

Telamon—Virginia

November 2015

Empowering Individuals, Improving Communities

Message from the State Director Sharon Saldarriaga

Now that fall has arrived, I'm pleased to report that our National Farmworker Jobs Program is doing very well. We have a significant number of farmworkers pursuing academic and occupational skills training that will enable them to move into jobs with good wages and benefits. Staff is focused on assisting these customers with developing career pathways, setting them on a path that goes beyond self-sufficiency and fosters continual advancement beyond their initial placement.

In housing, with funding from HUD, VHDA, and the City of Danville, clients are receiving counseling to assist them with buying their first home, providing foreclosure prevention counseling, financial literacy, and other activities to help current and potential homeowners. Through funding provided by DHCD and

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Gisela Romero

By Lorena McQueen
Workforce Development
Specialist, Harrisonburg

On a beautiful day in September last year, Gisela Romero came to our office in Harrisonburg. Although not exactly sure what she wanted to do with her life, she knew it was time to change things for the better. Life was difficult working at the hatchery collecting eggs.

Through an interview and assessment process, we began to learn Gisela's skills and interests. We talked to her about her options and showed her the job market statistics so she could make the best choice. At last, Gisela decided to pursue a short-term training program leading to a certificate so she could be job-ready in the quickest possible time.

Through the National Farmworker Jobs Program, Telamon assisted Gisela by purchasing school supplies, providing support payments, paying for training, and helping her with her rent. After nine months, Gisela passed the certification exam and we helped

her prepare for employment with mock interviews and further coaching.

Gisela made the decision and we supported her with guidance and motivation. She was very excited when she was hired by Shenandoah Women's Health Care earning \$13/ hour and working full time. Gisela was so happy, she laughed and said, "I did it!"

Her new supervisor said, "We are very grateful to have Gisela as an employee." Because Gisela is bilingual and has the Clinical Medical Assistant certificate, she is a valuable asset to the health care center.



Eva Garcia

By Lorena McQueen
Workforce Development
Specialist, Harrisonburg



When Eva Garcia first came to our office a year ago, she wanted to find out how she could build a better future for herself. She had been working at several different jobs primarily doing farm work, but was struggling to earn enough income to make a stable living. We guided Eva through the application process and explained our National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) to her.

After the initial interview we found that Eva was eligible for NFJP and began the process of comprehensive assessment which is designed to identify abilities, skills, education status, interests, and aptitudes. Part of the assessment process includes a career evaluation. We learned that Eva was interested and capable of pursuing a career as a Clinical Medical

Assistant (CMA). We worked with Eva step by step to establish a pathway to success and a realistic plan to meet her goals.

At first, Eva was unsure about the outcome, but she kept a positive attitude no matter what. We offered emotional support to help her build confidence and remain motivated. Soon we were able to enroll her for classes at Blue Ridge Community College. We provided financial aid assistance and needs related payments to help her support herself while attending school.

As part of the career program, Eva entered a clinical externship at Rockingham Free Clinic. Once she finished all the requirements for the CMA, Eva

applied and was hired for full-time employment at the Harrisonburg Community Health Center (HCHC). She was very excited. After so many difficulties, she was now employed as a professional! At HCHC, Eva is working more than 40 hours a week, earning \$14 per hour plus full health benefits.

We recently conducted a follow up interview with Human Resources at HCHC. They said that Eva is tremendous. She is attending more than 45 patients at the health center each day. She was rated as Outstanding on her first evaluation. We knew Eva could succeed in this career because she has wonderful people skills and really cares about others.

We congratulated Eva on her accomplishments, and she was very grateful to Telamon and NFJP for all the support and assistance. Now, she has a stable career and is to help herself. Plus, through her work, she contributes to the health of the Harrisonburg community.

John Quinn

By Douglas Adams
Workforce Development
Specialist, Danville

John Quinn was determined to put the pieces of his life back together and the only thing that was stopping him was his past haunting his future.

John spent a great deal of his life working on a tobacco farm where he planted, topped, and picked tobacco, but he knew that he could be doing a lot more with his life and that is what he strived to achieve. He decided that he wanted to give up farmwork and he began down the long road of looking for full-time work, but he didn't get very far. John has a criminal background and because of this, employers were not giving him a chance. What Mr. Quinn needed was an advocate, someone to help him pick up the pieces of his life, empower him, support him, and guide

him. In October 2013, John found just that when he enrolled into the NFJP program at Telamon Corporation.

Once enrolled and after a series of assessments and interviews, it was determined that John would be a perfect fit for the HVAC program at Danville Community College. As soon as he began college, Telamon began assisting him with a weekly stipend to help with transportation back and forth to school. Mandatory tools for his HVAC classes were purchased for Mr. Quinn along with any books that he required that were not covered through Financial Aide. And on occasion, Telamon assisted him with paying for his rent and utilities. Along with the financial assistance, John also received financial management training, pre-employment training, and job-readiness training to ensure that he had a comfortable transi-

tion into the workforce after completing school.

In July of 2015, John graduated from Danville Community College and received his degree in HVAC. He graduated with a 3.6 GPA and was inducted into the National Technical Honor Society. That same month, John found full-time employment working at Allied Supply Corporation of Danville as a HVAC Sales Supervisor where he sells HVAC supplies and materials to licensed independent contractors. John absolutely loves his job at Allied Supply Corporation of Danville and says, "I will stay here for the next 20 years... if I live that long."

John is extremely grateful for all of the encouragement and support that Telamon Corporation has been able to offer him for the past two years. And, we are so very proud of all that John has been able to achieve. Congratulations John!

Alejandra Palomar

By Sara Lopez
Workforce Development
Specialist, Montross

Elsa Alejandra Palomar Rodriguez entered into the National Farmworker Jobs Program as a dependent of her husband, a long term farmworker. Alejandra had recently obtained her permanent resident status and was seeking to better her future. Alejandra had no work experience since arriving to the United States. Prior to entering the program, Alejandra managed to study and pass her driver's license test all on her own. She currently has two children.

After speaking with staff, she decided that her first step should be attending ESL classes in order to increase her English language skills. We set her up an appointment to register for our in-house classes offered by Adult Education at Rappahannock Community College. Alejandra rapidly increased her knowledge of the language. She was constantly praised by the instructors and she was very proud to see that her hard work was paying off. Alejandra faced many obstacles along her path to success. With financial and emotional support from Telamon staff, she was able to overcome all.

Alejandra ended up relocating to Colorado due to personal reasons. There, she was soon hired by Cargo, Inc. as a General Laborer making \$14.50 an hour. She called staff with much excitement to tell us the news. A few months after,



Alejandra informed staff that she had been promoted to a Safety Charge position. She said that her supervisors continue to praise her and even want her to take a test to become a part of the Quality Assurance team. She explained to staff that each position has a different color hard hat to go along with it. She started out with a white hard hat as a general laborer and now that she has been promoted to safety, she has been given a green hard hat. She said that if she becomes part of Quality Assurance, she will be given an orange hard hat.

Alejandra sends staff a picture each time that her hard hat changes color. She sounds very determined to continue working hard to get her orange hard hat. She assured us that she will be sending in another photo soon with her new hat. She is very happy with her job and her advancement opportunities. She thanks staff and Telamon for all of our help along the way. Congratulations Alejandra! We are so proud of you!

State Director's Message

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DSS, efforts to make homes more energy efficient continue to help residents in Brunswick, Mecklenburg, Lunenburg, and Nottoway Counties.

Training farmworkers and their families on how to keep safe from pesticides continues with funding from VDACS and the Association of Farmworker Opportunity Programs. In the year just ended, 1388 farmworkers were trained on pesticide safety and heat stress prevention and treatment. This year, funding provided by the Theodore H. Barth Foundation, Inc. has enabled us to serve 105 farmworker children and youth with books and cultural enrichment activities.

With the holidays right around the corner, please take a moment to give thanks to the farmworkers who still toil and struggle daily for the food we enjoy with family and friends. Those workers, rarely seen, rarely thought about, add immeasurable value to our lives.

Staff Notes

Congratulations to Tytiana Dennis! Effective October 16, 2015, she is the Housing Program Coordinator for Virginia. She is very excited about the promotion. She will continue to provide counseling and have a much more active role in housing programs.

4H Camp

By Sara Lopez
Workforce Development
Specialist, Montross

This year, with funds provided by a grant from the Theodore H. Barth Foundation, Inc., the Telamon office in Montross was able to send seven children ages 9-13 to 4-H Junior Camp. Telamon partnered with Wendy Herdman, the extension agent for 4-H youth development to spread the news in the local farmworker community and find the interested families.

As in the past, it was held at the Jamestown 4-H Center in Williamsburg and lasted five days and four nights. The purpose of the 4-H program is to assist with the positive development of youth. The program has standards such as trustworthiness, respect, responsibility, fairness, caring and citizenship.



The young adults were able to participate in activities such as: archery, canoeing, kayaking, swimming, robotics and many more. During their time at the camp, children were able to improve their awareness and appreciation for the natural world and establish friendships with children from around the state.

A few days after their return, staff called all of the families to see how the trip went. All the children spoke excitedly about their adventures and several even asked if they could go next year. They all sounded like they really enjoyed their time at camp.

For many of these families, this was the first time their children had ever been away from home overnight without them. Upon observing how their children returned, they admitted that their children seemed more confident. A few of the children even sent letters to the Telamon staff letting us know just how much they enjoyed going to camp and listed the activities they liked the most.

We are very thankful to be provided with these funds so that our farmworker youth can continue having these wonderful opportunities and experiences that they wouldn't have otherwise.



HOUSING UPDATE

by Tytiana Dennis,
Housing Program Coordinator

LEASE-PURCHASE

Our lease-purchase program in Danville allows potential clients a chance to live in a home while they work to build credit, pay off debts, and address other barriers to homeownership. In this 24-month program, tenants follow an individualized action plan and must complete Homebuyer Education training. The program has been a tremendous success.

- Ms. W. has enrolled in our *Homebuyer Gold Club* which will enable her to purchase a home. She and her children love the home they are leasing and look forward to owning it.
- Ms. C. has been leasing for a year and a half and is ready to proceed with purchasing a home from Telamon.
- Ms. M. has been working diligently with our counselor and has increased her credit score to 638; she is very close to reaching the goal of 640 that is required to purchase.

PURCHASE

- Ms. R. is now a homeowner after purchasing a newly built Telamon home through the lease-purchase program. She was recently awarded a *new home accessory kit* which included lawn care items. Very happy with her success, she has referred several coworkers to Telamon.

FORECLOSURE PREVENTION

- Ms. O. had tried for years to obtain a loan modification before she came to us for assistance. Our counselor worked her case tirelessly until Ms. O. was awarded a modification that lowered her mortgage payment from \$1000 a month to \$394! In addition, her interest was reduced and escrow payments spread out. Ms. O. was very happy. She had fallen behind on the mortgage after being diagnosed with cancer and facing huge medical bills. The improvement in her finances has

reduced her stress and given her more strength to fight for her health.

- Ms. H. is a single mother of two living on limited income. She had fallen behind on her mortgage and needed assistance to keep from losing the house. Our counselor helped her to design a sustainable budget and to obtain a part-time job; the extra income was necessary to make the home affordable. After months of sweat and tears (literally!), a loan modification was approved and now she is back on track.

CREDIT COUNSELING/BUDGETING

Telamon hosted a Financial Literacy class for sophomores and seniors at Gretna High School. The class focused on the importance of credit, how to read a credit report, good debt versus bad debt, checking accounts, bartering/borrowing instead of buying, and identity theft. The first class went so well we decided to establish a regular offering at the high school and hope to add the middle school soon.