

## Stories from the Bridge Program

Valstie Toussaint Rameau graduated from the CLC's Bridge to College program in 2019. Her path, like many Bridge students, was neither short nor easy, and she is a testament to the grueling work, faith, and tenacity that are required of so many immigrants in the U.S.



Valstie came to the U.S. as an asylee from Haiti with an undergraduate degree in history and a law degree from France under her belt. However, with English as her third language, the burdens of working under a restrictive work permit, and the reality that loomed before her of what it would take to ever practice law in the U.S., she set her sights on a more practical option.

"My idea wasn't to do college over," she says. "You don't want to start over. . . but I had to be realistic. When you're coming to the U.S., you are trying to find your way. How can you try in this society if you don't seek an education?" It was this understanding that led her to Bridge, where she thrived even though she was working long days and nights as a cashier at CVS.

When Valstie graduated from Bridge, she started taking classes full time at Bunker Hill Community College, where she was accepted to the notoriously difficult general sonography program. As an asylee, Valstie was not eligible for federal financial aid, so even though she was working about forty hours a week, she reports, "I was spending all my days at Bunker Hill and in clinical rotations and was not able to work enough to cover all my expenses." She attributes her ability to complete the general sonography program to the many scholarships she received over the years, including three scholarships from the Friends of the CLC.

In 2022, Valstie graduated with her associate's degree in general sonography and, additionally, a license to practice obstetric sonography. Today, she works full time at Cambridge Hospital as an ultrasound technician. When asked about how she feels about having entered a completely new field, Valstie says, "It became a passion. Cambridge Hospital is a really diverse hospital. I can meet people from anywhere in the world. This is what I was looking for."

Valstie also finds the work itself to be incredibly moving: "You learn so much from people. So many people come with hope, and when you see the first baby's heartbeat, it's an amazing experience."

*Read Valstie's full story online at [www.friendsofclc.org/blog](http://www.friendsofclc.org/blog)*

## SAVE THE DATE!

The Friends of the CLC invite you to test your knowledge, compete for prizes, and have fun at TRIVIA NIGHT!

Tuesday, June 20th, 2023  
7:00 - 9:00 PM  
730 Tavern, Central Square

Our general knowledge, bar-style quiz is open to all and free to play. Donations will benefit the Community Learning Center. Visit [www.friendsofclc.org](http://www.friendsofclc.org) for more information.

## Friends Welcome Two New Board Members



The Friends of CLC are very excited to welcome two new members.

Holly Klose joins the board after ten years of working as a career counselor, primarily working with adults looking to make a transition in their work. Adept at helping people understand their strengths, weaknesses, and work goals, she found it rewarding to support people along their journeys.

Originally from New Hampshire, Holly has lived in Boston for 20 years. At various points, she's tried to live in many different cities – from Seattle to Austin to Denver – but always found New England was calling her home. Now, she splits her time between here and Berlin, where her husband works part time.

A lot of Holly's volunteer work has focused on adult education, including beginning computer classes through local hospitals and career counseling. She loves the work, especially seeing how motivated adults are to learn, juggling so many responsibilities from families to jobs. She feels inspired by that level of dedication and commitment and enjoys bringing her skills in tech-based applications, communications, and fundraising to the CLC.

Holly's experience and energy are a truly valuable addition to the Friends of the CLC. From new fundraising events to piloting new systems, Holly is already bringing her creative and innovative spirit to our group.

**FUN FACT:**  
Holly used to be a competitive roller blader!



Julia Miller found out about the Friends of the Community Learning Center from a posting online. She had recently moved back to the Boston area, where she grew up, and was looking to get involved in the community in some way. The CLC Friends was the kind of organization she was looking for. Julia left Boston for college where she majored in English and volunteered at a local library to read with kids, which is where she first became interested in literacy. She also worked at the Writing Center, helping other students with writing skills.

After college, Julia joined Teach for America and was a kindergarten teacher in Rocky Mount, North Carolina. Rocky Mount was where she first encountered children who had not been exposed to literacy at all. Though it was challenging, she was fascinated by how kids learn to read and the neuroscience behind those processes.

Since then, Julia has been working at a pediatric hospital on grant-funded educational programming, where she works with diverse students on health literacy and mentorship programs. She enjoys developing curriculum that weaves literacy and social-emotional learning into STEM and using research-based practices to improve pathways to careers in STEM.

Julia really believes in the work of the Community Learning Center. She's on the Communications team and works on the website, the Friends' blog, and the newsletter. She calls what the Friends do an "amplification of good work," with the purpose of bringing in more funding for classes, scholarships, and supports for teachers. Her creativity, writing, technical skills, energy – and her enthusiasm! – are a wonderful addition to the Friends of CLC.

**FUN FACT:**

Julia's hidden talent is winning prizes from claw machines!

**Get Involved!**

To become a CLC volunteer or join the Friends Board, contact Louis NeJame at [Lnejame@tytonpartners.com](mailto:Lnejame@tytonpartners.com) or (781) 588-4380

**Call to Action**

Please continue to support the Friends of the Community Learning Center during this critical time. If you believe that educated citizens make strong, healthy communities and local economies, please donate:

**By check to:** Friends of the Community Learning Center  
5 Western Ave.  
Cambridge, MA 02139

**Online at:** [www.friendsofclc.org](http://www.friendsofclc.org)

Or through your employer's Matching Gift or Charitable Designation program.

**Message from the President:  
Making Connections**

If you are reading this newsletter, chances are good that someone has connected you with the Community Learning Center—a student or family member of one, a staff member, or perhaps one of our amazing volunteers who tutor students or serve on the Board. Maybe you yourself have taken on one of these roles. Either way, you have come to know the splendid work that CLC does to help people transform their lives. And I'm willing to bet that your connection to the CLC community makes you feel good. Just hearing stories about the tremendous sacrifices our students make to come to class, juggling work and family responsibilities in order to invest in their futures, is inspiring.

CLC students don't have to be convinced to come to school; they know that education is their ticket to a better life for themselves, their families, and their communities. Watching new opportunities unfold for the students as they progress is a thrill. If someone has brought you this joy by connecting you with the Community Learning Center, you can keep that good feeling going by connecting CLC with someone else. Share this newsletter. Invite a friend to graduation on June 22. Tell your neighbor about the milestone that you helped your tutoring student reach. Ask your coworkers to join you in sponsoring a Friends of CLC scholarship.

So get involved, and bring others along. You'll feel good, you'll look good, and you'll do good. By expanding and strengthening your connections to the Community Learning Center, you will help make the world a better place.

Thank you, as always, for your support.

Phyllis A. Benjamin  
President  
Friends of the Community Learning Center

**Go Paperless!**

In order to stretch your donation dollars and save our natural resources, please go to [www.friendsofclc.org](http://www.friendsofclc.org) and sign up for online communication. We will not sell or share your email address (we promise!) or use it more than a handful of times a year: for the spring and fall newsletters, the annual appeal, and updates about important events such as graduation and the annual Benefit for Bridge. Online communication saves trees and helps us keep channeling more than 90% of our funds to direct services. Thank you for your continued support!