

Chris: From Blue Collar to Botany

Chris is an aspiring entrepreneur who wants to bring a quality product to the Vermont community: Cannabis! His encyclopedic knowledge of seed germination, growing, and harvesting best practices are complemented by a connoisseur's sense of the leafy green plant. Chris also earned his high school diploma at VAL at age thirty-two. Chris describes himself as a "run of the mill guy" raised Blue Collar, between Massachusetts and Vermont. Chris grew up largely on his own with very little adult guidance and left high school early, just a few credits shy of his diploma. He'd been to VAL before and returned in early 2021 with renewed earnestness.



"I needed to buckle down and get my education," Chris said. "I wanted to develop skills to do other work and growing cannabis (legally) is something I'm passionate about. I thought I would just finish my high school diploma and then, Joy (VAL Teacher) suggested I consider college. My new goal is to earn my degree in botany and become a certified cannabis grower. For folks considering VAL, I want them to know that the teachers will actually make learning fun," he adds. "Joy and Gretchen (VAL Teachers) are two of the best teachers I've ever had. For anyone reading this: If you haven't completed your diploma, just do it. You'll never regret it."

OUR WORK

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

Visit us online at www.vtadulthoodlearning.org



From our Executive Director

Dear Friends,

VAL is proud to offer our students flexible opportunities to grow. Whether individually or in a group setting, in person or remotely through our Online Learning Center, we ensure

that our students get the skills they need to move on to college or high-demand skills training.

We strive to provide opportunities to hard-working Vermonters who lack a high school diploma, job skills, or have language barriers. We know an investment in our students is an investment in Vermont.

Be safe and be well,



Hal Cohen, Executive Director
hcohen@vtadulthoodlearning.org

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Windham County

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Brattleboro, VT 05301
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Springfield Location
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Billing/Correspondence

P.O. Box 539
Waitsfield, VT 05673
802-560-4057



"Julia (VAL ELL Teacher) helps me so much with my English. I am so grateful and appreciate VAL's programs."

~Adjii, ELL Student from Senegal

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"VAL gave me opportunity; they helped me get my diploma. They were always there to help me. I don't know how to thank them. They believed in me and that really helped."

~James, High School Completion Student

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Janine Fleri

Development Director

jfleri@vtadultlearning.org
 Let us know if your name was inadvertently left off of the donor list.

Thank you!

Meet VAL's New Development Director, Janine Fleri

Please join us in welcoming VAL's new Development and Communications Director, Janine Fleri! Janine comes to us after six years with the Community Relations and Development office of the Community Health Centers.

Janine was born in Burlington and grew up in Jericho before moving to New York to pursue her BA from Sarah Lawrence College. She worked in film and television before transitioning to the nonprofit sector and pursuing her MA in Media Studies from the New School. She returned to Vermont in 2012 and entered the Vermont nonprofit world as a volunteer for the Humane Society of Chittenden County, where she helped support their fundraising and outreach initiatives in addition to shelter and animal care.

As the daughter of a Special Educator, Janine is no stranger to the importance of basic education and literacy for people of all ages and backgrounds. She is excited to be a part of VAL's mission and is looking forward to getting to know her co-workers as well as VAL's students and supporters like you!



Are you interested in supporting VAL?

Contact Janine at jfleri@vtadultlearning.org



Meerim: An Unquenchable Thirst for Learning

"I appreciate that here in the U.S. I am free."

~ Meerim

Meerim, 30, is an English Language Learning (ELL) student at VAL from Kyrgyzstan. She speaks three languages: Kyrgyz, Russian (Kyrgyzstan was a former Soviet Republic) and is learning English.

"I came to the United States because I wanted a better life," Meerim said. "I am a Muslim and I like to be independent and I can earn more money here," Meerim said. "Muslim women in my country have fewer rights. I was told I'd have to marry, stay home, cook, and take care of children. I arrived in Vermont on March 7, 2020, just before the (COVID-19) lockdown."



Meerim worked in Kyrgyzstan's capital, Bishkek, as a manager at Neman Pharmaceuticals. She holds dual Master's Degrees from her home country in Pharmacy from Bishkek Medical College and Business Management from Bishkek Humanities University.

Meerim currently cleans houses in Vermont. She is a dedicated ELL student, preparing to begin studies in fall 2022 for a new career in Information Technology.

"I appreciate that here in the U.S. I am free—I can do what I want, go where I want," Meerim said. "I like to travel; I visited Chicago, New York City, Utah, and Arizona with my sister who also lives in Vermont."

"Leigh (VAL ELL Teacher) is so nice," Meerim said. "I take online classes with her. She always checks our homework. She is so helpful. She tells us we can call her anytime or text her. She helped me a lot with my English. She also taught me about the history of the U.S. It's interesting for me, I didn't know before about the Civil War and about race relations."

New Americans like Meerim bring their stories, their culture and their ambitions, strengthening the fabric of our Vermont communities. "Vermont people are so polite," Meerim said. "People help me in the store, at work."

"I've never had an English student quite like Meerim," her English teacher Leigh said. "She has signed up for every possible course I offer within her time schedule, and pursues each one vigorously. She is often the first to show up in class, has mastered online resource challenges, and is always cheerful and helpful with other students. I can predict Meerim will go far because her thirst to learn is unquenchable. I am so glad Vermont Adult Learning could be here for her."

Vermont Adult Learning

P.O. Box 539

Waitsfield, VT 05673



Energy Works Trainee: Meet Ryley



Ryley, age 28, is a recent graduate of VAL's Energy Works Weatherization Training. She and her partner live with their children near Rutland, Vermont. She graduated high school early and enrolled in the automotive program at Vermont Technical College (VTC) but left after her first semester. Commuting to Randolph while juggling schoolwork and parenting became untenable. She's at a point where she's making deliberate, positive choices for herself and her family as they seek to establish firm economic footing.

"It's easy to get by," Ryley said. "Anybody can get by, but it's hard to get ahead. I'm determined to get ahead."



Ryley really enjoyed the three-week Energy Works Weatherization Training. She found staff to be positive and enthusiastic, keeping the content interesting. Hands-on learning and free lunch were added perks. Ryley plans to use her new construction skills to launch her own property management company.

Learn more about Ryley's business, N.E.W.S. Property Services, at News.propertyservices@gmail.com or by calling (802) 779-5443.

VAL is grateful to Bowes Health Trust, The Vermont Low Income Trust for Electricity, HireAbility, and other partners for supporting Energy Works. To learn more about our upcoming Energy Works trainings contact Jeff Nerney at jnerney@vtadulthoodlearning.org or (802) 779-0057.

Email jfleri@vtadulthoodlearning.org to receive this newsletter via email with GO GREEN as Subject Line.