

A blessing in disguise: The Workforce Development Board of Solano County and its partner gave a Vallejo woman a new life after jail



Mariah Nance has a new career as a job retention specialist. Photo by Joel Rosenbaum

by Gail Allyn Short

When Mariah Nance, 31, of Vallejo was arrested and released on bail in 2017, the once storage rental company manager found herself jobless.

Employers were reluctant to hire her because she had a record. And yet, she had restitution to pay.

"How can I pay something if I don't have a job?" she asked. She found some work through temporary agencies, but no full-time employment.


Then in 2021, a counselor referred Nance to Sheryl Cutler, a program analyst with the Workforce Development Board of Solano County jobs center.

"I provided her with a basic resume review, resource information, guidance and tips and tricks for job seekers who have a (record)," says Cutler. "These services are offered in public libraries and job centers and are open to

all to get one started on their journey.”

Cutler says Nance listened and adopted the suggestions for her resume.

She also referred Nance to the Center for Employment Opportunities, a nonprofit dedicated to giving ex-offenders and people who are justice involved a pathway to becoming job-ready through training and transitional employment.



“It’s changed my life as a whole. I can invest in my business more. I can invest in myself more, and I can pay off my restitution.”

Mariah Nance, CEO client

The Workforce Development Board has even helped CEO clients access funding for tuition for truck driving school, says Marcus Mills, director of CEO’s Solano County office.

CEO placed Nance on a transitional work crew, picking up litter along roadways for a weekly wage. But soon, Nance earned herself a promotion and was put in charge of safety, monitoring traffic as crews worked.

After several weeks, staffers invited Nance to CEO’s 12-week Emerging Leaders Program, an internship where clients work alongside CEO staffers to learn more about their roles in the organization.

Specifically, ELP is for those who demonstrate increasing levels of responsibility, drive and leadership skills while working on the transitional crew and in the office with the vocational team during job coaching and in-job development meetings.

“We look for people who we think would fit well in the culture of the office with the vocational staff here,” Mills says. “And, she demonstrated an interest in the human services field.”

In January, Nance applied for the position of job coach retention specialist and was hired full-time.

Today, she assists clients who need help like she once did.

“It’s changed my life as a whole,” says Nance, who hopes to open a catering business one day. “I can invest in my business more. I can invest in myself more, and I can pay off my restitution.”

She calls the Workforce Development Board a “blessing in disguise.”

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