



2024 Spring Newsletter

English Language Learners Enjoy Immersive Opportunities Across Regions



VAL currently serves 515 ELL students from over 65 countries who speak more than 45 languages!

Learning a new language can be a challenge, but with the support of VAL's compassionate English Language Learning (ELL) instructors, it becomes a journey filled with exciting discoveries! Students in our ELL programs have enjoyed several opportunities over the past year to dive into immersive experiences that bring the English language to life.

Last summer, Maureen Cavanagh and Julia DiPietro from our Chittenden County Learning Center teamed up to teach a special English class focused on exploring Burlington's vibrant community. Visiting landmarks including the Fletcher Free Library, Church Street, ECHO Science Center, Flynn Theater, and City Hall, students had the chance to practice English in real-life situations while soaking in the local culture. Students practiced ordering from a cafe, learned how to get a library card, and took pictures in City Hall Park.

Reflecting on their adventures, the

class shared their thoughts in a collaborative piece for VAL's Learning Matters Blog. "It was a good experience to visit these places this summer. We were able to talk more with other students," they wrote. "We are not from the same countries, but we were able to make new friends."

*"It's so rewarding to see them **achieve** these milestones in their **new culture**."*

-Robin Bitters
VAL Educational Advisor
and Instructor

In December, Joy Gaine from our Windsor County Learning Centers led students on an enriching trip to the AVA Gallery in Lebanon, NH. Mahin, an Iranian student living in Windsor County, was particularly impressed by the beautiful paintings and handicrafts

on display. "It was very interesting," she said. "Very beautiful and the art exhibition was wonderful and worth seeing."

Meanwhile, in Windham County, Jeryl Julian Cissé and Robin Bitters helped coordinate a visit to Brattleboro Memorial Hospital. Their students explored different departments, listened to inspiring words from the CEO about community partnerships for better health, and even received assistance from the HR department in applying for job opportunities. Shortly after, two students made their way through the hiring process and are now employed!

"It's so rewarding to see them achieve these milestones in their new culture," said Robin.

From cultural excursions to professional networking, our ELL programs are not just about language learning but also about embracing new experiences and forging connections within the community. ■



Amanda: “The best thing about all of this is wanting to do it.”

When Amanda found Vermont Adult Learning, she had been seeking consistent tutoring for some time. Since coming to VAL’s Addison County Learning Center in Middlebury, Amanda has worked closely with adjunct instructor Becky Trombley to strengthen her literacy skills by using the Orton Gillingham Approach which has helped her read paragraphs and understand the content.

“I wish this program was invented when I was in high school!” Amanda exclaimed. “Every lesson I have to write my alphabet down in cursive. Becky says words, I say them back, we separate them, learn how to spell them, work on vowel sounds and consonants,” she explained. As her skills grow, Amanda looks forward to reading her woodworking magazines, true stories, and animal stories.

“Working with Amanda is such a delight,” Becky shared. “We have had so many great conversations. Also, she has never missed a class!”

This past February, Amanda joined a handful of other students in testifying to members of the House Education Committee at the Vermont State House as part of an Adult Education and Literacy (AEL) advocacy day. She wanted to

share her story to help legislators gain a better understanding of adult students and the importance of funding AEL programs. She also wanted to overcome anxiety related to public speaking.

“I wanted to do it to prove to myself that I can still stand up in front of people and not be nervous.”

Amanda faced her fears and gave a compelling testimony. Afterward, she joined a large group of adult learners from around the state to observe the legislature from the balcony. The group stood in unison to be recognized by the House when introduced by Rep. Emilie Krasnow, herself a former VAL student.

“The best thing about all of this is wanting to do it,” Amanda said. “I’m not made to do it and that means the world to me.” ■

Chris: “Learning is a Win-Win Situation.”



Chris came to VAL as a determined individual ready to embark on the journey to a new career through our Energy Works training program.

Coming from a background in grounds maintenance and lawn care, Chris found himself at a crossroads in his career. Seeking stability and growth, he turned to HireAbility for guidance, where he was referred to Energy Works for the opportunity to engage in heat

pump and weatherization training. Chris started with weatherization and enjoyed the course so much he continued to pursue Heat Pump training, honing his skills to gain a deeper understanding of energy efficiency techniques. Through a blend of classroom instruction and hands-on practice, Energy Works trainers helped participants navigate the complexities of weatherization and heat pump systems.

“The instructors were excited about their professions, which helped get participants engaged,” Chris shared. “In Heat Pump training, we learned extensively through repetition the ins and outs of how refrigeration works. So you’re getting a really useful, actionable education on that EPA certification path. The instructors give you a really good run-through of what you’re going to be working with.”

Now equipped with OSHA 10, CPR/First Aid/AED, and EPA 608 Universal Certifications, Chris is employed by Hildebrand Homes where he conducts weatherization audits and contributes to home renovation projects. For Chris, the opportunity to apply his training in a real-world setting has been immensely rewarding.

When asked what he would tell someone if they were considering pursuing Energy Works just one thing, Chris had this to say: “Learning is a win-win situation. Whether you decide to embark on either of these professions, you’re going to learn something and they’re good skills to have, generally. Complying with residential energy standards will be the norm so learning this early on if you’re working with your hands in construction, you now have a transferable skill.” ■



Unrestricted donations play an important role in our greater operating budget, filling gaps not covered by our state and federal funding.

Here are a few ways your donation helps contribute to the success and well-being of our students!



Learning Center Nutrition

Each of our learning centers provides students with access to free, healthy snacks. A gift of **\$35** could help cover one learning center with a one-week supply of nutritious snacks and drinks.



Student Transportation Support

Many of our students face barriers related to finances, scheduling, and transportation. A gift of **\$50** could provide over 30 hours of metered parking or 25 bus trips for students in need of transportation support.



GED Testing Fees

Our services are free and we are committed to reducing financial barriers for our students. A gift of **\$150** could help cover the full battery of GED exam subjects for one learner.



Student Use Chromebooks

Students who lack access to technology at home are at a disadvantage compared to their peers. A gift of **\$275** could purchase one Chromebook for our student laptop loaner program.



Acute Needs Instruction

Our competent, compassionate instructors understand that no two students are the same. A gift of **\$1,000** would equate to 20 hours of intensive individualized instruction for learners with acute needs.

HELP US REACH OUR ANNUAL FUNDRAISING GOAL!

As a 501(c)3 nonprofit, Vermont Adult Learning depends on state and federal grants, regional United Way funding, town funds, foundation grants, business sponsorships, and individual donations like yours.

Gifts made before July 1, 2024 will help us reach our annual fundraising goal of \$150,000.

We're over halfway there already! You can use the enclosed envelope, visit us online at www.vtadultlearning.org/giving or scan the QR Code to support our mission of equitable education today!





From Our Board Chair

Dear Friends,

As you likely know by now, 2024 kicked off with a big change for Vermont Adult Learning with the retirement of Hal Cohen, our Executive Director since 2018. Hal was an excellent leader, and his influence on VAL's growth will surely be felt well into the future.

In the time since Hal's retirement, our day-to-day operations have been in the capable hands of Joe Przyperhart and David Justice, our Interim Co-Executive Directors. Members of the Board, including myself, have formed a hiring committee in collaboration with members of our Leadership Team and have been diligently screening and interviewing Executive Director candidates over these last few months. The search is still underway and I look forward to sharing an announcement on that front soon!

Our staff are the heart of our mission, ensuring those who come to us for services are treated with dignity, respect, and compassion. I hope you enjoy reading about the exciting work we've been doing and will continue to do with the winds of change in our sails!

Be well,

Jim Coutts, Board Chair

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

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Vermont Adult Learning (VAL) helps students 16 years and older build assets for success. We provide reading, writing, math, financial literacy, English Language Learning, academic & career advising, career and job development, and high school completion services... all FREE!

Learn more at www.vtadultlearning.org

VALedictorian Sponsor Spotlight

Mascoma Bank is more than just a financial institution - it's also a certified Benefit Corporation committed to using "business as a force for good." Mascoma has been community-focused for 125 years, donating \$11.4 million through the Mascoma Bank Foundation in the past 5 years alone. As a certified B Corp, Mascoma is able to be a force for positive change, creating benefit for all Mascoma stakeholders—not just shareholders. Mascoma conducts business knowing that people and place matter, aspiring both to do no harm and to benefit all; Recognizes INTERdependence, because we are dependent on and responsible for each other as well as future generations; and strives to be different from other banks, and will continue to change and grow to better serve the world around us. Mascoma constantly strives to do things better and to make the change we all seek happen.

Thank you to our friends at Mascoma Bank for their continued support and for being our first VALedictorian Level Business Sponsor!



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Thank You to Our Recent Supporters!

We're so grateful to the individuals and organizations that support our mission of lifelong learning! Our donor roll has gotten so long we have moved it to the Giving page on our website. It's a good problem to have! View our recent supporters online at:

www.vtadultlearning.org/giving/#donor-roll

Contact Janine Fleri, Development Director, to learn more about business sponsorship opportunities: jfleri@vtadultlearning.org
Secure online donations accepted at vtadultlearning.org/giving



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Vermont Adult Learning
Learning Lasts a Lifetime!

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