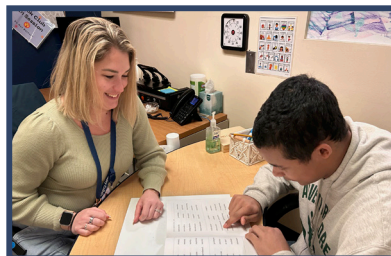


## New Beginnings at Valley Collaborative



### Hitting Our Stride

■ Page 2: Valley Elementary students are head over heels for cross country skiing.



### Making Big Gains

■ Page 3: Students in the Transitional Programming at Valley Middle/High School are making big gains in reading, thanks to a new focus on literacy.



### Working Independently

■ Page 6: Individuals in Valley's Adult Services programs work independently at dozens of area organizations.



DR. CHRIS A. SCOTT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR; MATTHEW GENTILE, DIRECTOR OF DDS & MASSABILITY SERVICES; **MATT BOOTH OF CHELMSFORD, VALLEY'S DDS INDIVIDUAL OF THE MONTH**; AND DR. JAY LANG, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, VALLEY COLLABORATIVE, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER, AND SUPERINTENDENT OF CHELMSFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

Dear Students, Staff, and Families:

As we move further into the school year, I am filled with pride and gratitude for the incredible work happening across Valley. It has truly been a successful and inspiring year, and I want to take a moment to recognize the many ways our students, staff, and families contribute to the vibrant community that makes Valley so special. One of the highlights of this year has been the exciting experiential trips our students have had the opportunity to participate in. These experiences extend learning

beyond the classroom walls and provide meaningful opportunities for students to grow socially and emotionally. Whether exploring new environments, participating in hands-on activities, or simply sharing time together outside of the typical school day, these trips help strengthen the connections that make our community thrive. At Valley, one of the most important factors influencing the positive impact we have on the youth and DDS participants we serve is the relationships we build with one another.

*\*continued on page 7*

# Elementary School: An Action Packed Year

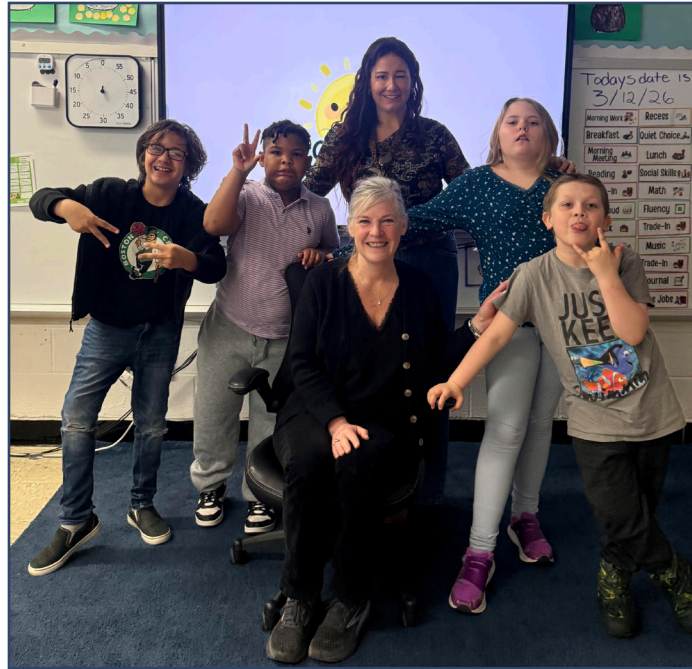
From out-door activities including cross-country skiing and horseback riding, to a re-vamped cooking program, and a celebration of reading, the school year at Valley Elementary has been action packed! Here's a look at some of the highlights of the school year so far.

## Hitting the trails

Students were invited to experience cross country skiing and snow shoeing at Northfield Mountain this winter free of charge. "There were a lot of falls and perseverance," says teacher Matt McCarthy, who led the outdoor adventures. In fact, students enjoyed their new winter activity so much that they made two more trips to Great Brook Farm in Carlisle, which generously gave the Valley skiers a discount. Says Matt: "We are hoping for another snowy winter next year for more cross-country skiing!"

## Cooking up skills and independence

When elementary students take part in a weekly cooking program led by our occupational therapists, they're learning to do more than follow a recipe. They're also building independence, practicing motor skills, and enjoying hands-on learning. Each classroom follows the same simple recipe each week, with the occupational therapists guiding students through the steps of preparing each recipe, encouraging communication, problem-solving, and teamwork. Students also participate in brief community shopping trips to purchase ingredients—an important opportunity to practice real-world skills such as planning, navigating stores, and interacting with community members.



READ ACROSS AMERICA COMES TO VALLEY ELEMENTARY LEFT TO RIGHT: KURTIS LEDOUX, OMARO CAPERS, JAZMYNA CATALANOTTI AND ETHAN BARRY. CENTER: DR. CHRIS A. SCOTT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR; REAR: HEATHER MACKAY, PRINCIPAL.

## A celebration of reading

Valley Elementary celebrated reading throughout the month of March, with a reading-themed spirit week, guest readers, including Dr. Scott and the Tyngsboro Fire Department, a guest author assembly and a door decorating contest. This year's Scholastic Book Fair was a huge success, says administrative assistant Karen Blackburn, who oversaw the fair. "We earned \$808 dollars of scholastic money for our classrooms, doubling what we earned in the previous two years. Thanks to all who participated!"

## In the saddle

Valley Collaborative Elementary School is now partnering with Ironstone Farm to offer a therapeutic horseback riding program for our students. "This unique experience gives students the opportunity to build strength, confidence, communication skills, and emotional well-being while working with trained therapeutic riding instructors and the wonderful horses at the farm," explains occupational therapist Madison Pesa. During visits to

the farm, students work together to complete obstacle courses and relay activities on horseback, as well as spending time with the farm's friendly donkey, Spud. "The program has been a fantastic way for students to connect with animals, enjoy time outdoors, and grow both socially and emotionally in a supportive and fun environment," says Madison.



TOMMY O'MELIA DURING A VISIT TO IRONSTONE FARM.

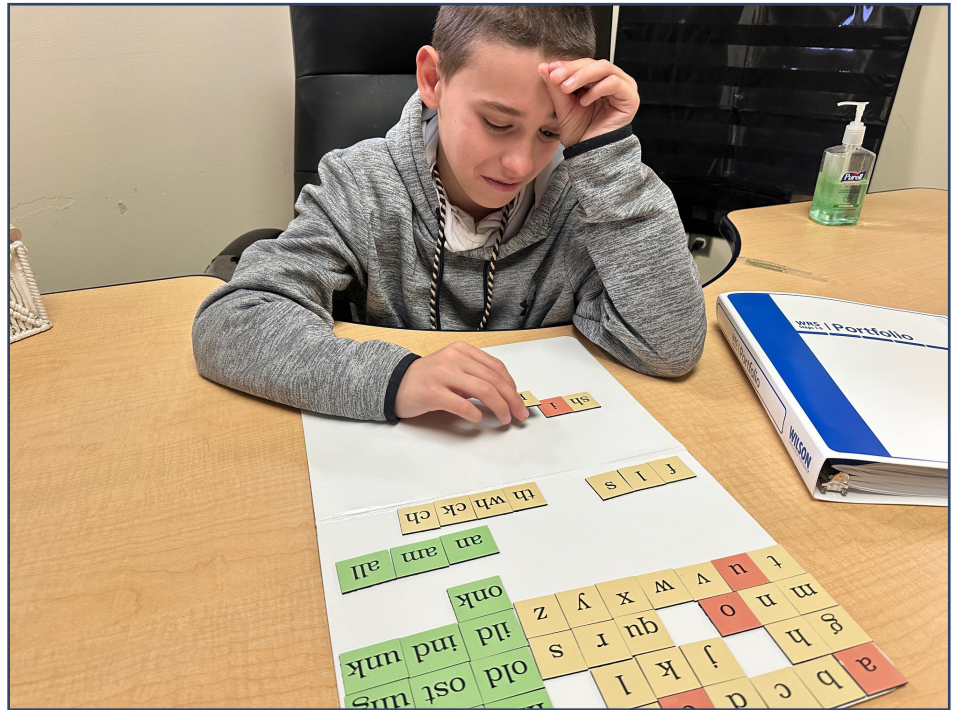
# Transitional Programming at Valley Middle/High School: Celebrating Student Progress

When Shana Cheevers received the results of students' mid-year reading tests, she could barely believe her eyes. The kind of progress teachers might hope to see by June was already showing up halfway through the year. "We have students who have jumped up two grade levels," says Shana, the reading specialist at the Transitional Middle/High School. "Teachers are really encouraged by this level of improvement."

The progress reflects an increased emphasis on literacy at Valley, starting with recognizing the varied needs of students. While some students needed help with the fundamentals, things like letter sounds and decoding words, others could read the words but struggled to make meaning from them. Shana says that a big part of her focus has been on giving teachers everything they need to assist students. "Teachers now have a whole toolbox to use, including a set curriculum, lessons and activities," says Shana, who spent 10 years as a middle school classroom teacher before transitioning to her current role.

Middle school teacher Kali Rowe says that the new tools are working exactly as intended. "The implementation of our new curriculum and programs have greatly helped to streamline my classroom and teaching to better meet student needs."

While teachers can see the results of their hard work in their students' data, it is the individual stories of student success that stand out the most. One Valley high schooler who started out the year insisting that he didn't like reading has since made two grade levels worth of progress in just a few months. "Now he's committed to working on his reading be-



LOUIS LORINO WORKS ON HIS LETTERS IN AN EFFORT TO BECOME A STRONGER READER. AN INCREASED EMPHASIS ON LITERACY HAS PRODUCED BIG GAINS FOR VALLEY STUDENTS.

cause he knows that he'll need those skills in the future and he can see for himself that he's getting better," says Shana.

Another post-grad student who began the year reading at a first-grade level has seen her skill level jump up to that of a third-grade reader. "That's a huge difference," says Karen Rowe, Team Chairperson. "Especially when you consider how much information for the general public is written at a 6th grade level." For older students, these literacy gains will translate into greater independence. "They can use these skills functionally when they're reading directions or filling out job applications," says Karen.

Perhaps most impressively, the hard work of Valley staffers is creating a culture of reading among middle and high school students—not an easy task. When asked what

they think of all of the emphasis on reading, these students had only rave reviews. Louis Lorino was eager to show off what he's been working on. "This year I learned about suffixes and buddy letters!" Abram Brittsan once found reading dull, but no longer. "Reading can be boring if you don't have the right book, but if you do have the right book it can be interesting." For Javian Pettengil, books are transporting. "Reading gives me another form of imagination."

Shana says that she expects to see continued progress when students' reading skills are tested at the end of the year, further evidence that their teachers' efforts are paying off. "Our teachers can see that the hard work they put in with these kids is paying off," says Shana. "It's right there in the data."

# Alternative Programming at Valley Middle/ High School: Hitting the Slopes

By Jennifer C. Berkshire, newspaper editor, with help from student Cam Greene.

During a frigid stretch of March, Valley students piled into the vans. The destination: Mount Wachusett, the 2,000 foot ski resort in central Massachusetts. Over two different trips, 30 students in Valley's middle and high school alternative programming would hit the slopes.

Student Cam Greene was one of them. "I've been snowboarding since I was eight, so it was fun to be able to go with my friends and stuff and just have a good time out on the mountain," says Cam.

For students without Cam's experience, the day started with lessons at the base of the mountain—an introduction to equipment, technique and the skiing basics, including how to stop. Outdoor educator Pete Loring says that thanks to the warmth and flexibility of the Mt. Wachusett team, Valley's new skiers did great. "We've been going there for a few years now and the group services folks are just great to work with," says Pete. "That's definitely a big part of what makes these trips so special."

With skis and helmets on, and some essential new skills under the belts, it was time to head to the summit in one of the resort's high-speed chairlifts—something one student in particular couldn't wait to try out, says Pete. "He just couldn't wait to get on the lift, and even though this was his first time on the mountain he did great, and he made it down safely."



HIGH SCHOOL STUDENT MICHAEL "MJ" JEAN (LEFT) TAKES A BREAK FROM SNOWBOARDING; MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT ANTHONY "TONY" ESTRADA TAKES A SNOWBOARDING LESSON ON MT. WACHUSETT'S NEW SHORTY CARPET LIFT.



Speech pathologist Christine Brennick, who led the trip along with Pete, says that adventures like this one allow the students to try out an activity that they might never do on their own. Even students who might have found skiing intimidating or scary didn't want to miss out on something their friends were doing. "I think there's a group mentality that works in our favor. When everybody you know is going, you want to go too, and you want to try to be good at it even if you're scared."

For Cam, that meant helping his friends who'd never skied before get over their fear of falling. "I was falling, though not as bad as some of the other kids. It's not that big of a deal. You just get up and try it again."

Skiing activities aren't new at Valley. This was the fourth year that

Pete and Christine have run a ski trip together. Valley staff also previously worked with a small group of students who were passionate about skiing, taking them to the Nashoba Valley Ski Area. What's different about the current trips, says Pete, is that they include students who are brand new to skiing. "This is an activity that lets students take risks, but in a way that's respectful of others and is about making good choices," says Pete.

\*continued on next page

# Hitting the Slopes

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Some of the students' favorite memories of the trips involved the opportunity to interact with other skiers on the mountain. Cam says that he especially enjoyed getting to meet new people. "I met some really nice people on the hill, a bunch of nice people. We'd meet in the lift or coming down the hill. It was just a fun experience to be out there and be with everybody."

Cam says that other students on the trip had experiences that were just as positive. When he interviewed three fellow adventurers, they all said that they'd had a great time skiing, even if it was their very first time.

Cam: "What'd you think about the ski trip?"

Nathaniel Goodwin, "I think it was amazing. It was good bonding

time with friends, and helping people out, and a good environment."

Isaiah Deans, "It was a good experience. This was my second time skiing and I like going to Mt. Wachusett. It's a nice place."

Gavin Correia, "It was fun. I liked that it was a new experience for me. I did a lesson by myself, then went down the bunny hill, but I didn't even really need to do that."

For Christine and Pete, the rave reviews from these students are confirmation that these ski trips are a worthwhile investment. They're also an opportunity for Christine and Pete, both seasoned skiers, to share their experience on the slopes with Valley students. "We feel really fortunate to have the skills to be able to do this," says Christine. "Having these opportunities in our lives has

"Skiing field trips provide students with the opportunity to engage in outdoor learning, build confidence, and try a sport they might not otherwise have access to. Several staff members fondly remember learning to ski as students themselves and understand firsthand how meaningful it is to overcome challenges and celebrate progress on the mountain."

Dr. Chris A. Scott, Executive Director, Valley Collaborative

been really important, so being able to share that with our students is really meaningful to both of us."

Dr. Chris A. Scott, Valley Collaborative executive director, says that she's thrilled that Valley is able to offer an opportunity to students that they might not otherwise have. "Skiing field trips provide students with the opportunity to engage in outdoor learning, build confidence, and try a sport they might not otherwise have access to. Several staff members fondly remember learning to ski as students themselves and understand firsthand how meaningful it is to overcome challenges and celebrate progress on the mountain," says Dr. Scott. "With Valley's support, we are able to offer this experience to our students—an opportunity that might otherwise be out of reach for many due to cost, access, or limited exposure."

While skiing season may be done for this year, these Valley adventurers are just getting started. On the agenda: a hiking trip to New Hampshire's Lonesome Lake, where students are hoping to complete their most ambitious hike to date, 4,000 feet up Cannon Mountain. Says Christine: "The momentum's not stopping."

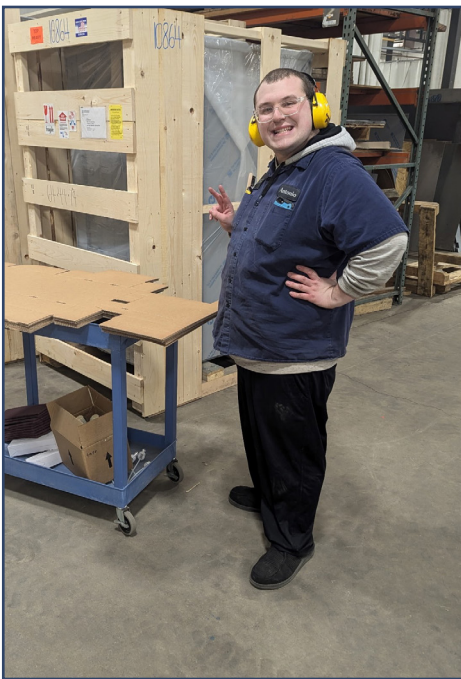


TEACHER COLLEEN MCANESPIE AND STUDENT SKYLAR MOLOY-PILGRIM PREPARE TO SKI MOUNT WACHUSETT, THE SITE OF TWO RECENT VALLEY FIELD TRIPS.

# Adult Services: Expanding Opportunity, One Community Connection at a Time

As the Today and Tomorrow program continues to expand and grow, it is important to recognize the three main services we provide the individuals served: Community Based Day Supports, Group Supported Employment, and Independent Employment Supports. These services are meant to transition into one another, with growth in one service leading to enhancement in the next service. Individuals use Community Based Day Supports (CBDS) to engage with their surrounding communities through recreational activities and social learning opportunities.

The soft skills individuals develop in CBDS are then put to work, literally, in a group setting where they complete employment tasks with four of their peers and a Direct Support Professional in a 5:1 ratio,



TONY BERRY AT CONSOLIDATED STERILIZER SYSTEMS.

while also being compensated.

For some individuals, this is the extent of their service plan. They have a mix of CBDS and Group Supported Employment and they focus on goals geared toward continuous personal growth and achievement. But for many individuals, the Group Supported Employment acts as a catalyst toward the individual one-day working independently, with on-going support from a Valley Job Developer.

Independent employment can be difficult for any person to manage on their own. The individuals served by Valley through the Independent Employment Supports model are provided with 1:1 job development and coaching as they highlight interests, search for opportunities that align with these interests, apply for jobs, navigate the onboarding process, and then receive continuous support on the job to ensure both the individual's and employer's needs are being met. While independent employment may not be the goal for all of the individuals, Valley currently serves 50 individuals who do receive this specific service through the DDS contract. Of the 50 individuals currently in the contract, 40 of them actively hold an independent employment position.

Organizations our individuals work at independently include; Jones Lang LaSalle, Market Basket, Five Guys, Consolidated Sterilizer Systems, Sodexo Catering, TJ MAXX, Tyngsboro High School, Build a Bear, Wegmans, Tyngsboro Sports Center, Stop & Shop, Knowledge Beginnings, Chelmsford High School, Walmart, O'Conner's Hardware, 3M, Billerica Access Television, Carleton-Willard Village, Bedford Public Schools, and Four Oaks Country Club.



LEO VAHEY FILMING A HIGH SCHOOL-HOCKEY GAME FOR BATV.

All of these organizations listed on the next page continue to be essential community partners and play a vital role in the lives of the individuals we serve. These employment opportunities continue to display how capable the individuals served by Valley Collaborative truly are. With just a touch of support on the job site, our individuals are able to contribute to different organizations overall output while leaving a lasting and positive impact on each and every specific organizational culture. The adults served by Valley Collaborative continue to show how successful they can be if provided the opportunity. With reinforcement from the job development team, our individuals are able to work independently as they continue to grow and hone their skills in order to unlock new employment opportunities in the future.

# New Beginnings at Valley Collaborative

*»continued from cover*

The bonds that develop between our students, DDS individuals, and our dedicated staff are at the heart of everything we do. These relationships create trust, foster growth, and ensure that every individual feels supported and valued.

When you walk through our schools or visit our DDS headquarters, it becomes immediately clear that Valley is a place where people genuinely care about one another. You can feel it in the conversations in the hallways, the encouragement offered in classrooms and programs, and the way our community celebrates each person's successes. Our students, DDS individuals, and staff share a profound sense of belonging, and that sense of connection is what makes Valley such a powerful place for learning and growth.

As we welcome the arrival of spring, we are reminded of the beauty of new beginnings and growth. Just as we see the world around us coming back to life, we also see tremendous growth in our students—academically, socially, and emotionally. It is a privilege to witness the progress they make each day and the confidence they build along the way.

Thank you to our remarkable staff for your dedication and compassion, to our families for your continued partnership, and to our students and DDS participants for bringing energy, curiosity, and joy to our community. I look forward to all that the remainder of the school year will bring. Please reach out if I can ever be of assistance. We are here to serve. My door is always open.

My best to you always,



Chris A. Scott  
Executive Director  
Valley Collaborative



TOP: JILLIAN WENDLER, SLP; ERIN FRAZIER, BCBA; DR. JAY LANG VALLEY, CHAIRMAN OF THE BOARD, VALLEY COLLABORATIVE, EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBER, SUPERINTENDENT OF CHELMSFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS; BRYAN THOMAS, ASSISTANT PRINCIPAL; HEATHER MACKAY, PRINCIPAL; OLIVIA BUONAMANO, VALLEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL STUDENT OF THE MONTH.

BOTTOM: DR. CHRIS A. SCOTT, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR; DR. KERRY CLERY, BOARD OF DIRECTORS, VALLEY COLLABORATIVE, SUPERINTENDENT, BILLERICA PUBLIC SCHOOLS; NICOLE NOSKA, PRINCIPAL, MIDDLE SCHOOL, TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMS, TRANSITIONAL HIGH SCHOOL, TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMS; AND LOUIS LORINO, GRADE 7 BILLERICA, VALLEY TRANSITIONAL PROGRAMMING MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENT OF THE MONTH.

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