

## ‘Don’t Give Up’: Mental health and unemployment



Like to work with children? Workforce Development Board of Solano County helped one woman make the connections she needed for her dream job.

**BY: [GAIL ALLYN SHORT](#) APRIL 1, 2022**

### **Workforce Development Board of Solano County and partner agency Caminar help Fairfield woman find her dream job.**

Leslie Carrillo, 43, of Fairfield, once worked as a tutor, but her bipolar illness got in the way and interfered with her efforts to land a more permanent position.

“There were times when I didn’t want to go to work. I had anxiety of something going wrong or doing something wrong or not being able to fit in,” she says.

But Carrillo found help at [Caminar](#), a nonprofit behavioral health and social services agency and a partner organization for the [Workforce Development Board \(WDB\) of Solano County](#). Caminar case managers helped Carrillo with what she says was a confusing and anxiety-provoking amount of paperwork at the time to apply for unemployment.

While there, she and Caminar employment specialist Roxanne Medearis struck up a conversation.

As an employment specialist, Medearis says she analyzes each clients' level of education, skills, work history and goals and teaches them how to fill out job applications. She also conducts mock job interviews and instructs clients on how to carry out a successful job hunt.

Further, for clients with mental health challenges like Carrillo, Medearis says she reminds them to use whatever coping techniques their case managers taught them to use whenever they feel symptomatic while on the job.

"Leslie had already had college courses behind her," says Medearis, "and she wanted to teach. That was her goal. So that's why we connected her with the Workforce Development Board."

At the Solano County WDB, Carrillo met with Rachele Franko, a disability resource specialist for career counseling.

"She came to us looking for job seeker services," says Franko. "She didn't know what she really wanted to do. So we worked through that, looking at what she was able to do and the skills she gained from working for past employers and discussed what she wanted to do."

Franko says she suggested that Carrillo consider becoming a school paraeducator. She thought the job would be a good fit for Carrillo because she enjoyed working with young people.

Carrillo agreed and enrolled in and completed a two-week paraeducator training course sponsored by the Solano County Office of Education.

Today, she is a classroom paraeducator working with kindergarten and first grade students with special needs.

"I love it," Carrillo says. "I learned something every day. It's fun, and it feels like I'm giving back to society."

"I couldn't have done it without them, that's for sure," she adds of the [Solano County WDB](#) and Caminar. "Being bipolar and having so much information coming at me brought on anxiety. But they were able to tell me what my next steps were and what would get me from point A to point B."

Her advice to others?

"Don't give up. There are resources out there to help you."