

#### Center for Community-Based Learning and Action (CCBLA)

*A Public Service Center at The Evergreen State College connecting students, faculty, and community organizations since 2004*

### THE BASIC NEEDS CENTER - A CONVERSATION

As an Evergreen alum, Basic Needs Navigator V Guardado recognizes the power, heart, and spirit that comes with direct student engagement. *“I feel like the Basic Needs Center wouldn’t be the Basic Needs Center (BNC) if it wasn’t for the student voice.”* The collaborative nature of the center exemplifies the ethos of community-based learning. Students and staff form connections with local organizations and learning is nurtured beyond the classroom.

Maria Atristain a student worker at the BNC attests to this, *“It has helped my learning a lot. My ability to problem solve has improved as there’s always a little thing we’re thinking through whether it’s how to solve a student’s problem or how to better utilize the space. I’m constantly thinking of different strategies on how to make the center better. It has also helped my teamwork skills by working collaboratively to solve issues. I’ve learned a lot about Evergreen in general, through people who come in, and interacting with different offices around campus.”*

V notes, *“It’s a joy to see the BNC be a place where student curiosity can blossom and can evolve from the confines of the college into the greater community and then tune into the larger context of what basic needs means on a state and even national level. We’re providing and supporting students through things like housing, food access, healthcare, and transportation. We also think about the greater issues that affect student needs, like student debt, the general landscape of housing access in the greater Olympia community, how the legislature funds these kinds of programs and supports these programs. I think that the growth that has happened and the support we’ve received is really because of our students showing up and caring for each other.”*



*Pictured  
Left to Right:  
Gabriel  
Vesenka, Halle  
Robinson,  
Maria  
Atristain,  
V Guardado,  
Ellen Shortt  
Sanchez*

### AMERICORPS SPOTLIGHT

Gabriel Vesenka graduated from Evergreen in 2023 with a B.A. in Popular Education, and he feels privileged to support the CCBLA as an AmeriCorps Service Member. Since graduating, Gabriel has served as Evergreen’s Organic Farm Caretaker, as an AmeriCorps at the Thurston County Food Bank, and as the children’s musician “Farmer Gabriel” at the Evergreen Children’s Center. His first Evergreen Academic Program (titled “Cultivating Justice: Food, Feminism, and Community Psychology” taught by Prita Lal and Arita Balam) introduced him to Community-Based Learning (CBL) through volunteering at the Evergreen Organic Farm. CBL led Gabriel to a position as the Organic Farm Caretaker, driving home the lesson that community service often benefits everyone involved. Gabriel is incredibly grateful to support student learning through service on and off-campus, where students get opportunities to apply their learning, engage with real-world problems, and connect with prospective employers.

### CCBLA STAFF 2025-26

CCBLA Director.....	Ellen Shortt Sanchez
CCBLA Faculty .....	Mukti Khanna & Catalina Ocampo Londoño
Basic Needs Navigator .....	V Guardado
Community Service Work Study-Basic Needs Assistant .....	Sequoia Gallatin
Basic Needs Lead.....	Maria Atristain
CCBLA Assistant and Newsletter Editor.....	Halle Robinson
AmeriCorps Mentor/Tutor Coordinator .....	Gabriel Vesenka

## SHELTON PROMISE

*Alauna Carstens*

As a student athlete at The Evergreen State College, one of the most meaningful parts of my experience has been supporting my peers. Evergreen's commitment to community has played a significant role in shaping my values. When the college launched the Shelton Promise Program, a place-based scholarship funded by the Washington State Legislature to expand college access for 2025–2026 graduates of the Shelton School District, I knew I wanted to be involved, especially since the program serves my hometown.

I connected with the Program Manager, Monear Fatemi, and was fortunate to be offered a tutor/mentor position supporting incoming students as they navigate college. This position complements my other on-campus internship as a Peer Health Educator through the Community-based learning course with Mukti Khanna. As a first-generation college student and an older sister who has often guided my younger siblings, stepping into these roles felt natural.

Working with the Shelton Promise Program has reminded me of what it's like to be an incoming freshman. At Evergreen, students navigate a large campus, adjust to integrative, interdisciplinary academic structures, and learn to balance newfound freedom with social life and coursework. These transitions can be overwhelming, making a holistic approach to student support important for long-term success and retention.

While a financial offer alone may motivate students to pursue college, support needs to go well beyond providing occasional communication. The Shelton Promise Program embodies a holistic model, not only providing financial support but also creating interactive learning spaces that prioritize students' social and emotional well-being. This reflects what I love most about Evergreen: relationality and care that extends beyond numbers. This commitment to follow-up care has been shown through one-on-one meetings with students, pop-in study days at the Social Justice Center, and the development of an alumni network to provide additional mentorship for incoming students.

Being an upperclassman mentor has strengthened my communication skills and given me meaningful opportunities to



*Monear Fatemi, Ellen Shortt Sanchez, Alauna Carstens*  
Photo by Noble Pugh

help peers find their voices and build resilience with assignments. I have grown more observant and supportive, and so have my peers. During a small-group check-in, one student shared that their biggest concern was not about themselves but about answering questions for a new friend they had made. The Shelton Promise Program is grounded in compassion and collective responsibility. I hope others can experience a community defined by the same level of care that makes this Program so impactful.

Looking ahead, continued community support and advocacy for educational funding is critical. The Shelton Promise Program currently supports two cohorts, and additional funding would enable it to serve more students.

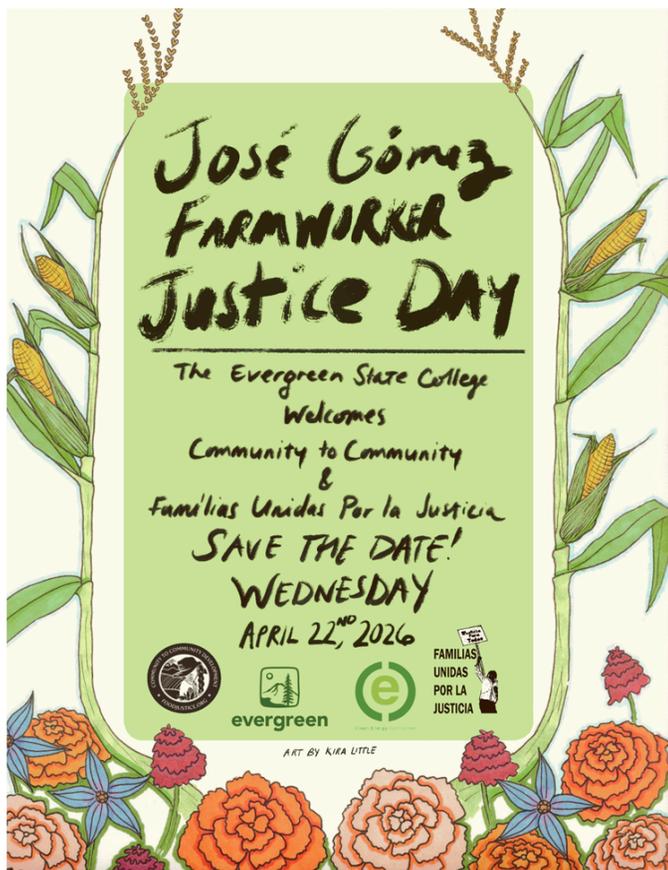
As I continue working as a tutor/mentor, I am reminded of the Seventh Generation Principle, a Haudenosaunee philosophy, that the decisions we make today should result in a sustainable world seven generations into the future. While building a legacy takes time, the Shelton Promise Programs' progress in just one year shows strong potential for long-term impact and is one way to shape sustainability for generations.



## SOUND LEARNING

CCBLA Community Partner, Sound Learning, a Community-Based Adult Education program, has served Mason and Thurston County for 35 years. They offer a High School Completion program and ESOL classes designed to help people improve their English skills at a variety of levels.

Victoria Ridgway, a Community Service Work Study student at Sound Learning shares her experience, “I’m definitely learning about teaching methods and skills especially for teaching a language and learning about how to make lesson plans. It can be helpful to communicate in Spanish, so I get to practice my Spanish which is great. It also sets a really nice tone, whether we’re in the big group or in one-on-one tutoring. I really like this feeling of mutual learning. They may call me the teacher, but I like to ask, ‘oh how would I say this in Spanish’ and I’m able to say thank you for being my teacher too. It’s a nice thing where we’re all on the same level. We’re all learning. Making connections in the community is really wonderful and beautiful.”



Maria Del Consuelo Guijosa, the Thurston County Program Manager and Instructor describes the indispensable role volunteers play in Sound Learning, “Thanks to Victoria we are able to do this program because we usually have up to 200 students in both counties, but we are just 8 people working at the office and 6 teachers, but we have a lot of volunteers like Victoria who help us provide tutoring one-on-one. We have some tutors who teach online, so we try to adapt to the different levels and schedules of the students. Victoria’s been participating in both counties. She’s been very active during the time she’s been with us. She’s doing ESL, online, one on one, literacy skills, she tackles a variety of everything, and we truly appreciate that Evergreen sends students like Victoria who can support us.”

Mason County English Learner Assistance (ELA) Program Manager and Instructor, Jenny Blumenstein emphasizes how volunteers improve the learning environment. “As a volunteer working with small groups it is a team experience. I can’t imagine working in a classroom where it’s just me working with the group of students, by having volunteers people get to practice more in a small group it makes them more comfortable, they can practice with each other but having someone there to help facilitate the practice and ensure its done well is really useful. One of the key components in other countries’ language schools is having small groups because you get to participate more and get feedback. At our best this is really what happens in our classes... over all these years it’s been really, really helpful to have volunteers in a classroom.”

Victoria also shares, “Making connections in the community is really wonderful. I’m involved in some immigration justice work as well, so having connections to the immigrant community in Shelton and Thurston County and being able to talk to people about programs that are available or if certain students want to get involved with some of the programs we have. One of my tutoring students is interested in joining our accompaniment team where we accompany immigrants to their immigration related appointments if they’re feeling nervous about going or not wanting to go because they feel unsafe.”



## HOPE PLAZA / PLAZA ESPERANZA

Hope Plaza is a community hub based in Shelton that provides multilingual services and connects community members to resources. Maria Parra Director of Hope Plaza describes “We call it a resource fair plus because we don’t only give you a flier our community partners actually provide services on the spot. Our goal was for it to be multilingual. We, along with our partners, have staff and volunteers that speak different languages. We provide services in Spanish, Mam, Q’anjob’al, and English. We provide assistance for people that don’t have papers to connect to services. They may not qualify for medical assistance from DSHS. We help them fill out the applications including to apply for housing.”

Community Service Work Study Student Elida Jeronimo Perez shares “Working at Hope Plaza has been an amazing experience. During my time there, I have been assisting at food banks, providing interpretation services, filling out paperwork, creating flyers and collaborating with Maria on advocacy and case management. I truly enjoy helping our community access food banks and resource fairs. I find this work very rewarding and have appreciated the opportunity to work alongside Maria. She is an incredibly helpful and kind person, and I admire her dedication and approach to serving our community.” Hope Plaza has received support. Maria Parra shares, “We’ve gotten more volunteers it’s grown quite a bit and I’ve got a lot of help now. Before it was very challenging I had very long days with my kids here helping me run it. Now donations of toiletries to the food bank and masa harina help since we don’t get those very often but when we get it its gold”

## COMMUNITY-BASED LEARNING: INTERNSHIPS AND COMMUNITY PROJECTS SPRING PROGRAM!

Through their internship or project work, students will develop strong links to organizations, regional social movements, and community mentors and partners who will be students’ guides and hosts in their work. Working in conjunction with schools, advocacy groups, community mentors, or non-profit organizations, students will experience and reflect on what it means to support communities in our region while gaining on-the-ground experience working with local organizations. Taught by faculty Catalina Ocampo Londoño

## BEING THE CHANGE CBL PROGRAM

Are you ready to create positive change in yourself and in your community? The program focuses on building skills in leadership, advocacy, and psychology, while participating in meaningful community-based internships and projects. During the program, we will participate in the global observances of Season for Nonviolence, and practice daily choices that foster peace and wellbeing to support social transformation. This winter program joins the Community-Based Learning: Psychology, Communication and Civic Engagement program that started Fall 2025.

### Fall and winter interns with Dr Khanna’s CBL Program

#### served at:

- Arbutus Folk School
- Artists with Ecology
- Avanti High School
- Basic Needs Center at Evergreen
- Catholic Community Services
- Crisis Clinic
- Haven House
- Hummingbird Studios (Kokua)
- Intercity Transit Village Vans
- Interfaith Works Shelter
- Native Student Mentor Olympia Schools
- New Horizons Community Quixote Village
- North Thurston High School
- Olympia School District Student Mentor Program
- Our Arc
- Shelton Promise
- South Sound Dance Access
- South Sound Salmon Enhancement Group
- Student Wellness Services
- Thurston County Food Bank

ART BY  
STUDENT MENTOR  
PROGRAM INTERN:  
EPIPHANY STALCUP

