

JUNE 1, 2016

TURTLE TRACKS

A WEEKLY E-NEWSLETTER FOR THE VERMONT COMMONS SCHOOL COMMUNITY

UPCOMING EVENTS

June 2nd - 8th
Final Exams

June 4th
SATs

June 9th
Field Day

June 10th
Graduation

Spring Research & Service

Just before Encounter Week, our Research & Service program closed out yet another successful semester. As a toast to their work, we invite you to explore this spring's projects in this special R&S edition of *Turtle Tracks* - a toast to a fantastic program that serves as a fundamental pillar of the Vermont Commons experience.



Faces From Around the World

by Mark Cline Lucey

The Vermont Commons School Research and Service class, “Faces From Around the World” connected students with the New American experience here in Vermont. During this semester-long class, the brainchild of junior Kamli Faour '17, students began exploring the topic of refugee resettlement in Vermont focusing on the individual experience. Using photography and storytelling as their mediums, students delved into what it means to be a refugee and the difficult and often frightening process of applying for asylum. Students researched and engaged in conversations about the ethics of ethnography, and heard from guest speakers who offered insight into the world of oral history.

Throughout the semester, students engaged in extensive conversation with people from countries such as Nepal, South Sudan, Somalia and Bhutan, to gain a better understanding of the cultures, religions, histories and current experience of people who have come to settle in this community. Students then transcribed the most powerful parts of each conversation, pairing the story with stark black and white photos of the story teller.

“I was amazed by how hard the process is for people trying to get refugee status in the U.S.,” commented 9th grader Fiona Oldham '19. “There is so much they have to do to prepare. They go through this really hard interview process, and then they can just be told ‘no, you have to go back’.”

The exhibit spent time on display at Vermont Commons School, before moving to Burlington City Hall on May 31st where it will remain for the month of June. In the late summer it will move to the Vermont Folklife Center in Middlebury. Vermont Commons students hope this exhibit will raise awareness and appreciation of our New American neighbors.

Please come and take a look at “Faces From Around the World: A Vermont Commons School Exhibit” at Burlington’s City Hall.



Building and Bouncing

by *Adriana Comtois*

For the last few months, a group of VCS and The Schoolhouse students have been working on building a few wooden structures around Bread and Butter Farm. Being consistent with our mission of creating ecological citizens and stewards of the environment, we have been dedicating time to enhance nature areas with the purpose of studying it closer and make it more accessible to the community.

Based on designs made by previous Research and Service classes, we built an observatory platform, an arch, boardwalks, benches, and trail signs. The observatory platform will be used to observe flora and fauna, and get a closer look at some details such as nests. The benches were placed close to the platform so you can admire the beauty of your surroundings as well as get a break from the sun. A few boardwalks were necessary since some parts were muddy and hard to access once the snow started to melt. Trail signs and the arch were suggestions from the students who pointed out that the trail head was not so obvious.

Part of our discussions were about conservation and minimizing the impact of humans on nature. With that in mind, we were very conscious about what went into these structures and employed low-impact practices. For example, even when we could have brought a small vehicle with all the tools and materials to the site, we chose to carry them all by hand under any weather condition. The platform was built using mainly untreated wood, nails and screws. We also selected a couple of trees that were already there as our anchor. The benches were made of just regular wood, which we varnished with an eco-friendly finish made of natural oils. The boardwalks were made with untreated wood as well since they will have direct contact with the ground and we did not want to pollute it with chemicals. The arch and trail were made by reusing broken branches found in the area as well as some rope.

Another component of this class was the mentorship between both schools. We spent some time getting to know each other through team group activities, explorations around the camp site (plenty of bouncing!) and sharing our building skills. Students were divided in different groups and they learned how to read bench plans and to build independently, dealing with measurements and angles, with sequencing of tasks and effective communication. It was also about patience, since many times they had to take turns, and wait until one crew is finished, so the other one could start. And of course, it was about team work. We needed to learn how to work alongside each other whether it was moving tree trunks, carrying tools, cutting wood, securing the ladder or nailing the floor.

At the end, we finish building all the structures. The Schoolhouse students will waterproof it and attach a rope ladder. In our wrap-up session students were proud to see all their efforts come to fruition and they were actually able to climb up and enjoy the views. It was a very rewarding journey together!



Extinctus

by Taegen Yardley

EXTINCTUS is a fun and easy way to raise awareness about extinction and save the environment. We enjoyed working with David Bradbury and Steve Gibbs to enhance our knowledge about entrepreneurship and dealing with money while thinking about the environment. We also enjoyed conducting our service at the Birds of Vermont Museum.

Please [visit our website](#) if you're curious about our products!



6th Grade

by Jory Hearst

In this inaugural 6th Grade Research & Service project, students partnered with K-4th grade students at nearby Vermont Day School. Our 6th graders partnered with the Day School students as reading and writing buddies. It was a terrific and fun partnership!



All the World's a Stage

by Heather Win

The All the World's a Stage R&S class had a busy and productive semester of researching and supporting people who are experiencing or are at risk of homelessness in the local community. Students democratically chose this issue of concern at the beginning of the semester and together sought out opportunities to learn and serve. After visiting Spectrum Youth and Family Services, many in the group participated in the first VCS Sleep Out for Spectrum, spending the night outside on the lawn to show solidarity with youth who are without stable housing.

With this endeavor, they were successful in raising more than **\$1,700** for Spectrum.

Desiring to learn more about the people in our community, we headed out to the streets on a rainy day and served free hot chocolate and did mini-interviews with those who visited our tables. This put us outside our comfort zones and helped us recognize the value in hearing the stories of individuals.

We also partnered with the Committee on Temporary Shelter (COTS), and after visiting the Waystation shelter and inviting a former COTS client to speak with our class about her experience, the students initiated a Soap Drive, collecting soap that will be used by the various COTS facilities.

In the last week of the semester, students cooked an epic meal of baked ziti and brownies to serve 120 people in need of a wholesome meal at the Salvation Army in Burlington. Rosa, Zeb, and Ezra from our class along with our awesome additional volunteers--Lily, Nimaya, Eugene, Sawyer, Zeb's brother, and Ezra's father--had the opportunity to prepare, serve, and clean up during dinner service at the Salvation Army. We've learned that the Salvation Army is in great need of more small groups to serve the nightly meals, and we encourage anyone interested to contact them or Heather Win for more information on how to get involved.

Our R&S class would like to give special thanks to the many in the VCS community who supported our various endeavors. We felt the love, and we were happy to be able to pass it on to those in need.



Help Support Our Research & Service Program!

Inspired by these Research and Service Stories? Amazed at the way Vermont Commons students affect change in their world?

The Commons Fund is an integral part of making this program, one that goes above and beyond your typical independent school curriculum, happen.

Please consider a gift to the Commons Fund now as we close this remarkable year. Any and every amount helps. We just ask that you give what you can.

Click here: www.vermontcommons.org/giving/ or send a check in to Katherine.

Remember: It's for the Commons Good!

A promotional banner for the yearbook. It features a stack of white pages on the left and a silver alarm clock on the right. The text in the center reads "IT'S TIME TO ORDER YOUR YEARBOOK." Below this is a button that says "SHOP NOW >".

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