

CS4NorCal Newsletter Spotlight Article

October 2024

Headline:

*From Africa to America, a Teacher Discovers
the Value of Computer Science -- and Making Connections Along the Way*

Article:

With a background in chemical engineering, Sonsoles Abbott has traveled the world and never thought those travels would land her in Anderson, California -- in Shasta County. A native of Spain. Sonsoles was working in Africa when she met her husband, and got married, later becoming a mother of two, and moving with her family to Washington D.C. before landing in Northern California.



For the last four years, Sonsoles has been teaching Science, Spanish and now STEAM classes at the ***Tree of Life International Charter School*** in Anderson. With absolutely no computer science experience, Sonsoles heard about the CS4NorCal Integration Workshop and was immediately intrigued to learn more.

"I am just a life-long learner... and am excited by always learning new things," Sonsoles said. "As a teacher, I like to participate in training! It's a great chance to learn new things, get out of the classroom, meet new people and it stimulates my learning."

Sonsoles Abbott participated in the Computer Science Integration trainings as part of the CS4NorCal program.

As with many of her colleagues, Sonsoles was a bit intimidated about learning computer science. But the presenters and training team at CS4NorCal made it very accessible and understandable -- providing so many resources to help participants get started. Sonsoles noted, ***"You don't need to be an expert in computer science; CS4NorCal showed me how I can integrate computer science into the things I'm already doing."***



Rural schools in Northern California are so different from those schools in the larger cities, like San Francisco. Students in Anderson do not have as much exposure to the programs that are offered in larger school districts -- like robotic programs, programming lessons and the latest technology tools. With rural schools there are social, geographic and economic barriers to accessing computer science. The need for training and resources was the reason the CS4NorCal grant was awarded to the Small School Districts' Association to begin building K-12 computer science pathways exclusively focused on six rural counties in Northern California starting in 2021 (including Shasta, Siskiyou, Glenn, Modoc, Lassen and Plumas counties).

But the CS4NorCal program not only gave Sonsoles the tools to teach computer science to her students -- but also the confidence. *"I am so grateful to CS4NorCal and their amazing team!"* said Sonsoles. *"It is such an important program and training to empower our students... but making us, as teachers, more confident in teaching computer science."*

Sonsoles is so invested in computer science, she recently purchased an entire set of books from the Girls Who Code. These books include explanations of computer science concepts using real life examples; relatable characters and profiles of real women in tech. It's one of the first times that the story of computer science has been told through so many girls' voices.

Sonsoles is a believer. She knows the computer science skills she is teaching will be critical in providing her middle school (6th, 7th and 8th grade) students with the tools they will need in the future. She is also very grateful to have an administrator like Deborah Wallace, who supports her in all these efforts.

"You never know what you're going to enjoy, until you've actually tried it," she said. *"I lead my STEAM classes with the direction of the students -- tapping into their interests, the things that they're excited about -- and that fuels their creativity."*

Sonsoles loves the life she has built in Anderson with her husband and her two children -- ages 12 and 14 -- both of whom attend the Tree of Life International Charter School, which is a TK-8th Spanish/English Dual Immersion Charter School where Love is our First Language.

CS4NorCal, a professional learning and research project serving over 100 schools (in Glenn, Lassen, Modoc, Plumas, Shasta and Siskiyou counties), promotes equitable access to computer science education for small and rural schools in Northern California.



The project, started in June 2021, brings resources and builds capacity and partnerships to create opportunities to establish CS pathways in similar districts throughout the state. It is sponsored by the Small School Districts' Association.

To make this article more robust for the ssda magazine, we would like to add:

- More photos of Sonsoles and students
- Quotes from students about CS in the classroom and their experiences
- Photo of Tree of Life school (& logo)

