



# Respect Works Here

## Community Champion

**Abdil Jalil Chtaibi** was studying to be a Heating & Cooling engineer in Morocco when his friend invited him to come back to Canada to live and to go to school.

Although it would have been easier to go to Europe or to the US with his connections, he chose Canada almost without thinking but he now knows it was the correct decision.

“Canada is the best country anywhere, it just basically spoke to me,” he smiles.

“You can come to Canada and any dream can come true. It is unlimited. You just work hard and it will come true.”

“I was very lucky to move to a small city like Vernon. You can get lost in the big city,” Jalil laughs. “I was very lucky and had a lot of help from so many people.”

The move wasn't without hardship however and especially the language was a hurdle that he needed to overcome.

It was too hard to study with his level of English at the time so Jalil chose to immerse himself in the community and to work and connect with people to improve his language skills.

Jalil acknowledges especially that the support he got from his first employer, Swan Lake Nurseryland, made a big impact.

“It was a really great start for me,” he says. “The boss understood that I didn't speak the language but still they gave me work.”

“They opened the door for me,” continues Jalil, and his genuine gratitude is apparent. “Even after I got other jobs, I still worked there on the weekends. I am still working there now. It is my house, my family.”

He acknowledges, that this connection has given him an anchor in Vernon.

“When you feel anchored you can go far because you know you have the support. And that's what happened to me.”

Currently Jalil is going back to school to improve his English and to take online courses before he plans to go back to finish his engineering degree. He has two sons, Salah and Mohammed, and his wife Laila, that his family introduced him to in Morocco. She is adjusting to life in Canada also but the family feels very accepted and welcomed.

To give back, Jalil has been very active with churches, the Vernon Muslim Association, and with Vernon and District Immigrant and Community Services (VDICSS) to help Syrian, Iraqi and other refugees who have arrived in the North Okanagan to get settled and find employment.

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~ Abdil Jalil Chtaibi

“I was an interpreter to help the families settle. To help with paperwork, show them places,” he explains. “I try as much as I can to help them to see that Canada is their home now too. They are not refugees anymore, they are residents, and they can become citizens one day.

“I know it is hard,” he continues. “I tell them, don't tell yourself that you are not part of this community. But you have to get involved and be a part of it. It took me about five years to adjust to the culture, the climate, to everything.”

“This is why Canada is the best. You can be whatever you want, you can believe whatever you want, as long as you don't try to push it on other people.”

