

# Riley Knowles: Automotive Repair Preparation Technician

by Stu Rhodes

**There's** no such thing as wrong training when it comes to the trades.

Riley Knowles is living proof of this. From a young age he's had a fascination with automobiles, especially his beloved Volkswagens. So, it didn't take much encouragement from his Career Counsellor, Wendy Walker, at Saanich Individual Learning Centre (ILC) for him to consider the Auto Service Technician (AST) trade program. After completing the AST program in partnership with Camosun College, Riley successfully transitioned to an apprenticeship in an auto body repair shop.

For Riley, this was the first time in many years he'd shown interest in school. "At last, I was finally able to learn about something that was important and interesting to me!"

Like many other students who've discovered newfound success in trade training, the AST program arrested Riley's negative, spiralling downturn. Learning in a contextual setting with role modeling and mentorship from his AST teacher, Mark van Akker, was a total game changer for Riley. His mom, Samantha Meade, credits the program with saving her son from despair. "We're talking about a kid who I could barely get out of bed in the morning, who changed everything. Once he started the program he couldn't wait to get to school and now he can hardly wait to get to work each day," said Meade.

Indeed, Riley himself said: "There's no way I would have graduated without the help from the ILC teachers and the chance to take a trade program. I look forward to work each day with great anticipation because I never know what I'm going to get to learn today." This from a kid who used to hate school! Riley's employer, Chris Bennett, of Auto-Com Refinishing, concurs: "Riley has an artistic gift for working with and manipulating materials. He is an enthusiastic worker and learner." Bennett went on to say that the AST training Riley received positioned him perfectly to cross over into auto body repair. "All the 'wrenching' he learned in AST really helps him in our industry." SD63 is incredibly grateful for community employers like Auto-Com.

Riley's English teacher, Will Moore, describes Riley as a bit of a diamond in the rough who had all the right stuff to be a star, except



for direction. "Once Riley finished the AST program and became an apprentice with Auto-Com he showed amazing determination to graduate by working several days per week, then coming to ILC one day per week to finish his remaining graduation requirements."

When asked what he'll be doing in five years, Riley blurted out: "Well, for starters, I'll be a journeyman by then!" That's the cool thing about trades: apprenticeship training embeds the notion of continuous, and lifelong learning into the craft of working. To get his Red Seal, Riley has to keep on learning, and that's what gets him excited about going to work each day!

Though Riley and his mom may not have always agreed on things before, today they both encourage students and their families to explore the possibility of a career pathway that includes training and certification in one of over 100 credentialed B.C. trades.

Contact Stu Rhodes for more information on how to get involved as a student apprentice, or as an employer sponsor in this, or any other career program in Saanich School District, at 250-415-9211. View the promotional YouTube video, "Jump Start Your Career" at <http://www.youtube.com/user/saanichcareers>. ✨