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# Learner Handbook



Education that Changes Lives

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# WHAT IS VERMONT ADULT LEARNING

## **Mission Statement**

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Vermont Adult Learning's mission is to create an innovative, inclusive and equitable learning environment that provides personalized opportunities for education and career development for Vermont residents by building relationships, strengthening communities, and fostering life-long learning."

## **Vision Statement**

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Vermont Adult Learning works for the day when all Vermonters are prosperous and have the life skills and knowledge to achieve success in their careers, family and community. Further, we envision Vermont Adult Learning as a leader in education and training for those 16 years and older, and as a key resource in helping Vermonters to be successful in achieving their goals.

## **Core Values**

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### **Respect**

The inherent worth of each individual is valued. Respect for self and others is the basis for relationships among all VAL staff and learners.

### **Student Centered Learning**

VAL supports individuals in making informed choices about learning priorities and plans based on life circumstances and personal goals.

### **Lifelong Learning**

VAL provides opportunities for learners and staff to continually expand their skills and knowledge.

### **Community Responsibility**

VAL is dedicated to building a learning community that educates, advocates, and collaborates to create a better world.

### **Excellence**

VAL is committed to ongoing program improvement.

## **History**

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In 1980, the Vermont Institute for Self-Reliance (VISR) was created to help learners obtain the knowledge and skills they needed to become self-reliant. At that time, VISR provided an Adult Basic Education correspondence course to learners in Vermont. The staff consisted of two employees, one full-time and one half-time and the office was a rustic room in a 150-year-old barn on a dirt road in Calais.

In 1996, the name of the organization changed to Vermont Adult Learning (VAL). In 2002, the State Board of Education committed to building a system to provide adult education and literacy programming statewide, known as Learning Works.

Today, VAL is the largest provider of adult education and life skills programs in the state, with seven offices, numerous satellite branches, and over 100 employees.

# WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT

As a learner at Vermont Adult Learning, you have the right to expect:

- Instruction focused on helping you achieve your goals.
- An individualized learning plan created with you to identify your path to achieving your goals.
- Clear feedback on a regular basis from your teachers concerning your progress.
- To be treated with courtesy and respect.
- That VAL will not acknowledge enrollment or physical presence to anyone without your express permission. Attendance, academic progress, and other records will not be released to a third party without your written permission, or in accordance with a court order.
- Access to your own files through a request to a staff member.
- That photographs or video footage of you will not be released without your written permission for each use.

# SERVICES WE PROVIDE

## Getting Started

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The first step for new learners is to schedule an appointment for orientation and an initial assessment using the Test of Adult Basic Education in Math, Reading, and Writing (TABE). TABE results assist us in matching our services to your needs. After Orientation and Assessment, you will meet with a High School Completion Plan Manager (see below) who will talk with you about your goals, help you prepare an education plan, and refer you to teachers who will work with you to achieve those goals.

## High School Completion Plan Manager

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The role of the High School Completion Plan (HSCP) Manager is to assist and guide the student through the process of creating the Student Education Plan, goal setting, translating student goals into a general road map for achievement, referring students to other agencies/organizations as necessary and monitoring progress. HSCP Managers are responsible for keeping in regular contact with students.

## General Educational Development (GED)

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You must come to an authorized center to take the exams. There are four exams, Language Arts, Math, Science and Social Studies. Each test is \$30 each. Please visit the GED website for more information and for registration. A valid ID is needed on exam day.

## **High School Completion Program (HSCP)**

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This program, unique to Vermont, allows individuals ages 16 and over to design an individualized Graduation Plan, approved by the high school of residence. Competency can be demonstrated through a wide variety of experiences, including paid employment, life skills, prior learning, internships, mentorships, on-line courses, traditional classes at high schools, technical centers or colleges, and more. Successful completion earns a diploma from the student's high school of residence (or other, with a waiver). Graduation requirements vary by high school.

## **College Preparation**

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Learners may engage in courses, including study skills, reading and writing strategies, and research skills. Learners can also develop a range of "college-readiness" skills and prepare to pass the Accuplacer, SAT or ACT tests.

## **Computer Instruction**

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Every VAL center is equipped with computer and internet access. Students may bring in personal laptops or technology to use for academic purposes. Students must sign a computer use agreement provided during orientation.

## **Career Support**

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If you are currently receiving Reach Up benefits, ask your case manager how you may qualify to take part in these career support programs at VAL: job readiness assistance; skill development; employability assessments.

## **English Language Learner Program (ELL)**

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The ELL program offers classes for non-English-speaking individuals interested in learning English or enhancing their current skills. Learners may also study citizenship skills for full participation in community life in the United States.

## **Essential Skills Building**

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We offer classes and self-paced learning programs in reading, writing, basic math, and math problem solving for learners at levels from beginner to high school completion/college preparation. An initial confidential assessment tells us where to begin so that you can make the most of your time with us. Whether you have a need for improved skills at your place of work, or just want to be able to communicate and advocate for yourself more effectively in your personal life, we can provide a course of study to meet your needs.

# OUR EXPECTATIONS OF YOU

VAL has specific expectations of you as a learner. These expectations have been established to improve your opportunities for success, to provide a safe, respectful learning environment that supports learning for all students. Please take the time to become familiar with these expectations and ask questions if you need clarification or further information.

## **Academic Honesty**

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You must uphold principles of academic honest in every assignment. This includes the principle of never submitting or taking credit for anyone’s work but yours. To that end, please remember to express your own thoughts in your own words and to quote and cite the work of others as necessary. When you cite other sources, please use a standard format. If you have questions about when or how to cite sources, please ask before submitting your work. No work that contains plagiarism or any other violation of academic honesty may count as passing.

## **Attendance**

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In order to reach your education goals, you need to attend weekly or twice-weekly instructional sessions. You are expected to attend all scheduled classes and appointments. However, we realize that there will be times when you will not be able to come to class. If you cannot make a class or a scheduled appointment, you must call the center or your teacher to let us know as soon as possible.

Please be aware that all programs have specific attendance requirements. If you have any questions about these, please talk with your teacher or HSCP plan manager.

## **Cell Phones and Social Media**

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Cell phone use and use of social media are not allowed during school hours without permission. They can be distracting for other students, so we ask that they not be used in or near classrooms and that; they are turned off during class sessions.

## **Conduct**

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Learners are expected to behave with courtesy and respect at all times. This includes refraining from behavior that interferes with learning at our centers or threatens the safety or well-being of students and staff.

## **Dress Code**

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In keeping with the educational purpose of our learning centers, students are expected to dress and groom themselves appropriately. Each student is expected to keep his or her person and clothing clean and neat. Sleep and loungewear are not allowed. Appropriate footwear and shirts must be worn. Clothing, accessories with slogans, symbols, or displays regarding drugs, alcohol, sex, obscenities, or gangs are prohibited. Sunglasses may not be worn inside the building.

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## **Drug-Free Environment**

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VAL centers are drug-free environments. All learners are expected to come to the centers or any affiliated location drug-free and not in possession of drugs or alcohol. A learner suspected to be under the influence will be asked to leave the center immediately.

## **Harassment**

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Harassment is an illegal form of discrimination based on a person's sex, race, ethnicity, age, religion, disability, or sexual orientation. Actions, words, jokes, or comments based on these characteristics will not be tolerated. If you believe you are the target of harassment, please contact a staff member immediately (either in person or by phone, e-mail, or mail).

## **Privacy**

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FERPA (Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act) is a Federal law that is administered by the Family Policy compliance Office in the U.S. Department of Education. 20 U.S.C. \*1232g;34 CFR Part 99. FERPA guidelines are provided to students upon registration and enrollment. There may be times when teachers must contact learners at home by phone or mail. Please let your teacher know if you do not want to be contacted at home.

## **Reporting Abuse**

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Please be aware that VAL takes the position that the staff at the centers are mandated reporters of abuse and neglect for protected classes of people (children, the elderly, and people with certain disabilities). If information of this type is disclosed, staff members do not have a choice about reporting, regardless of a learner's desire or request.

## **Smoking**

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All VAL Centers are smoke-free campuses. Smoking or use of tobacco products is not permitted in our centers. Designated Outdoor smoking areas are identified during orientation. Learners are expected to help keep the area clean by using receptacles provided.

## **Visitors**

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Visitors to the VAL centers are welcome to wait for students in the reception area.

## **Weapons**

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No weapons are allowed on center property. This includes all guns, knives, mace, and hazardous materials. Any learner bringing weapons onto VAL property or other sites of services provided by Vermont Adult Learning will be asked to remove the weapon from the premises immediately and will be reported to the police.

# SERVICES TO SUPPORT YOU

## Community Resources

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We work closely with a variety of local community resources that may be useful in helping you address obstacles to your education, such as lack of transportation or childcare. Please talk with your teacher or educational advisor about these.

## Complaint and Appeal Procedure

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We strive to make your experience with us as positive and productive as possible, but there may be times when you feel you are not being treated fairly or appropriately. In these circumstances, we encourage you to take advantage of the following methods to register a complaint or appeal a decision:

1. Speak directly with staff to attempt to resolve issues informally.
2. If that does not resolve this issue, please contact the Regional Director at your Learning Center.
3. If the issue is still not resolved, please contact Hal Cohen, Executive Director, at (802) 244-0634; or email [hcohen@vtadultlearning.org](mailto:hcohen@vtadultlearning.org); or write to Vermont Adult Learning, 46 South Main Street, Waterbury, VT 05676.

## Disability Services

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VAL centers are handicapped accessible. Our teachers are trained educators who can accommodate a variety of learning styles in classroom and other instructional settings. However, learners may request reasonable accommodations for specific disabilities. Please talk with your teacher if you think you qualify for an accommodation or modification in instruction or testing.

## Internet & Computer Use

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Computer access is an important tool in today's learning environment. We strive to make this technology available to students. Free Wi-Fi is available to enrolled students. VAL schoolwork may be printed free of charge.

We require appropriate use of computers as part of a respectful environment. Computers are to be used for students' academic work only. Social media sites, sites with pornography, and downloads are prohibited. If you need any assistance or have specific questions, please ask your teacher.

## Transportation

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VAL policy prohibits staff from providing transportation to students in personal vehicles. It is the learner's responsibility to make his or her own transportation plans. Student carpooling is encouraged. If you have difficulty securing transportation, please speak with your advisor.