN JOSLYN, MARYALICE JACKSON, JENNIFER GLIDDEN AND ADAM GUILD.

Valley also holds a food drive where we collect non-perishable items to be donated to the Merrimack Valley Food Bank. As with the toy drive, the individuals have done an amazing job with their donations and have made a real impact on their community with their charitable endeavors. With nearly 300 pounds of food donated, Valley individuals continue to show what amazing people they are and what an outstanding culture they have created throughout the building.

The Adult Program also held two of our annual events recently to get into the holiday spirit.

The day before Thanksgiving, all the worksites and volunteer sites shut down and the adults participate in our Thanksgiving Brunch. Valley staff all make dishes from their own wide-ranging cultures, and we all come together to share and enjoy in a beautiful potluck celebration. This is

always a joyous celebration, and acts as a great opportunity and reminder to enjoy the people around you and to be thankful for all that you have.

The Adult Program also held our annual Holiday Dance in early December. The music was loud and cheery and the individuals were wearing their party shoes as they danced the night away. The Holiday Dance always acts as a great reprieve from the hard work the individuals commit to their worksites every day. It's just an opportunity to mingle with friends and cut loose on the dance floor!

Both of these events, and all the charitable donations, highlight so much of the good that builds within the walls of Valley. We are so appreciative of all the opportunities we are given within our local community, and we jump at the opportunity to be able give back and do our part. ■

The Year in Review

**continued from cover*

§ Our systems throughout the Collaborative were consistent and followed with fidelity.

§ Staff were well trained including but not limited to top tier therapeutic teams, educators who deliver high quality programs consistent with the state standards, and highly trained Special Education Assistants. (Valley's successful efforts to put into place the Academy for Special Education Assistants is noteworthy.)

§ DESE protocols and procedures were followed with fidelity.

§ Staff were committed and devoted to the mission of Valley.

§ They wished that Valley could train other Collaboratives on how to do the exceptional work they witnessed.

- DESE Collaborative Financial Review:

Valley still has not received the draft results from the DESE Collaborative Financial Review performed by MARCUM Accounting for DESE in May 2024. The Department continues to work through some technical matters regarding how certain DESE guidance and regulations are being interpreted by Collaboratives across the Commonwealth. It is not clear when we will have a draft version to review. Valley is proud to be a thought partner and the pilot site for this new financial review process that all Collaboratives will undergo every six years.

Tentative Results: the feedback to date has been Exemplary

- FY'24 Independent Financial Audit:

Valley's FY'24 Independent Financial Audit, performed by Fritz DeGuglielmo, LLC, has been completed. Daniel Schaffner, CPA, and his team. Valley is proud to say that the audit was again this year finding-free and demonstrates Valley's commitment to sound, competent, financial management/oversight. The Board of Directors and Valley's Administration team take very seriously its responsibility to be good stewards of public funds. Valley had another financially successful year in FY'24, ending the year with \$2.0M in profit with \$1.67M being returned to Member School Districts. Our systems and processes have never been more effective, Daniel Schaffner reported out to the Board at the November 21, 2024 Board of Directors meeting.

Results: A+/Exemplary

- DDS CORI Audit:

For the first time, on September 24, 2024 DDS performed a CORI audit to ensure Valley Collaborative was in full-compliance with all procedures and protocols.

Results: A+/Exemplary

- DDS DPPC Audit:

To ensure compliance with Nicky's Law, the Disabled Persons Protection Commission (DPPC) is authorized to conduct periodic compliance reviews of DDS and agencies defined as Employers (Valley Collaborative). Valley completed its first compliance review on September 6, 2024. This review included DDS staff hired after July 1, 2023, along with their signed DPPC Consent Form and Valley's internal policies and procedures to adhere to M.G.L. c. 19C § 15.

Results: A+/Exemplary

Financial Highlights:

- During the fiscal year ended June 30, 2024, the Collaborative's overall net position increased by approximately \$1,091,000.
- Total assets increased by approximately \$1,555,000 primarily as a result of continued strong operations and oversight increasing the overall cash position of the Collaborative.
- Total liabilities decreased by approximately \$638,000 which was primarily the result of the decrease in the year's pay down of lease liability of approximately \$387,000 and the adjustment in the OPEB liability of approximately \$588,000 due to the updated actuarial study and \$758,000 as a result of the timing of the payback of credit to the member districts that occurred in fiscal year 2023 but not in fiscal year 2024.
- The Collaborative realized an increase in net position from operations, including depreciation on capital assets, right-of-use lease expense and other post-employment benefits expense, of approximately \$1,091,000.
- The total assets at June 30, 2024 were \$22,669,446.
- Valley's Capital fund remains fully funded with \$1.5 million in FY '24.

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



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Executive Director
Valley Collaborative.

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Valley Collaborative Board

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Superintendent, Billerica Public Schools

Mr. Steven Stone

Superintendent, Dracut Public Schools

Dr. Geoff Bruno

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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

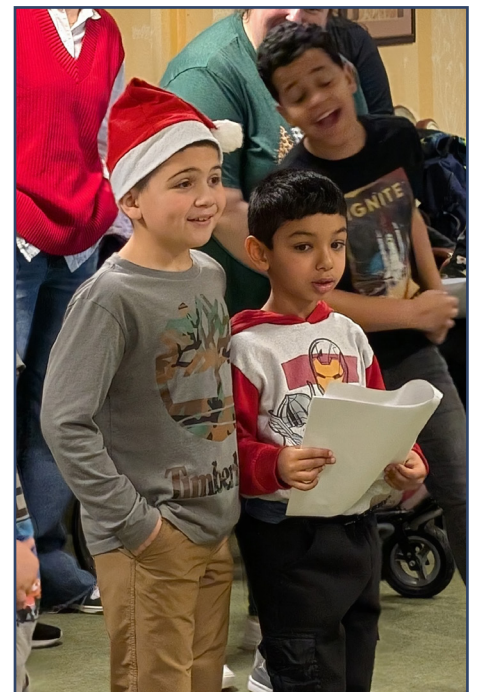
Superintendent, Tyngsborough Public Schools

Dr. Christopher Chew

Superintendent, Westford Public Schools



KURTIS LEDOUX, AYDENN SANTOS, NICO MAGLIOCCHETTI AND CORMAC VINCENT WITH BRYAN THOMAS AND JILLIAN WENDLER DELIVERING DONATED PUMPKINS FROM PARLEE FARMS TO DR. SCOTT.



DONISO QUADROS, NASSIM AGUAOUZ AND AYDENN SANTOS ENJOY A LITTLE HOLIDAY CAROLING.