

Garcia's Bistro: VAL Student opens restaurant in Enosburg Falls

There's a new restaurant in northern Vermont. **Garcia's Bistro** opened in early November in Enosburg Falls, serving Honduran, Mexican and many other dishes native to Central and South America. Yesica, the owner, is a Honduran-born, English Language Learning (ELL) student at VAL.

"It's a beautiful thing that I'm learning English," Yesica said. "I can communicate with my friends and for my business."

"Yesica and her family have made yet another dream come true! She is not only a fantastic cook, but an inquisitive, ambitious English student," said Leigh Smith, a VAL ELL Teacher.

Garcia's Bistro is open Tuesday to Saturday, 10:30 a.m.-9:00 p.m. at 383 Main Street in Enosburg Falls. The phone number is 802-933-3149. Authentic Honduran dishes, including *baleadas* and *tres leches* cake, await you!



Our Work

Vermont Adult Learning (VAL) helps students, ages 16+, build assets for success. We provide reading, writing, math, English Language Learning, academic & career advising, workforce development, and high school completion services. Our services are FREE!

Visit us at www.vtadulthoodlearning.org.



From our Executive Director

Dear Friends,

As 2021 comes to a close, I find myself reflecting on all that we've accomplished during a year of unease and uncertainty amid COVID-19. We continue to serve students in person

and virtually, safely and competently.

This newsletter introduces you to Yesica, Laurentia, Sarah and Trevor, current and past VAL students, who are building assets for economic security and health. As the economy re-opens, these folks are using their education, training and persistence to seize opportunities. Thank you for supporting our work!

Be safe and be well,

Hal Cohen

Executive Director

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225 Maple Street, Ste. 6
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802-299-2469

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100 River Street, Ste. 102
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802-546-0880

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"VAL gave me the tools to continue my education in the United States

*~ Elizabeth
ELL student
from
Ecuador*

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Thank you to our recent supporters

VAL student created a personal Walkathon to support VAL

"I was so excited to walk for VAL. It's because of VAL's Physical Education that I started walking and, 17 months later, I have lost 102 pounds."

~Laurentia

Thank you, Laurentia!



Individuals

- Iris Berezin
- Hal & Shelley Cohen
- Eric Peterson
- Garth & Clara Peterson
- Dee Gilbert
- Mary Ide
- Geramy Noone
- Jed Rubin
- Katherine Stamper
- Bill Wilson

Organizations

- Handy Toyota
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Please contact

kstamper@vtadultlearning.org
for more information.

I learned that I actually don't mind reading books, which I never used to enjoy at all.

*~Michael
High School Completion
Program Student*

Volunteer Spotlight: Janet Whatley

Janet Whatley, a VAL volunteer, retired after many years as a professor at the University of Vermont. She earned her Ph.D. in French and taught courses in French Language and Literature and the Humanities. She spent the early years of her retirement interpreting and translating for Congolese refugees before teaching at VAL. She's helped New Americans apply for asylum, prepare for LNA courses, and apply for jobs.

"I'm used to teaching across languages," Janet said. "My French is particularly helpful working with the Congolese community. I enjoy advising students and the one-on-one human interactions."

"Janet is amazing," said VAL staffer Maureen Cooney-Moore. "Whether working with Sunda on his citizenship classes, teaching Stephen to read, navigating medical terminology with Kipene for her LNA class or tutoring Sunshine on her writing assignments for CCV, she meets students on their level."



Are you interested in volunteering at VAL?

Contact Katherine at
kstamper@vtadultlearning.org



Sarah: VAL Alumna and Entrepreneur

"VAL allowed me to take the reins of my education" ~ Sarah

Sarah, 27, is a successful entrepreneur in southern Vermont. She operates her own professional design studio on Putney Road in Brattleboro. Sarah is also a 2011 VAL graduate.

As owner of Sarah Blake Designs, LLC, (<https://www.sarahblakedesigns.com/>), Sarah has found her niche, blending a love of designing interior living spaces with entrepreneurial savviness. Building a successful career was not easy. Hard work, grit, and leaps of faith factored into the equation.

"Early challenges led me down a different path," Sarah said, as she recounted her early, troubled years at Brattleboro Union High School (BUHS).

Sarah took time away from school to tend to her health. She realized, upon returning, that the public school environment wasn't conducive to sustaining the life improvements she was choosing for herself. Separation was key to forging a new road.

Sarah's guidance counselor recommended she consider VAL to complete her high school diploma. Sarah hesitated at first; she wanted to be certain that pursuing her education via VAL wasn't, somehow, less-than what her high school offered.

"I worried that the unconventional route was a negative, not a positive," Sarah said. "VAL worked to really understand me as a student. I was allowed to decide what I wanted to learn. Art, music and voice lessons became part of my educational plan. At 16, I was allowed to take college classes so I started earning college credits as I was completing my high school diploma. I was allowed to dive right into the adult world and that worked well for me."

"VAL allowed me to take the reins of my education, my life and my experience," Sarah said. "I had no idea what to do. People at VAL helped me embrace that uncertainty and explore. I appreciated the autonomy. Education gives young people the tools to **figure out** who they want to become."

Sarah embraced her full-time VAL studies while working full-time. She was self-supporting by the time she was seventeen. Sarah completed her high school diploma and earned an Associate Degree in Human Services and Psychology at the Community College of Vermont and studied Business at Southern New Hampshire University. Sarah's entry into interior design came via an **invitation** from a colleague who recognized her intrinsic sense of how best to create warm, welcoming spaces. She was working in banking at the time. You could say it was a bit of a leap of faith.

"I always had this idea that art couldn't be a 'career.'" Sarah said. "But, I took a pay cut. I worked weekends. I backed out of a potential promotion at the bank. My roots were calling me. There are endless possible careers, and high school should be the place we get to explore them all. Luckily, for me, I got to experience this through VAL. A more autonomous, hands-on learning experience allowed me to be unconventional and self-employed by age twenty-five and it changed my life."

"VAL places students in the driver's seat and gets them out into the world," Sarah said. "That's exactly what I needed."



VAL: Connecting Vermonters to Good Jobs



Tim*, a 39-year-old Rutland resident is excited. After completing Energy Works, VAL's newly-launched workforce training program, he has a solid job offer as a Weatherization Crew Member at BROCC Community Action. This follows a period of absence from the work force due to health issues.

Weatherization workers help customers use less energy, lower their bills and reduce their impact on the environment. They improve efficiency of heating and cooling ductwork by repairing windows, insulating walls and attics, etc.

"I'll be earning drastically more than I did in my last job and there's room to advance," Tim said. "My daughter would sometimes ask me, 'Dad, what do you do?' I'm so excited to tell her about my new job!"



VAL, thanks to a grant from the Vermont Low Income Trust for Electricity, is the lead agency coordinating a series of free workforce development trainings in Rutland preparing individuals for entry-level positions in the sustainable energy fields of weatherization, heat pumps and solar cell installation. As an Integrated Education and Training program, VAL helps participants earn their high school credential, if needed, while training.

VAL is recruiting for our next training session beginning January 10th in Rutland. For more information, please contact Jeff Nerney at (802) 779-0057 or jnerney@vtadultlearning.org.

*Name changed to protect confidentiality

Email kstamper@vtadultlearning.org to receive this newsletter via email. Type GO GREEN in Subject Line.



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