

CONNECTIONS

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Dianne Talbot, an Adult Education teacher who earned her GED through EASTCONN, has been named Educator of the Year.

EASTCONN Adult Education Teacher Honored by CAACE

EASTCONN Adult Programs teacher Dianne Talbot has been named 2016 Educator of the Year by the Connecticut Association for Adult and Continuing Education (CAACE).

Talbot was one of three Connecticut adult education teachers to be honored by CAACE. The award is presented to educators “who have contributed above and beyond the normal expectations of an adult educator, have demonstrated consistent dedication and service to adult education students and have been involved in innovative programming,” said CAACE Conference Awards Committee Chair Maureen Wagner.

“I can’t tell you how proud we are to have Dianne on our staff,” said Rich Tariff, who directs EASTCONN’s Adult Programs division. “From the start, she has been an exemplary teacher.” Talbot, who resides in Plainfield, has worked for EASTCONN since 2015.

EASTCONN’s connection with Talbot started years earlier.

When Talbot was a senior in high school, she learned just two months before graduation that she was short one credit and wouldn’t graduate with her class. She dropped out. She soon married and started a family, but continued to regret that she hadn’t gotten her diploma. Eight years later, she decided it was time to earn her degree. She enrolled in EASTCONN’s GED classes in January 2005, and passed her GED tests seven months later.

“It was worth it for me, and more importantly, for my children to

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Great Partnerships Enrich After-School Program for Students



One of many UCONN student-volunteer tutors helps a Windham Heights student complete her homework assignment at CAC.

Thriving partnerships with universities, agencies, organizations and local schools are enriching the lives of children from Windham Heights through an after-school program that provides tutoring, homework assistance, creative activities, nutritious snacks, library books, field trips, free tickets to arts performances, and more.

EASTCONN operates the Community Arts Connection (CAC) after-school program for 70 elementary and middle-school children who reside at Windham Heights, a federally-funded complex located outside of Willimantic. Open since 2007, CAC is designed to support students’ academic achievement and open their eyes to the arts.

“Our outside partners are critical to our success at CAC, there’s no question about it,” said EASTCONN’s Carolyn Stearns, who coordinates the CAC program. Stearns is an award-winning, professional storyteller.

“Thanks to many generous people, organizations and agencies, we’ve been able to support our students’ academic progress, introduce them to the arts, and expose them to new ideas and experiences that are fun, but that also empower them to think differently about the world and their future,” said Nancy Vitale, who oversees the CAC program for EASTCONN.

Monday through Thursday, students get off the bus after school and walk over to the Windham Heights Community Center, which houses CAC. They get a healthy snack and then meet with UCONN tutors, a group of university-student volunteers, who help them with

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see me complete my education and to know that hard work pays off," Talbot said.

Next, with the help of an EASTCONN Adult Programs transitions coach, Talbot discovered that she wanted to become a teacher. Over the next seven years, she earned her associate's degree from Quinebaug Valley Community College; her bachelor's in history from Eastern Connecticut State University; and her master's in elementary education with a cross-endorsement for middle school social studies from Sacred Heart University.

Talbot said she has a special empathy for her adult education students. "I understand the embarrassment of carrying around the stigma of not finishing high school," she said. "I understand the work it takes to commit to focusing on yourself, when deep down you know that being a parent is more important. I understand that sometimes they need to realize that they are not taking away time from their children. In reality they are teaching their children many lessons. They're not just saying that education is important; they are actually showing them. They are teaching them to persevere and never give up."

"Dianne inspires her adult students every day, and truly understands the struggles they face as they manage the complex challenges of earning a living, raising a family and returning to school," said EASTCONN Associate Director of Adult Program Kristin Hempel. Learn more about teaching with EASTCONN's Adult Programs in Danielson or Willimantic by contacting Kristin Hempel at khempel@eastconn.org.



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homework.

"As a tutor, I get to help students learn to like learning," said UCONN freshman Lauren Moore, as she worked with a CAC student in March. "It makes me happy to see them reading and enjoying it."

Once homework is done, students can read books in the Community Center's small library, supplemented and curated by the Willimantic Public Library's Gail Zeiba and her staff. Literacy is another important aspect of the CAC program.

"We're still in the stage of cataloging and adding books," Zeiba said. "But it's a nice library of children's books that [CAC] children can use. We are hoping to open a satellite library there for all of Windham Heights before the summer, which would be a win-win for everyone."

CAC students participate in imaginative activities that are linked to monthly themes. So far this year, themes have included Fix It!, Public Speaking, Biography, Cooking, Words with Friends, and Math By the Numbers. Stearns said Mystic Seaport museum staff offer her valuable, free professional development, which helps her plan CAC activities. EASTCONN also offers on-site Spanish GED and ESL services for parents and residents, in addition to other learning opportunities.

On Fridays, the UCONN Big Buddies program buses CAC students to UCONN in Storrs, where they learn about college, with the hope that they will one day attend. CAC students and families are also bused to free performances at UCONN's Jorgensen Center for the Performing Arts; Jorgensen's JOY program absorbs the cost. Last month, CAC students and parents attended the Kodo Drummers show at Jorgensen, and everyone was thrilled, according to Stearns.

Among CAC's many other substantial partners are VESTA/Lifelong Learning; Windham Public Schools; Connecticut State Library system; ECSU; Connecticut DEEP; and Mountain Dairy. Area professionals also visit CAC to share their expertise.

Learn more: Contact Nancy Vitale at nvitale@eastconn.org.

\$25K SUEZ Grant Cuts Cost of Mobile STEM Lab Visits

And in the good news department...

A \$25,000 grant from the SUEZ Foundation will help underwrite the cost of bringing EASTCONN's Mobile STEM Laboratory to 20 schools across the EASTCONN region over the next year.

"This generous contribution by the SUEZ Foundation will make it possible for even more schools and students to benefit from a Mobile STEM Lab visit," said EASTCONN's Dr. Stacey Williams-Watson, who oversees the STEM Laboratory's science instruction and learning. The international SUEZ Corporation, which has a facility in Danielson, is a water conservation and water recycling company.

EASTCONN's Mobile STEM Laboratory is fully equipped and can travel relatively long distances. EASTCONN charges a break-even fee to finance STEM Lab trips to schools or other sites, like state parks, where students can conduct experiments both inside and outside of the Lab.



An EASTCONN Quinebaug Middle College student, far right, shares part of a health curriculum with visitors to the Mobile STEM Lab.

Thanks to the SUEZ grant, 20 EASTCONN-region schools will only have to pay half that break-even fee. Included in the fee: STEM Lab travel, a teacher's pre-visit training, an on-board EASTCONN science instructor, all scientific materials, a curriculum aligned with the Next Generation Science Standards, and more.

The lab's curriculum is intended for students from 5th to 12th grade, and covers topics like watersheds, biodiversity, climate change, wastewater treatment, introduction to robotics, among others. Customized curricula are available, and STEM learning opportunities are also available for younger grades.

Among the lab's on-board inventory are iPads for interactive work, data collection and analysis; an on-board scanning electron microscope; general laboratory equipment; Vernier probes; 20 work stations with electrical feeds for lab microscopes; interior flat-screen monitors; an exterior TV monitor, and other tools.

To learn more, contact Dr. Stacey Williams-Watson at swatson@eastconn.org, or reach her at 860-455-1508.

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Professional Notes



Dr. Sheila Desai

& Practice (LDRP)

Dr. Sheila Desai, a member of EASTCONN's Psychological and Behavioral Consultation Services group, co-authored an article, "Manipulating Treatment Dose: Evaluating the Frequency of a Small Group Intervention Targeting Whole Number Operations," that was selected to receive the prestigious Kirk Award for the best research article published in *Learning Disabilities Research & Practice* (LDRP) during the 2016 volume year.



Diane Gozemba

Collins, a doctoral student.

EASTCONN's Director of Early Childhood Initiatives, **Diane Gozemba**, has been selected to co-present at the 44th Annual National Head Start Conference and Expo in Chicago this month. The presentation is titled "Serving Families: How well are you assessing it? Who Is Better Off?" Co-presenting with Gozemba are her UCONN colleagues, Dr. JoAnn L. Robinson and Ciara



Dr. Stacey Williams-Watson

early exposure to STEM, as well as to their personal persistence.

Dr. Stacey Williams-Watson, EASTCONN's Teaching & Learning STEM Education Specialist and EASTCONN Mobile STEM Laboratory Coordinator, has earned her Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration from the University of Phoenix. Her dissertation was a phenomenological study that addressed persistence among minority students majoring in the STEM fields. Positive student outcomes were linked to their

Aspiring Administrators Sought for CCSU 092 Cohort at EASTCONN

EASTCONN is seeking aspiring school administrators to participate in a 30-credit, Sixth Year Certification program being offered by Central Connecticut State University's Department of Educational Leadership, Policy and Instructional Technology.

Starting this summer, classes for the regional, cohort-based Sixth Year program will begin, with much of the course work taking place at EASTCONN's Conference Center, 376 Hartford Turnpike (Route 6), in Hampton.

This is a two-year, CSDE-approved preparation program for the Intermediate Administrator 092 certificate.

"The curricular content is customized to the needs of small districts, like those we find in resource-stretched, rural Connecticut," said Dr. Toni Ryan, EASTCONN's Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment. "We want this program to be relevant to the needs of future school leaders in our region."

Contact CCSU's Dr. Ethan Heinen for more information at heineneth@ccsu.edu, or 860-832-2102.

Or, contact EASTCONN's Dr. Toni Ryan at tryan@eastconn.org, or 860-455-1580.

Protulis Leads EASTCONN Special Services Division



EASTCONN's experienced, new Director of Special Education Services, Eric Protulis, will continue the tradition of collaboration.

EASTCONN has named Eric Protulis to lead the agency's Special Services division.

"Prior to working for EASTCONN, I was always impressed with the collaborative nature of the agency," said Protulis, who was recently named Director of EASTCONN Special Services.

"I look forward to continuing in this tradition. We face many challenges when providing programming for students with disabilities and I'm eager to identify the ways in which we can partner to better serve the students in our region."

In his new role, Protulis will oversee the day-to-day operations of EASTCONN's two Clinical Day Treatment programs; the Related Services group; Autism Program; and Psychological and Behavioral Consultation Services.

"We are very excited that Eric accepted this expanded leadership role at EASTCONN," said Tom Cronin, EASTCONN's Director of Education Services. "His experience running one of our Clinical Day Treatment programs over the last three years, and as a school psychologist and special services director has prepared him to lead our special education programs and services. He is smart, thoughtful and responsive. He's an outstanding leader and advocate, who will continue to grow and strengthen our collective work."

Protulis has been an educator for 18 years, and holds degrees in psychology and school psychology. He has been a school psychologist and has worked for the state Department of Corrections, Plainville Middle School, and Regional School District #8 (RHAM), where he served as director of special education for five years. When he first joined EASTCONN, he oversaw the Educational Vocational Center in Columbia.

Contact Eric Protulis at eprotulis@eastconn.org to learn more.



100 Early Childhood educators from across CT attended the Fourth Annual Infant Toddler Conference at EASTCONN last month.

Check it out! EASTCONN's Website Has a New Look!

EASTCONN has launched its new website, with cleaner, leaner pages and more user-friendly features, including a fully responsive design that allows visitors to more easily view and browse from any device — mobile, tablet or desktop.

Visit us at www.eastconn.org to see our new look!



A screen shot from EASTCONN's new website landing page.

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ACT Students Win Writing Awards



Creative Writing students at EASTCONN's ACT arts magnet high school have won recognition for their writing and poetry talents.

Creative Writing students in EASTCONN's Arts at the Capitol Theater (ACT) performing arts magnet high school have again been honored for their creative works in state and regional contests this spring.

Eighteen ACT students won 26 awards for their writing and poetry in the 2017 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards, a prestigious national program that has supported teenagers' artistic development since 1923. ACT received the second highest number of awards in the state of Connecticut, behind Rockville High School in Vernon.

Five of ACT's 18 student winners earned 7 Gold Key Awards, Scholastic's highest honor, in the first round of regional writing competitions among Northeastern states. Their works will now compete with regional Gold Key winners from across the United States.

ACT senior Juliet Duchesne, also one of ACT's Scholastic Award winners, placed among the Top 5 in the final round of Connecticut's 12th Annual Poetry Out Loud: National Recitation Contest. More than 7,000 students from a record-breaking 43 Connecticut high schools participated in the contest this year.

EASTCONN's ACT arts magnet high school enrolls students in grades 9-12 from northeastern Connecticut. Located in EASTCONN's historic Capitol Theater in downtown Willimantic, ACT offers small classes and a rigorous arts-infused, standards-based curriculum with an emphasis on developing students' artistic talents. ACT is currently accepting new enrollments for 2017-2018. Contact ACT Principal Sarah Mallory at 860-465-5636 or visit www.eastconn.org/act.



Save the Date! *Mental Health Issues in NE CT: A Growing Concern*

May 25, 2017, 9 a.m.-11:30 a.m., EASTCONN, Hampton

Please join us for this call to action about the growing impact of children's mental health on our schools and communities. A facilitated community conversation with experts in the fields of education, mental health, healthcare and the juvenile justice system will focus on the scope of the problem in our region, and share information about how deep the problem goes. How are our region's systems responding to children's mental health challenges? Where is the greatest need? How can we effect change? Be part of the solution as we build awareness and identify strategies for taking action.

R.S.V.P. by May 18th to Jennifer Miles at jmiles@eastconn.org, or call her at 860-455-1518 for more information.

Invitees: Superintendents, pupil services directors, mental health providers, police personnel, juvenile review boards, local officials, legislators, DCF, DHMAS, DSS and EWIB/DOL representatives.