

Hi

My name is Misha Iver. Today I am an author and illustrator of children's books, a parent, an advocate for victims of Domestic Violence, and an active member of my local community here in Vermont.

About seven years ago, I came to Vermont during a transitional time in my life. I was exhausted after living for 5 years in NYC and was looking for changes, exploring where I wanted to live next, and trying to understand whether Vermont could become home. I did not have a very specific plan. I was simply curious. I wanted to learn more about the place, about the people, and about what opportunities might exist for me here.

English is not my first language. I learned it on my own over years by traveling, and working in creative industries including multiple graphic design agencies in New York City. But I had never formally studied English in an academic setting. When I arrived in Vermont, I did what I often do when I am curious.

I googled it.

“English classes. Burlington, Vermont”

That is how I discovered Vermont Adult Learning.

I simply showed up. I did not know exactly what I needed. I only knew that I wanted to learn.

I remember being amazed that these classes existed and that as long as I was curious, there were so many opportunities available.

I took art history classes, which felt familiar and unfamiliar at the same time, because I have a master degree in a creative field, but learning about art and culture through the English

language gave me a completely new perspective. My teacher Megan made me see things that I already new from a completely different perspective.

I took persuasive writing, even though at that time I had no idea what “persuasive” meant, but Megan was an amazing teacher so I was happy to learn more whatever this “persuasive” means.

That class was where I learned how to build an argument, how to select the strongest points, how to understand who my audience is, and how to communicate ideas clearly and effectively. Those skills shaped how I express myself today, how I advocate for myself, and how I advocate for others.

I signed up English classes with Beverly, because I was told she is simply the best, and I can confirm that she is.

One of the most meaningful classes for me was civics, also with Beverly. I grew up in Belarus, which is an authoritarian country where understanding how government works does not necessarily change your daily life. In fact, it is always safer not to be visible at all.

In civics class, I learned about the structure of government, the roles of different branches, and the idea that ordinary people can communicate with their representatives. I remember meeting public officials and being surprised by how accessible they were. Where I come from, meeting government officials is something people try to avoid. Here, I was encouraged to ask questions, to learn, and to participate.

We visited community organizations, local institutions, and nonprofits. We spoke with people who were actively shaping the communities around them. Our final assignment was to choose an organization, interview them, and present what we learned. I chose SEABA, because

as an artist I wanted to understand the creative community. That experience later helped me participate in exhibitions and local markets and connect with other artists locally.

I loved that class so much that I took it twice.

Looking back now, I realize that those classes shaped the way I live my life every day.

Today, I am deeply involved in my community. As an artist, I collaborate with local organizations and participate in exhibitions. I volunteer with community organizations that support creativity and connection.

I am also actively involved in my child's school community. I participate in the PTO and school committees, because I believe that being present and engaged helps create a stronger environment for all children, not only my own.

Perhaps most importantly, I learned that knowledge is not only something we keep for ourselves. Knowledge allows us to contribute. It allows us to advocate. It allows us to participate in shaping the communities we live in.

Because of what I learned through Vermont Adult Learning, I have the confidence to speak up when something is not right. I have the skills to communicate clearly. I have the understanding that systems can be improved and that individuals can have an impact.

Today, I am involved in advocacy work supporting survivors of domestic violence. I work with organizations and community members to help connect people with the resources they need. I am one of cofounders of the UpLift Vermont, under Vermont Network, and I support others in navigating difficult systems so they can find safety and stability.

The belief that one person can make a difference did not appear in my life by accident. It was strengthened through education that showed me how communities function and how individuals can participate meaningfully within them.

If art history helped me understand the past, civics helped me understand the present, and persuasive writing helped me learn how to communicate ideas that may help shape the future.

Standing here today, speaking to you, feels like a natural continuation of the work I began as a student.

Seven years ago, I was learning how to identify my audience and communicate my ideas clearly. Today, I am doing exactly that.

Vermont Adult Learning helped transform Vermont from a place I was simply visiting into a place that is my home.

Thank you for your time and for your work on behalf of our communities.

Misha