



# VERMONT GEAR UP

It's time again for our newsletter! When we send this newsletter out to "families," we're including every adult who takes the time to be part of the lives and education of students. We're grateful for all the adults who care for students. Contact us any time with questions or concerns. Thank you for being a youth champion!

## Scholarships & FAFSA meetings

Scholarships—like grants—are financial aid that you don't need to pay back. Scholarships are offered by many different groups, organizations, and even individuals. They're offered for all kinds of achievements and to all kinds of students. They're usually competitive, with eligible applicants competing for a limited number of awards. But remember, you're competing only against others who actually apply.

You can find the complete listing of VSAC-supported scholarships in VSAC's **free** scholarships booklet. Check your school counseling office or visit <https://publications.vsc.org> to order a copy in the mail. Keep in mind: The very hard deadline for scholarship material submission is **February 15, 2023**.

Think about who your student will ask for letters of recommendation and make that ask ASAP. It's really helpful to get on each person's radar before too many people ask! And when we talk about the "hard deadline," we mean that everything needed for the review committee to look at **must** be in the student's file at VSAC on February 15, 2023.

You can find helpful videos on scholarships, grants, and loans—including a step-by-step video on filing the FAFSA—at [www.vsc.org/financial-aid-videos](http://www.vsc.org/financial-aid-videos). You'll also find an entire library of helpful videos on planning for college, career exploration, the life of a college student, and more at [www.youtube.com/user/myVSCstory](http://www.youtube.com/user/myVSCstory).



## FAFSA Fridays continue at VSAC

Families of students entering college in the fall must complete the FAFSA prior to enrolling. This is the gateway to federal funding, scholarships, and grants. VSAC's skilled financial aid counselors can help!

First, make sure to go to <https://studentaid.gov/fsa-id/create-account/launch> to create an account with Federal Student Aid and to get your FSA ID. Then you can get help in a number of ways:

- Ask your counseling office if your school has scheduled a Forms Night, where a VSAC counselor will assist you in filing both the FAFSA and the Vermont grant application.
- Schedule a 1:1 meeting with VSAC to receive personalized guidance on the FAFSA. For in-person or virtual appointments, visit [www.vsc.org/events](http://www.vsc.org/events) or call 1-877-961-4369.
- Drop in at our Winooski office at 10 East Allen Street through the end of January (Tuesdays–Thursdays between 9:00 am–3:00 pm). Stop by to work independently on your FAFSA and ask questions to VSAC staff as they arise
- Have a quick FAFSA question? Call 833-802-8722 with your questions Monday–Friday between 8:00 am–4:30 pm.

Please call ahead for the detailed list of items you'll need for your 2023–2024 FAFSA.

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## GEAR UP GUIDE student spotlight

Abdimajiid Mohamed is a GEAR UP alumni from Winooski, Vermont. Born in Somalia, Abdi and his family immigrated to Winooski when he was just 8 years old. He graduated from Winooski High School in 2018.

"Coming from an immigrant family, it's difficult navigating higher education because I am a first-generation college student," says Abdi. "For me, it was a sink-or-swim type deal mainly because I had to figure it out myself."

Abdi is currently attending Trine University in Indiana, where he's finishing up his dual bachelor of science and master's in business administration degrees with honors. Despite the barriers he's faced, he has certainly left his mark on campus, having founded the first ever Black Student Union, served as Student Body vice president, and played soccer for two years. His accomplishments were met with many twists and turns, however—Abdi transferred to a few schools before settling on Trine.

"Many first-year college students find the process of transferring institutions to be overwhelming," says Abdi. "A big lesson I learned when transferring was identifying a contact person for admissions, student services, and financial aid. More often than not, those 3 departments are the main ones working on your



transfer process, so reaching out and building a connection to a point person makes the process much easier."

Abdi emphasizes that the mentorship he received during his time in high school from both his community and GEAR UP

Outreach helped him tremendously in finding his footing and preparing him for the difficulties of navigating higher education. So much so that he's still making waves in his community from afar. He's currently interning with GEAR UP GUIDE to strengthen mentorship partnerships with already established mentor programs in Vermont communities. He was also recently appointed by Winooski's City Council to serve as a member of the Winooski Commission for Inclusion and Belonging.

"Working with GUIDE, I'm able to be a leader in my community," says Abdi. "GUIDE has exposed me to opportunities that not only develop me as a student, but also as a profes-

sional. The initiatives we take on enable me to apply my experience with GUIDE back to the classroom, which allows me to grow my classroom experience as part of a working team."

GEAR UP GUIDE is fortunate to have Abdi on the team, and we look forward to continuing our work with him this fall. We can't wait to see where his path takes him!

## Join us for the 2023 Transition & Career Conference

This year, we're hosting our annual conference for school counselors, leaders, agency staff, and parents on May 12, 2023, at the Stoweflake Resort on the Mountain Road in Stowe, Vermont. The event will highlight opportunities for Vermont students, and we invite families to spend the day with us. There's so much available for Vermont students that we want to share with you!

Registration via Eventbrite will be in March. Mark your calendar to register in the spring at [www.vvac.org/events](http://www.vvac.org/events). The cost is \$35, but if you'd like a scholarship to attend, email [printon@vsac.org](mailto:printon@vsac.org).



This year's theme is *Living and Learning in the 802*. The event will begin with a keynote address from Jess DeCarolis, Vermont Agency of Education Division Director—Student Pathways, and the day's session will cover:

- Vermont State University—what the changes mean for our students
- dual enrollment
- early college
- loan forgiveness
- career opportunities and supportive programs
- internships
- work-based learning
- career and technical education
- finding and being a good youth employer
- hands-on math, including escape rooms and sacred geometry
- free programs and certificates

... and so much more!

## Kingdom Career Connect

*Bringing 400 +middle school students together at NVU Lyndon*

When more than 400 students, along with teachers, GEAR UP counselors and community volunteers come together, electricity is in the air! On Tuesday, October 4, middle school students from 14 schools in and around the NEK attended VSAC's GEAR UP Kingdom Career Connect event at Northern Vermont University-Lyndon. Students took part in hands-on career exploration workshops offered by professionals from across the region, from Casella Waste to Human Resources. The most popular workshops included Carpentry, Music Production, and Mental Health Counseling.



This event is designed to help young students think about the future, explore possibilities, and hear directly from people in a wide variety of careers about their work. You can find career exploration resources and info about future events on our website at [www.vsac.org/vermont-career-connect](http://www.vsac.org/vermont-career-connect). We're always happiest when we're with our students in the community and can witness their excitement and engagement in career and college opportunities!

## Get ready for College & Career Pathways 2023

VSAC's College & Career Pathways events are returning in person this year! From February-April, high schools around the state are invited to bring students to take part in a day of workshops on topics including identifying career interests, choosing a college or postsecondary training program, navigating the admissions process, and managing the costs associated with education after high school. We'll also be hosting an event for families on Saturday, March 18. You can find details and additional resources to help you prepare for life after high school at [www.vsac.org/ccp](http://www.vsac.org/ccp).

## SEEDS Student Leadership Summit

*Summer 2023*



GEAR UP is excited to return to an in-person SEEDS program this year from June 28-30 at Vermont Technical College. GEAR UP students who are currently in 8th or 9th grade have a chance to participate for free in this nationally recognized leadership development program.

Students will spend 3 days and 2 nights living on a college campus, taking part in activities to build leadership and life skills, and forming new friendships with other students from around the state. Students must apply and be accepted to participate.

Applications will be available in April. Connect with your GEAR UP outreach counselor for more info. You can learn more about SEEDS Training Inc. by visiting [www.seedstraining.com](http://www.seedstraining.com).

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### GEAR UP Outreach Counselors

Dylan Bertolini  
Jimmy Clark  
Norma Gregory  
Nathan Hickey  
Jessi Krause Herron  
Michelle Legere  
Matt Mitchell  
Stevya Mukuzo  
Tia Stillman  
Patricia Turner

*Ask your child who their VSAC outreach counselor is—we're available to help you too!*

### VT GEAR UP Staff

Dianne Griggs  
*Director*

Adriana Eldred  
*Outreach Communications Specialist*

Dr. Anita Long  
*Academic Support*

Jessica Smith  
*GUIDE Program Coordinator*

Anna Telensky  
*Special Events*

Sara Vargo  
*Assistant Manager*

### Questions?

Cathy Printon  
*Parent & School Partnership Coordinator*

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## Welcome to GEAR UP

We have new staff members to introduce to you! While you might not know Sara Vargo from your school connections, Sara has been with GEAR UP as an outreach counselor in the Upper Valley for 4 years, serving Rivendell Academy, Blue Mountain Union School, and Oxbow High School. Sara has been promoted to GEAR UP's assistant manager and will now work closely with Outreach leadership to support and lead our grant with Director Dianne Griggs. We're thrilled with Sara's leadership and support.

Jimmy Clark joined our team last August and is serving as an outreach counselor in the Northeast Kingdom. Jimmy's background is in college admissions, coming from Sterling College in Craftsbury, Vermont. Jimmy is working with students at North Country Union High School and Coventry Village School. We're so pleased to have Jimmy's expertise, energy, and positive vibes on our team!

## GEAR UP Week & the start of school activities

National GEAR UP Week kicked off with a leap of faith in September with a trip to the Hulbert Outdoor Center in Fairlee, Vermont. Twenty-one middle schoolers took up the challenge to complete a day-long ropes course. Students were led by a team of expert counselors trained in challenge-by-choice outdoor exploration. Split into small groups, students were lead through a series of low-ropes course activities designed to inspire team building, trust, and leadership skills. The students amazed us yet again!

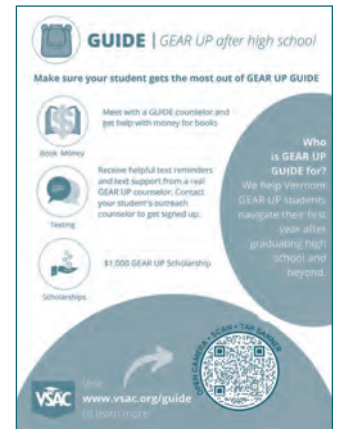
Students tested their newfound confidence by completing high-ropes course challenges, some as far up as 30 feet in the air. From balance beams to the zipline, students had the opportunity to learn in a new sensory environment and develop skills not typical of a classroom experience. GEAR UP also took the full 8th grade class from Richford Jr/Sr High School to Northwoods Stewardship Center for a fun day of team building challenges and learning about glacial erratics the following day.

Meanwhile, in Proctor, middle schoolers were surprised by a morning interruption of donuts, cider, and career games. Most popular was the spin-the-wheel career question game and the "I want to be..." photo booth. Other activities included rock painting and a trip to the State House in Montpelier for Equity Day.



On November 3rd, Danville Middle School students spent the day at Burke Mountain shooting rescue lines, making pizza with the chef, touring suites, learning about snow-making, and tuning skis with state-of-the-art equipment. The day was designed so that students could learn first-hand about the variety of skills and careers involved in running a world-class resort. Faculty and staff from Vermont State University-Lyndon joined the students for lunch, sharing the academic majors that are designed for working in a resort environment. What an amazing group of students from Danville, and the staff from Burke Mountain welcomed them right into their world.

Finally, GEAR UP's after-high school programming, GUIDE, hosted the newest installment of GUIDE LIVE! with Communications Specialist Adriana Eldred and GUIDE's career success expert and intern, Abdi Mohammed. Abdi talked about his experiences growing up in an immigrant household, transferring colleges to a new state to pursue his passion, and the reward of taking the risk.



"They don't really give you a road map to some of this stuff," says Abdi about transferring. "There's no advisor to help you from step to step until you arrive at the next school." Watch Abdi's entire 30-minute episode live on GUIDE's Instagram, [@gearupguide.vt](https://www.instagram.com/gearupguide.vt).

National GEAR UP Week is a celebration of not only GEAR UP students across the country, but the communities and experiences surrounding us locally every day. On behalf of all VSAC GEAR UP members, we thank you for the opportunity and pleasure of navigating this pathway together.

