



Central Vermont Adult Basic Education, Inc.

Local Partnerships in Learning

Serving Washington, Orange, and Lamoille Counties

Spring 2021
Newsletter



Message from the Executive Director



Carol Shults-Perkins

The human and financial resources put forth over these past 14 months have ensured CVABE's capacity to respond to the growing needs of those deeply affected by the pandemic in our service area. As a result of COVID-19, the need for education opportunity is more critical now than ever. Our vulnerable populations — people living in poverty, people with disabilities and the Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) — have been the hardest hit in our communities and neighborhoods. CVABE is working hard to provide the education and career and college readiness skills they need to change their lives and find food and housing security, as well as to find hope and opportunity for a better future.

Help Us in Our Fight for Social Justice Brian Kravitz, Development and Outreach Director

"Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family." Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of the United Nations.

The fight for social justice is stronger and louder now than at any time since the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s. Black Lives Matter. Systemic racism, bigotry, and the cycles of generational poverty that perpetuate injustice need to end. It is time to progress, and CVABE is at the core of the fight.

In Washington, Orange and Lamoille counties alone there are over 8,000 adults without high school diplomas, and tens of thousands more with low literacy. The cold, hard facts are those with under-education and low literacy are the most impoverished, most incarcerated and the most likely to face food and housing insecurity. These are our students. Of the 425 adults we served in FY2020:



Brian Kravitz

- Almost 100% were low income
- 26% were minorities
- 55% had a disability, ranging from learning disabilities to traumatic brain injury (TBI)
- 57% were unemployed
- 67% had no high school credential

Your support of our students, whether as a volunteer, donor or ally, is making a real difference in the fight for social justice. Thank you!

Another way that you can help in our fight for social justice and progress is to call and email your legislators and ask them to increase adult education funding for Vermont's most vulnerable and needy populations. If you're not sure how to reach your Representatives and Senators, please call me, 802-476-4588, or email bkravitz@cvabe.org and I'll be happy to provide you with their contact information. Every call or email makes a difference!

CVABE is creating a more comprehensive *Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Policy*. As we move forward in our fight for social justice, this document will serve as our guiding principles. Accountability will be measured by identified action steps. We are very excited to share this document with you in our next issue.

News from the Road

Kate Nicolet, Program Director



Kate Nicolet

Whether refugees or traditional immigrants, CVABE has a long tradition of providing English Language Learning (ELL) and citizenship skills to our new Americans. Last year alone, we served 65 English language learners, who hailed from 22 countries on five continents, and collectively speak 16 different home languages. With our support, 43 of these learners increased their citizenship skills. We are honored to help our students on their way to fulfill their hopes and dreams in our country.

Our ELL students have been impacted by the pandemic in many ways. Some are essential workers, and there is an increased need for supervision, care, and at-home learning for younger children. Closed borders and other travel restrictions have physically isolated many from their families. In spite of these hardships, our ELL students continue to work on their goals to improve reading, writing, speaking, listening, employment and citizenship skills. CVABE has continued to organize and provide one-on-one and small group instruction via video meetings through this period.



We also piloted some new kinds of learning opportunities made possible (and safe) by such technology. CVABE hosted a "writing through the pandemic" course, as well as "conversation clubs" to help students connect, learn and practice these vital skills. CVABE tried out a few digital learning platforms and we've selected *Burlington English* for its civics and employment-related lessons and practice. Our ELL and citizenship students show amazing persistence and resilience!

We can't do it without our *local partnerships in learning*, and we are thankful for all of the many volunteers who join in these efforts and support us. It is incredibly rewarding work, and if you'd like to help as a volunteer please email me (knicolet@cvabe.org), or call 802-476-4588.

The New Colossus Emma Lazarus

Not like the brazen giant of Greek fame, With conquering limbs astride from land to land; Here at our sea-washed, sunset gates shall stand A mighty woman with a torch, whose flame Is the imprisoned lightning, and her name Mother of Exiles. From her beacon-hand Glows world-wide welcome; her mild eyes command The air-bridged harbor that twin cities frame. "Keep, ancient lands, your storied pomp!" cries she With silent lips. "Give me your tired, your poor, Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, The wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tost to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"

James H – A Family History

By CJW, a High School Completion student

James H, my grandfather, was born in 1907 to Leslie and Nettie H in Lowell, Vermont. He had six siblings. When he was two, his family purchased a farm in Wolcott, Vermont. He lived and worked on the farm until he was twenty-one.



James' son and their horse team

James was twelve years old when his whole family contracted the flu. James was the only one who didn't come down with it. He was in the eighth grade and forced to quit school to take care of the family farm. He was left to do all the farm work alone. His four-month-old brother passed away from complications from the flu.

When he was twenty-three years old, he met his wife-to-be, Alice P. They married when he was twenty-four. They had six children together. Three of his children died as babies. James and Alice rented a milk farm in Wolcott, Vermont. There he purchased two work horses at auction; one he paid eight dollars for and the other twelve dollars. He used them for logging. They weren't tame, but he knew how to train them.

James bought another horse from a widow. Her husband had been working in the woods using this big work horse,

but the horse was wild and trampled him, killing him. James decided to buy the horse for twenty-five dollars. He knew he could tame him down. It took a year and a half, but my grandfather said it was the best workhorse he ever had. After three years, he sold the horse for two hundred fifty dollars.

James had a temper and no one messed with him. When James was in his late thirties, he had a friend, an old man, who couldn't afford to buy groceries from the small convenience store in town, so the man would take his horses to Morrisville, Vermont, and buy his groceries at the big store. The owner of the small convenience store was upset by this and cut up a feather mattress on the old man's front lawn. James and a couple of buddies were upset with the store owner for doing this. They decided to get even! He grabbed some eggs that his chickens had laid and blew out the centers. They filled all the eggs with red paint and plastered the little convenience store. It was known as the Little Red Store after that.



James and one of his horses

James had a bad heart most of his adult life. At the age of sixty-two he passed away from pneumonia. He is buried in Wolcott, Vermont, next to his wife, Alice, and four of their children.

Student Profile: Petagaye, a former CVABE student, is the embodiment of the American Dream. You may have seen her picture and a quote or two in other, recent publications, but we hope you enjoy the chance to read her full story. It is nothing short of inspirational.



I was born and raised in Jamaica. I made it to 9th grade in school, when I got pregnant. While pregnant I was supposed to go to the Women's Center for Underage Mothers, but I wouldn't go. I would have been able to continue my schooling if I had gone, but they would have taken my baby as soon as she was born and put her in foster care. I did go to the Women's Center after my daughter was born, because then they wouldn't take her away. They tried to get me into secondary school, but at that point I would have had to pay for it. Although my baby's daddy had promised to support me in school, he didn't. I had to go to work to support my baby.

As a teen I first worked at produce farms. My next job was at a garment factory, where I inspected t-shirts. I worked there for six years and then as a baby sitter for four years. All that time I was a single mom.

Life was very hard for me. The only hope I had for myself was to finish high school, but in Jamaica, education after primary school costs money, even adult education high schools. My real dreams were for my daughter, who I wanted to go to high school. I had started a high school program for myself, but I made the choice to drop out so that I could afford to put my daughter through school. My dream for her came true, and she graduated. I was still working as a housekeeper, with no high school diploma and no options.

In 2005, a friend of mine in Jamaica lost her baby, and to get away she came to visit family in New York. On that trip she came to Vermont to visit her sister-in-law, and she decided to stay. As she met people and made friends, she met an American guy who she thought I'd like, so she set us up on a "blind date." We fell in love over the phone, with him in Vermont and me in Jamaica.

After a while we decided to get married. I planned the wedding for a month. He flew to Jamaica on a Friday and we got married on the beach on Sunday. I was late for my own wedding and he thought I wasn't coming, but it all worked out. On Monday, my husband flew back to the United States, without me and my daughter.

My husband started the paperwork to bring us over, and it took 1.5 years before we received our Green Cards.

At that point my daughter was in teacher's college in Jamaica, but she decided to come to Vermont with me.

She became a housekeeper once we moved here, then got her LNA license, went to CCV and earned her Medical Assistant license. She's now in college at Northern Vermont University, studying to be a psychologist. It's hard to explain my feelings about it. My dreams for her have come true. I have so much joy and I'm so proud. She did well!

I worked as a housekeeper for most of the time after we moved to Vermont. I tried to do an online high school program, Penn Foster, but it didn't work for me. I also tried taking the LNA class with my daughter, but I failed. I didn't even have the education to read the textbook.

I knew I wanted to educate myself, so I Googled options in Morrisville and called CVABE. I wanted to change my career, but wasn't sure to what. I was sick of house-keeping. My big goal was to finally get my high school diploma. Before starting the High School Completion Program (HSCP) I had to bring my skills up, and my teacher helped me greatly with that.

As I was bringing up my skills, I had the goal of becoming a US citizen. My English was fine, so my teacher at CVABE helped me study for the history part. We worked on that goal for two months before I took my citizenship exam. My daughter and I became US citizens on the same day!

In the HSCP program, I had options to study for a career as part of my plan. I wanted to do Early Childhood Education or LNA. We left it open because I wasn't sure. I felt blessed to know that I had options. I could take college classes in Early Childhood Education as part of my high school program, or get my LNA license. It was free and I had choices.

Once in HSCP, it took me 2 years to get my diploma. All the work I did to prepare was counted, as were my Citizenship studies. I had made the decision to become an LNA, and was able to take the course. I earned my high school diploma in the spring of 2020. I still had to take my final LNA exam, though.

Because of COVID, I had to study for the exam on my own. It was so different this time than the first time. My skills and education were so much higher, it was easier for me, and I passed. I've been an LNA for a few months, and have a great job at a senior living facility.

I feel amazing. I have my diploma and LNA license. My dream was to walk at a graduation ceremony, but COVID stopped that from happening. But otherwise, I'm doing simply marvelous. I'm not stressed like I was as a housekeeper. I love helping people. It makes me feel good.

My husband cried when I became a citizen. He cried when I got my diploma. He cried when I got my LNA license. He's cried a lot recently!

CVABE is wonderful. My teacher, Casey, is excellent. I don't have words to describe it. All my teachers there became like part of my family. They were always so positive and encouraging. They never gave up on me. In the back of my mind, when I was taking the LNA exam, I heard my teacher saying, "You can do it, Petagaye!" I wish I had teachers like that when I was a kid. I'm still a student, working on computer skills with my other wonderful teacher, Charlotte.

I'm grateful and thank God that I found CVABE and my wonderful teachers. Thank you!

Staff Comings and Goings

Deb Fadden and Thom McAllister have been wonderful additions to our learning community, and served in the Montpelier and Waterbury learning centers, respectively.

Ed Pirie retired in January, spending the last few years of his career doing what he loved, teaching, in our Bradford Learning Center.

We wish Deb, Thom and Ed all the best in the future. They have positively affected hundreds of lives, and they will be sorely missed.

A Message from Deb and Thom

"After a relatively short but memorable time at CVABE we have decided that it is time for us to move along to the next phase of our lives. Having been kept apart from our son, our daughter-in-law, and our grandson by the pandemic, we are planning to make the journey across the country to Washington and revel in some much needed family time before moving on to hiking and camping in some of our national parks and forest lands.

It has been a great privilege to be part of the adult education community in central Vermont and we appreciate all the support, guidance, humor and insight provided to us by CVABE staff, students, volunteers and community partners."



Ed Pirie



Ed Pirie started his CVABE career 23+ years ago in November 1997 as the program's "Out of School Youth" Teacher/Community Coordinator. He was hired as CVABE was laying the groundwork for a program dedicated to serving out of school youth.

The Out of School Youth program combined academic work towards a GED credential with job search experience. The program was originally housed in Barre at a site a couple of blocks from the current Barre Learning Center called "The Hill Street Depot." At the time, city leaders, public school personnel, students and volunteers celebrated the opening of this new resource, the only one of its kind in the state. Ed was always a strong and caring advocate for students.

Amanda Hass

We would like to welcome Amanda, who is taking on the big task of filling Deb's shoes in Montpelier. As a graduate student at UMass Boston's Applied Linguistics program, Amanda began volunteering for CVABE in 2020. We couldn't ask for a more skilled and qualified person, and are thrilled to have Amanda on board with us!

"Hello! My name is Amanda Hass, and I am a new Teacher/Community Coordinator at the Montpelier location. I will be graduating with a master's degree in Applied Linguistics from UMass Boston on May 27. My courses taught me so much about language: its forms, how to learn it, and how to teach it. While my degree focused solely on language, I believe the skills acquired and lessons learned will help me be a great teacher for any subject!"



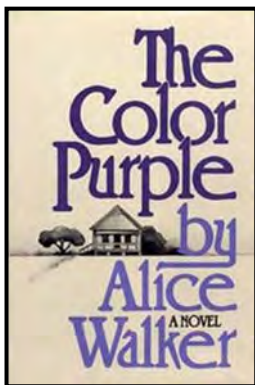
Coming from rural northern Minnesota, I have always enjoyed the feeling of a close community. My growing up in a tight-knit community fostered a drive to help and support people no matter who or where they are in life. Therefore, I am very excited to be able to combine my interest in language and teaching and background in community building into this new position as a Teacher/Community Coordinator for CVABE."

Alice Walker

by Kailea Silvers

What I have come to appreciate about Alice Walker is her orientation towards the good of humanity. Much of the work she does strives to bring forth from the shadows of oppression and erasure black culture and history specifically for the purpose of empowering black women. Through her inquiries, writing, and conversations, she is working out a greater picture of humanity by including the black experience, and she is creating opportunities for black women to claim a rightful pride in who they are. With patients and passion, she is helping us see, maybe for the first time, or perhaps, remember, and hopefully, appreciate the overlooked beauties of black people, especially black women, and their stories.

One story Alice Walker dedicated herself to uncovering was that of Zora Neale Hurston. Walker became intrigued with Zora after reading Zora's novel, *Their Eyes Were Watching God*. In 1973, Walker traveled to the town where Zora had lived, Eatonville, Florida. In Eatonville, Walker found people who knew Zora personally, including one of her neighbors, who enlightened Walker to such details of Zora's life as her love of flowers and gardening, and the dear companionship of her dog, Sport. Walker also met with one of Zora's close friends, Dr. Brenton. From this conversation, Walker learned the real cause of Zora's death, a stroke. Walker had previously heard that Zora had died of malnutrition and hearing that malnutrition was not how Zora's life ended was relieving to Walker. In fact, as Walker learned from Dr. Brenton, Zora loved food and "*She always ate well.*" Another accomplishment of Walker's adventure in



Eatonville was locating Zora's grave and having a headstone made for it. Upon Zora's death, her community took up a collection to fund her burial, but a headstone had not been included. Walker had the headstone engraved with: Zora Neale Hurston, "A genius of the South", Novelist, Folklorist, Anthropologist, 1901-1960. Through Walker's efforts to honor Zora Neale Hurston, Zora's deserving voice is now known to a much broader audience.

In addition to shedding light on overlooked black authors, Alice Walker also shares her voice in her own writing. Walker's most successful book is *The Color Purple*, which is written in a series of letters to God composed by the main character, Celie. The book follows Celie from the time she is 14, when she is pregnant with her second child after being raped by her father. Celie is inclined at first to fully submit to the vision of herself imposed on her by her abusive father, her abusive husband and her racist culture. But Celie encounters black women who refuse the sexist, racist narrative for black women and fight for their personhood including Shug Avery, a successful blues singer, and Sophia, the wife of Celie's husband's son. Celie develops relationships with these women and others that empower her to fight against

mistreatment. In particular, Celie is empowered by her relationship with Shug Avery whom she comes to love romantically and sexually. Eventually, Celie leaves her husband and lives with Shug, supporting herself by selling pants that she sews. Alice Walker provides an inspiring story of empowerment and an honest account of the black experience, especially the experience of black women, with her novel, *The Color Purple*.



Alice Walker is an author and she is also an activist. She has done work for both the Civil Rights and Feminist movements. One contribution Walker has made is coining the term "Womanist" which she defines as "A black feminist or feminist of color." Womanism is meant to unite black women and women of color with the Feminist movement by considering not only gender oppression, but the combined experience of race, class, and gender oppression that black women and women of color face in society. Walker says that the term comes "from the black folk expression of mothers to female children, "You acting womanish,"" which usually refers to behavior that is "outrageous, audacious, courageous, or willful." Walker expresses that a Womanist is "committed to survival and wholeness of entire people, male *and* female." Womanism represents part of Alice Walker's vision for humanity which is one based in bravery and balance.

In conclusion, Alice Walker is a person who cares deeply about people and humanity. She is expressive through her writing, contributing several novels and books of essays, short stories, and poetry. She is also expressive through her advocacy work, having participated in the 1963 March on Washington and later, volunteering to register black voters in Georgia and Mississippi, as well as supporting the feminist movement, and especially black women with her Womanist ideologies. Through her contributions to society, Alice Walker is supporting an orientation towards humanity as an integrated, wholesome community.

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"Alice Walker Biography." *Encyclopedia of World Biography*, www.notablebiographies.com/Tu-We/Walker-Alice.html.

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Visit us at www.cvabe.org

Central Vermont Adult Basic Education, Inc.

CVABE has learning centers throughout the three-county region. Please call your local learning center for more information about student services or volunteer opportunities. You can email us at info@cvabe.org or visit our website at www.cvabe.org.



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Montpelier Learning Center

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31 North Main St. – Ste. 1
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802-244-8765

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Bradford, VT 05033
802-222-3282

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10 South Main St.
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802-728-4492

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802-888-5531

Programs & Services

- Basic Skills: Reading, Writing, Math, Computer and Financial Literacy
- English Language Learning and Preparation for U.S. Citizenship
- High School Diploma and GED Programs
- Career, Technical Training and College Readiness
- Volunteer opportunities for community members

In our learning centers, community locations, workplaces and homes, CVABE teachers and volunteers work with adults and teens to meet their basic education needs. All tutoring and classes are free to the student.

We believe that a person who is literate has the essential key for self-understanding and for full and active membership in the world.

Ours is a two-part strategy for the realization of full literacy:

1. Providing basic education for adults and teens and
2. Involving the entire community so that the hopes and efforts of our students will be championed every step of the way.