



READER-SUPPORTED NEWS SINCE 2006

Your membership can make this the best free newspaper you've ever paid for.
Join today at <http://donate.commonnews.org>.

FREE

The Commons

www.commonnews.org

Brattleboro, Vermont
Wednesday, June 26, 2013 • Vol. VIII, No. 26 • Issue #209

WINDHAM COUNTY'S AWARD-WINNING, INDEPENDENT SOURCE FOR NEWS AND VIEWS

A4

NEWS

THE COMMONS • Wednesday, June 26, 2013

Youth Services honors a state leadership award winner *Carolyn Erikson, 21, of Brattleboro, one of four from Vermont honored*

BRATTLEBORO—The Vermont Youth In Transition State Team has bestowed its Young Adult Leadership Award on Carolyn Erikson, 21, of Brattleboro, citing her exemplary leadership and initiative in her own life and positive effect in the lives of others.

Erikson was one of four to receive the award statewide at YIT's fourth Annual Young Adult Voice Movement Conference, held May 31 to June 1 at Community College of Vermont's Redstone campus.

The conference gives young adults aged 16-21 the opportunity to meet peers and let their voice be heard. The event offers social networking, workshops, leadership and team-building events, and empowerment activities.

Erikson was nominated by



COURTESY PHOTO

Carolyn Erikson.

Alysa Vallender, her Youth Services case manager. As Vallender noted, Erikson transitioned from needing housing to renting her own apartment,

working a steady job, completing a licensed nursing assistant course, attending CCV, and contemplating matriculating to a four-year school — all while serving as a valuable peer resource.

According to YIT's award announcement, Erikson came to the organization in 2011 seeking help with housing. The Youth Services and Windham Windsor Housing Trust partnership made it possible for Erikson to rent a room at its Cobblestone building on Canal Street. On completing a year lease, she moved into her own apartment.

Vallender writes that she was amazed by Erikson's resiliency in maintaining her employment at a nursing home even while looking for permanent housing and lacking reliable transportation.

Erikson also is credited with demonstrated budgeting skills.

She saved money to buy a car and pay for her education at CCV so she could move on to greater life and education goals.

Vallender also lauded Erikson's self discipline, positive decision-making, and responsibility.

"As Carolyn's life has stabilized, I have begun to see a leader developing," Vallender said. "As she has learned about various community resources and how to access them, she has begun to help other young adults."

Vallender noted that Erikson has represented youth and the community at the statewide Youth In Transition Grant Executive Board and at various local meetings concerned with community development.

"Carolyn is constantly thinking about others and pushes herself to do [community-minded]

things even if it is out of her comfort zone, like recording a public service announcement on the radio for a recent fundraiser," Vallender said.

"I'm thrilled that Carolyn is being honored for her efforts, hard work, and dedication to improving her own life and those of other young adults and her community in general."

Erikson's next step: She's been invited to join the Vermont

Youth In Transition State Team at a national conference about excellence in young-adult leadership.

Each year, Youth Services serves more than 50 youth and young adults who are homeless or lack stable housing. For more information on Youth Services programs, call 802-257-0361 or visit www.youthservicesinc.org.

Saturday-Sunday, June 29-30, 2013

PEOPLE

Youth Services honors Carolyn Erikson with Vermont Young Adult Leadership award

BRATTLEBORO — Carolyn Erikson, 21, of Brattleboro, has been awarded the Young Adult Leadership Award by the Vermont Youth In Transition State Team. The award, presented to Erikson and three others at the annual Young Adult Voice Movement Conference, recognizes young adults in the state of Vermont who exhibit exemplary leadership and initiative in their own lives and affect the lives of others around them.

Nominated by Alysa Vallender, her Youth Services case manager, Erikson has transitioned from needing housing, to renting her own apartment, working a steady job, taking a Licensed Nursing Assistant course, attending Community College of Vermont and contemplating college at a four-year school while at the same time, serving as a resource for her peers.

Erikson came to Youth Services in 2011 to get help with housing. The Youth Services and Windham Windsor Housing Trust partnership made it possible for Erikson to rent a room at its Cobblestone building on Canal Street. She successfully completed her year lease and was able to move into an apartment of her own.



Carolyn Erikson

Vallender has been amazed by Erikson's resiliency, such as maintaining her employment at a nursing home, even when she was looking for permanent housing and had no transportation. Additionally, Erikson has demonstrated budgeting skills by saving money to buy a car and to pay off her bill at Community College of Vermont so she could resume her education.

According to Vallender, Erikson has many skills that display her self control, self discipline,

positive decision making, and ability to take responsibility for her actions.

"As Carolyn's life has stabilized, I have begun to see a leader developing," said Vallender. "As she has learned about various community resources and how to access them, she has begun to help other young adults."

Erikson has represented youth and our community at the statewide Youth In Transition Grant Executive Board as well as various local meetings about community development.

"Carolyn is constantly thinking about others and pushes herself to do things even if it is out of her comfort zone, like recording a public service announcement on the radio for a recent fundraiser," said Vallender. "She has never been one to blame someone else or make excuses for her mistakes. I'm thrilled that Carolyn is being honored for her efforts, hard work, and dedication to improving her own life and those of other young adults and her community in general."

For more information on Youth Services programs, call 802-257-0361 or visit www.youthservicesinc.org.

TheWeekendReformer

Brattleboro Reformer

Delivering Your Local News for 100 Years

298
apers Inc.

Thursday, February 14, 2013 • Brattleboro, Vermont • www.reformer.com

Community high school campuses to close

Editor's note: This is the first in a three-part series on plans to close the Community High School of Vermont and how the state hopes to streamline and improve services it provides to students CHSVT educates.

By **BOB AUDETTE**

Reformer Staff

BRATTLEBORO — For some young adults, Community High School of Vermont has meant all the difference in their lives.

"I wouldn't be where I am now," said Amanda Goyette. "I never would have gotten my high school diploma."

Goyette graduated from the Brattleboro campus of CHSVT in 2009, after having been told

by her probation officer to attend classes there.

"I wasn't happy," said Goyette, when told to go back to school.

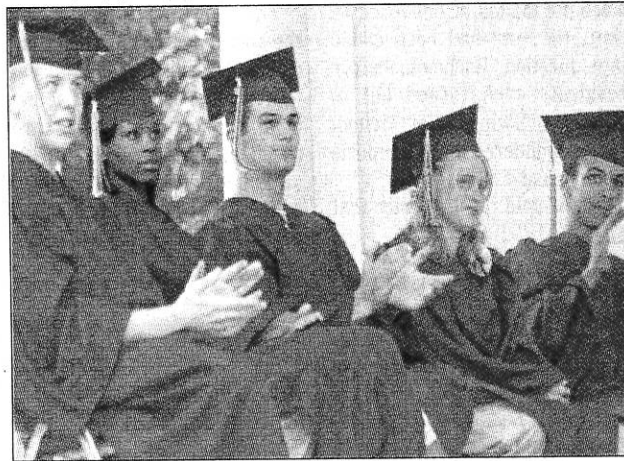
But now, three years later, she is grateful for being pushed to get her diploma.

"The teachers are awesome," said Goyette. "They understood me and they made school interesting and fun, not all stressed out."

Stephanie Murano, who is 21 and currently attending CHSVT, said she dropped out of school when she was 17 but went back when she got pregnant.

She first tried Vermont Adult Learning.

"I hated it," she said. "They



Zachary P. Stephens/Reformer file photo

Students wait to receive their diplomas during a graduation ceremony for the Community High School of Vermont.

weren't helpful. They don't have that one-on-one connection."

Youth Services told her about CHSVT.

"I love it. They help you. They care about the students."

During a CHSVT faculty meeting in January, teachers learned that the Vermont Department of Corrections was making changes to the way it educates those under its supervision — including a reprioritization of services based on the needs of the students, an examination of the duplication of services and the transition needs of the students.

They also learned that effective July 1, the 11 street campuses of CHSVT, which are run by

DOC, will be closing.

The restructuring proposal calls for combining CHSVT, Vermont Correctional Industries and Vermont Offender Work Programs, relocating street campus staff into facilities and creating "Community Transitional Instructors" to work with offenders as they are integrated back into the community from a facility.

The news was unexpected and hit teachers, students and graduates hard.

"I was dumbfounded at first," said Tod Lessard, who has been teaching at the Brattleboro cam-

See HIGH SCHOOL, Page 6

Brattleboro Reformer

Delivering Your Local News for 100 Years

Thursday, February 14, 2013 • Brattleboro, Vermont • www.reformer.com

298

apers Inc.

Community high school campuses to close

Continued from Page 1

pus since 2007. "I couldn't believe they are even thinking about doing something like this."

Every student he has talked to has been upset about the decision, said Lessard.

"They can't believe it. They have nowhere else to go in the community."

When they learned of the plan, many of the students made a commitment to get involved, some of them writing to or calling legislators, said Lessard.

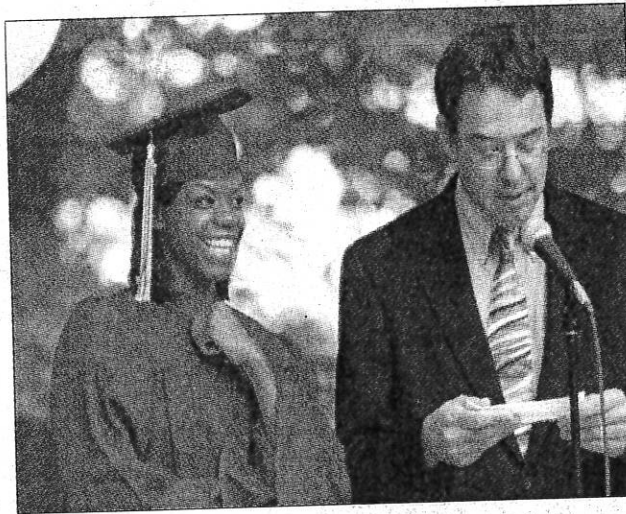
"It's a testament to the program that they want to get involved. They have become active participants in their community and in democracy."

Katarina Rayno said she learned about CHSVT after getting pregnant.

"At the time, I was living on the couch at my dad's with absolutely no idea where my life was headed," she wrote in a letter to legislators. "I did know that, to be a better parent, I wanted a high school diploma (but) I was very reluctant to be a pregnant teen at a 'normal' high school setting."

Youth Services directed her to CHSVT, which was able to design a schedule that fit her needs, which included doctor's appointments and sick days.

"The teachers made a whole-hearted effort to get to know each student individually and to help them realize their individual potential," wrote Rayno. "They are some of the most receptive, supportive, and compassionate people I have ever known."



Right, Tod Lessard, a special educator at the Community High School, makes a speech about Twiniquewah Shakirah Jackson during a graduation ceremony.

She is now a Peer Outreach Worker at Youth Services and in March will begin courses to attain a nursing degree.

"CHSVT has helped me see that I am more than just another statistic, that I have potential," wrote Rayno.

Peter van Wageningen, who has been teaching at CHSVT since 2004, said the Brattleboro campus is a true community site that reaches out into the Brattleboro community and brings in its most at-risk and disaffected young people.

Van Wageningen is retiring this year, and will see his last graduation in June.

"I really care about what I'm doing, what we have done and the program we've developed," he said.

The Brattleboro site has gradu-

ated about 75 students since its first graduating class in 2007, said van Wageningen.

"It's not a huge amount, but we probably saved the state quite a bit of money, just by kids out of corrections have moved on with their lives or kids have never had to enter corrections. CHSVT is cheap by comparison."

Darah Kehnemuyi, an adjunct at the Brattleboro campus, told the *Reformer* all young people deserve to have an adequate education that prepares them to be contributing, responsible members of their community.

"The Community High School is able to take young people who are otherwise disengaged learners and provide them with the tools they need to be responsible adults."

In a letter to the Legislature,

Danielle Southwell, the assistant director of youth development for Youth Services in Brattleboro, wrote that CHSVT is more than just a school.

"The cultural competence and compassion of the staff provides an unparalleled atmosphere where students receive not only effective educational services, but also the social and life skills that they will most certainly need to become productive, caring citizens of our community."

Southwell told the *Reformer* the staff at CHSVT are unusual in that they are welcoming of this population and understand the issues that the students face.

"We stress learning personal responsibility, and we stick with our students, encouraging them, helping them find their way in life," wrote van Wageningen, in an e-mail to the CHSVT faculty group.

In a letter to legislators, adjunct Robert F. Stuart wrote that some of CHSVT's students are first offenders who are on probation.

"Let's face it, whom are we servicing? Kids headed for Harvard or Yale? Absolutely not. These are kids who have been dumped on the streets by their parents and schools who come to us for help. If we are closed, where do they go? Prison?"

In Friday's *Reformer*: Why was the decision made to close the 11 street campuses of the Community High School of Vermont?

Bob Audette can be reached at raudette@reformer.com, or at 802-254-2311, ext. 160. Follow Bob on Twitter @audette.reformer.

