

The President's Quarterly Team Update

For CareerSource NEFL Employees



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

by Bruce Ferguson

As we near the end of the first quarter of 2024, let's take a few moments to recognize the great teamwork that has occurred across our organization, particularly during a time of significant change.

First, **congratulations to everyone again for achieving another A+ grade from CareerSource Florida.** Our organization's consistent ability to achieve the highest grade demonstrates your dedication to best serving our customers and making a positive impact on their lives.

With the closing of Market Street Office, and temporary closing of Gateway for repairs, many of you have moved your work location and/or have new coworkers. I am impressed by how career center staff throughout the region have been flexible and embraced team members who have needed to relocate to a different center temporarily or permanently.

I also have enjoyed learning about cross-program projects that have sprung up at our centers.

For instance, at the Southside Center, Business Services, Veterans Services and Job Seeker Services, have joined forces to pilot "Recruitment Wednesdays." Every Wednesday up to five employers attend a recruitment event at the Southside Center: the goal is to increase the number of job seekers attending our recruitment events, and the beginning attendance data is showing great promise.

The search for a new CEO is well under way. CareerSource NEFL Board Member and Search Committee Chair Elaine Johnson is leading the search with executive

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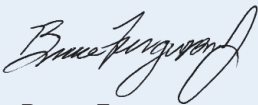
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search firm Winner Partners of St. Petersburg, Florida. The committee has been hard at work and the goal remains to have a new CEO in place no later than June. I remain fully committed to ensuring the transition goes smoothly after that person comes on board.

I recognize that there are significant changes occurring in the organization including my announcement of retirement. While all these changes can be distracting, I encourage you to stay focused, as you always have, on serving our job seekers and businesses. Change brings new opportunities and I encourage each of you to embrace those opportunities as they present themselves.

Might as well be awesome!



Bruce Ferguson

NEW EVENTS IN 2024

Recruitment Wednesdays

This is an in-person event happening bi-weekly at the Southside Career Center. Job Seekers are welcome to meet employers and participate in career services.

Military Veteran First Fridays

This event allows employers and supportive service providers to talk to a small group of veterans who want to know more about these provider organizations.



Find details about the events on the [events page](#) of our website.

NOW! LAUDS CAREERSOURCE NEFL STAFF FOR PROFESSIONALISM

NOW! Programs company is an ed-tech organization that provides evidence-based programs that prevent or improve learning difficulties and enrich language skills for children and adults. The Morris Center Ponte Vedra Beach is one of four clinics that serves students with Dyslexia and other neurological disabilities. Both companies, owned and operated by Dr. Tim Conway, neuropsychologist, have a new Chief Marketing Officer thanks to connections made through a hiring event hosted by CareerSource NEFL last summer.

“In our effort to recruit for remote, hybrid and in-clinic roles, I attended the CareerSource NEFL Recruiting Event at Beach Boulevard Career Center,” said NOW! Programs company Manager of Internal Communications Angela McTammany. “There, we were fortunate to meet Ms. Kelly Williams, who became our new Chief Marketing Officer.”

McTammany said she was impressed with the high caliber of talent represented at the job fair and the professionalism she experienced in working with the CareerSource NEFL staff – which proved to be a “win-win” in the company’s efforts to tap into the local workforce.

“Our Founder and CEO, Tim Conway, PhD, has a vision for empowering and upskilling the economic development of the local and national workforce,” McTammany said. “The NOW! Programs and The Morris Center clinics companies have many other roles to fill as we expand. We are looking forward to working with CareerSource NEFL to identify other great talent within the area.”

For more information about the NOW! Programs, visit <https://www.nowprograms.com/> or email careers@nowprograms.com

For information on The Morris Center clinics, visit <https://themorriscenter.com/>.



Neuro-Development of Words
NOW! Programs

LONG-TIME EMPLOYEES ANCHOR THE BAKER CAREER CENTER TEAM

From the career center office at the Cornerstone Square Shopping Center in Macclenny, a team of three workforce services representatives help job seekers connect with positions in Baker County and throughout the CareerSource NEFL Region. Two of those representatives, Rhoda Fernandez and Janell Combs, have combined experience of more than 40 years working in workforce development – with representative Henry Adams rounding out the team as the ‘newcomer’ at the office with 12 years with the organization.

Fernandez, the veteran of the group, was hired in 1989 – noting that the organization has had many names and she had worked at several locations before settling at the Macclenny center 20 years ago. Born and raised in Fernandina, she started her “first real job” working in the welfare transition program – Project Independence – from an office at Fernandina Beach. The program was moved to the U.S. Department of Labor and then, when privatization occurred, the program transitioned to a workforce organization led by a regional board of directors.

“We moved to an office on 103rd Street in Jacksonville, then I worked in welfare transition at our Market Street offices before I came to the office here,” Fernandez said.

Since that time, her family moved to Starke, Florida, located a few miles from the center.

“It’s been a good career and I love it out here,” she said. “I don’t like driving in traffic, so the commute is a top selling point in my book. Of course, the best part is when someone gets a job or gets their training and comes by or sends an e-mail saying, ‘thank you,’ or something like ‘if it wasn’t for you, I wouldn’t have done this’ or whatever... that’s just nice to hear.”

Fernandez says the most interesting interaction with a customer was when her mother was in the hospital and one of the nurses was someone she had helped years earlier.

While she has no specific date set, she does see retirement on the horizon. “Either way, I’ve had a good career and I highly recommend this organization,” she said.

Combs, who will have worked with CareerSource NEFL for 24 years this May, also holds the organization in high regard. “I appreciate the company, the benefits they provide and especially the family orientation that they have,” she said. “When you’ve been at a job as many years



Photo caption (left to right) Janell Combs, Henry Adams, and Rhoda Fernandez make up the Baker Career Center Team.

as I have you go through a lot of ups and downs in your personal life. They’ve always been there for me and my family and that means a lot to me.”

Combs was previously employed at Macclenny Products, a men’s clothing company that cut and sewed suits and clothes for JCPenney and other retail manufacturers at that time. She was working in the company’s import-export department when she saw the job listing in the local newspaper. “One of the big factors was that I had worked there for nine years with no pay increase and no benefits, so I was ready for a change,” she said. “I went and interviewed for it. When I got hired I thought I hit the jackpot.”

At that time, she says their office was “a little cubicle trailer set up at Keller Intermediate School they had set up for a receptionist.”

Except for a short period when her family moved while she was a teenager, Combs has always lived in Macclenny and, other than a 15-month stint when she was reassigned to an office on Market Street, has always worked in her hometown.

Describing herself as a real “people person,” Combs enjoys meeting and helping those who come into the career center and, as a long-time resident, runs into many of her former customers in the area.

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“We have one lady, Marilyn, who works at Walmart...she’s been there about three years now,” Combs said. “She came from out of state, we helped her get on the computer and apply at the store. Every time you go in the store she’s just always so appreciative. She’ll say, ‘there’s that Lady that helped me.’ Then, there’s a gentleman we helped get a job at Sanderson Pipe. He’s still there after all these years and I’ll run into him every so often. It’s just a good feeling to help someone, and help them become more productive, too.”

Unlike his two colleagues who share a short commute to the center, Adams has the longest drive from his home near Pecan Park Road in Jacksonville to Macclenny – but he’s grown to enjoy it.

“In the beginning, the drive used to drive me crazy,” he said. “But then, I realized it’s less stressful out here compared to the city. Again, you start to appreciate things. The drive is still long, but you have your music going and it’s peaceful and you can kind of relax. I make the best of it now.”

Adams started his career with the organization at the Gateway Career Center, working in the resource room or wherever needed until he was transferred to the Baker County Center.

A Jacksonville native, Adams attended First Coast High School and initially worked as a legal assistant for two years before he was led to the organization by his sister, CareerSource NEFL Senior Vice President of Operations Cheryl Taylor.

Adams says the stress-free environment at the center, along with the appreciation he receives from those he helps, keep him going in the job.

“The people who really want to be helped, when they get help, they’re really so thankful and you can see it all over their faces,” he said. “Also, the Walmart story is really my favorite. When Marilyn came to us, she couldn’t even use a computer. I think she was originally from Detroit and knew nothing about the area.”

He adds that it’s sometimes good when you don’t see customers return, because it means they are still on the job.

“That’s always something we joke about...if we don’t see a person return that means they’re working, so we don’t take that as an insult,” he laughed. “There’s this one guy named Paul, he just came in and out over and over...get a job, lose a job. But we were just talking about him a couple of weeks ago: we haven’t seen him so far this year, so that’s a good thing.”

CareerSource District Director Steve Hybarger, who oversees center operations in Baker County (along with Nassau and Duval/Southside), says being in the more rural Baker County gives the center a different ‘vibe’ than the ones in the city.

“I’m usually get out here at least once a week, and when you go to the outlying counties it’s a whole different culture...a different set of people coming in with a different set of issues they are facing,” he said. “A lot of people in this area work at the state hospitals and state prisons, the Walmart distribution center located close by, or take jobs on the west side of Jacksonville. They prefer the more rural-type lifestyle, but it is growing out here...and there are more retail positions available here these days, as well.”

Hybarger says the center offers all the same services as the other centers, but there are less people coming into the center – which translates into fewer staff, which means “they have a wear a lot more hats.”

“But, like the folks who come into the Nassau office, I do think that people who live out here are less worried about that commute into Jacksonville when it comes to finding a job,” he said. “For them, a 20-to-30 minute drive is not a big deal...as opposed to someone who lives in the beaches. To some of them, crossing the ‘ditch’ to Jacksonville is like going to the moon.”



CONGRATULATIONS TO OUR EMPLOYEES OF THE MONTH!



November

Raymond Lance
Workforce Services
Representative

Southside Career Center



December

Claudette Washington
Workforce Services
Representative

Clay Career Center



January

Constance McGruder
Employment Security
Representative

Southside Career Center



February

Miriam Mercado
Government Operations
Consultant DVOP

Southside Career Center

Recognition is an important pillar of employee engagement and organizational success, so get those nomination forms in and recognize more of our team superstars!

Nominations are based on excellent job performance, promoting a pleasant and professional working environment, dependability and/or innovation and must be received to Human Resources via the Share File link, [Submit Nomination Forms](#) between the 1st and 20th of each month for that month's award.



EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR

Maria Cunningham
Business Specialist
Southside Career Center

BARNABAS EMPLOYEES GREET WITH ‘HOLA’ THANKS TO CUSTOMIZED TRAINING SUPPORT

‘Hola,’ gracias’ and phrases like ¿cómo te sientes? have become familiar phrases for 20 employees at the nonprofit agency Barnabas Center thanks to training they received in conversational Spanish – and assistance through CareerSource NEFL’s Customized Training Program.

Based in Fernandina Beach, Barnabas Center began in the mid-1980s when a St. Michael’s Catholic Church priest was joined by parishioners to launch Barnabas Center (which means ‘son of encouragement’) in a vacant church for people struggling and needing resources in the area.

Today, the nonprofit is Nassau County’s comprehensive service center – providing free medical and dental services, operating a nutrition services program in partnership with Feeding Northeast Florida and providing other short-term help. This help includes financial assistance, budgeting and financial education, clothing and household items, and referrals for additional services. The agency also operates two resale stores in Fernandina Beach and Yulee to generate operating funds and provide donations to its clients.

“We are really the only primary care clinic for residents who are living below the federal poverty line, providing those folks with primary dental and medical care and many other services,” said Barnabas Center CEO Jamie Reynolds.

Reynolds, who has been with the agency for almost three years, says the number of Spanish-speaking residents needing help has been increasing – estimating about 25 percent of those using their services today speak Spanish. This prompted the agency’s Spirit Committee, a group of employees that meets once a month to come up with service delivery improvements and different inclusion activities, to suggest some training in the Spanish language.

“They identified that some of our patients and clients speak only Spanish, and it’s important that our client and patient serving professionals can communicate appropriately with them,” she said. “When the committee brought the idea to our chief administrative officer Cathy Dupuis, she looked into CareerSource Northeast Florida and found out that the organization would underwrite a conversational Spanish training for up to 20 staff members.”

With a total staff of 50, nearly half of the agency’s employees took the eight-week course.

Reynolds says the agency wanted to ensure that there was representation from each department, which resulted in a good mix of employees – including some from its dental clinic, medical staff, nutrition department and thrift stores,



(L to R) Barnabas Center Employees Casey Hemphill, Nick Covino, Nicola Barnack, and Linda Ellis were among 20 of the nonprofit agency’s employees who learned conversational Spanish thanks to CareerSource NEFL customized training funds.

along with the agency’s staff receptionist.

“The instructor from Florida State College at Jacksonville (FSCJ), Lissette Orengo, was amazing,” shared Nicola Barnack, the staff’s Director of Development & Communications and class participant. “The first two weeks, Lissette guided us through an overview of the language and what it would entail for us, but she soon realized that she really needed to teach us how to speak directly to speak to patients, so Lissette focused on words and phrases specific to our agency and the needs of our clients and patients: ‘are you in pain?, are you hungry?, do you need shelter?’ and things like that. We really appreciated that she customized the class specifically for our audience.”

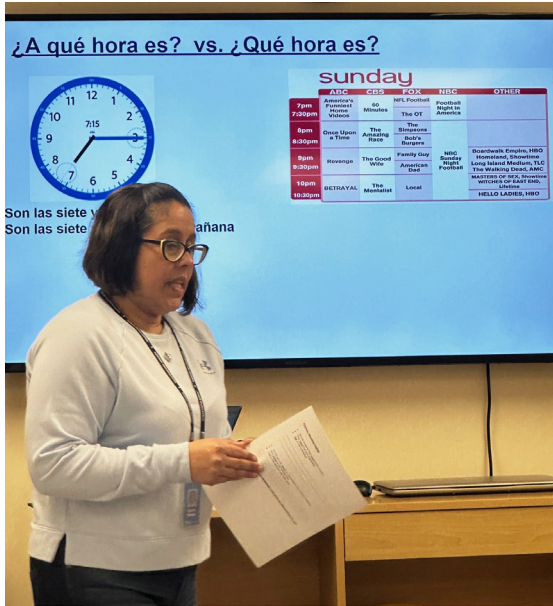
Barnack, who is responsible for fundraising and marketing, says she was even taught how to ask for a donation in Spanish.

“I really enjoyed it,” she said. “In fact, I’ve even drawn on what I learned personally outside of work. I was in a hotel three weeks after the class and spoke to one of their staff members. I actually said buenos días (good day) and she was very surprised.”

She notes that board members and even funders have been very supportive when they heard about the training.

“It’s been very interesting that everyone that we’ve told about the program have really appreciated it, because it’s clear there are barriers to communication here and oftentimes not all of us were completely inclusive of their

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Florida State College at Jacksonville Spanish Instructor Lissette Orengo.

needs,” she said. “Now, at least we can communicate, even for some of us on a very basic level just to say good morning, and I really enjoy that.”

In working with companies and nonprofit agencies like Barnabas Center, CareerSource NEFL acts as a funding partner and coordinates with outside educational advisors like FSCJ to provide the training, along with providing funds to offset the full training costs.

Carol Cullen, the Industry Manager for Healthcare at CareerSource NEFL, says this was one of the first times a healthcare provider has used customized training funds to learn a foreign language to help improve customer communication.

“It really represents the broad application of our Customized Training Program and how companies, and nonprofit agencies like Barnabas Center, can use these funds for many types of training when it comes to upskilling employees,” she said.

CEO Reynolds adds that she would encourage any nonprofit agency to partner with CareerSource NEFL when it comes to employee training. “CareerSource Northeast Florida was very easy to work with, and without its help this training may not have occurred for some time, if at all,” she said. “Also, this was a wonderful way to embrace the wants and needs of our staff. You could really see it on everybody’s faces...they were really proud. It was a nice way to provide a benefit to our team, and the class also gave those who participated the opportunity to learn a little more about each other.”

ECONOMIC & EMPLOYMENT HIGHLIGHTS

FloridaCommerce has announced that the unemployment rate for the Jacksonville region was 3.3 percent in February 2024 – unchanged from 3.3 percent in January 2024.

Of the 877,837 people counted as part of the area's workforce in February, there were 29,316 unemployed residents in the region – up from 26,585 unemployed residents December 2023.

NORTHEAST FLORIDA FEBRUARY UNEMPLOYMENT STATISTICS BY COUNTY

(Source: Florida Department of Economic Opportunity (not seasonally adjusted))

	FEB-23	JAN-24	FEB-24
CareerSource Northeast Florida	2.8%	3.3%	3.3%
Baker County	2.7%	3.1%	3.2%
Clay County	2.7%	3.3%	3.3%
Duval County	2.8%	3.4%	3.4%
Nassau County	2.4%	3.2%	3.1%
Putnam County	3.8%	4.2%	4.3%
St. Johns County	2.5%	3.0%	3.0%
Jacksonville MSA	2.6%	3.3%	3.3%
Florida	2.7%	3.1%	3.1%
United States	3.3%	4.1%	4.2%

REGIONAL EMPLOYMENT UPDATE

Over the last 12 months, employment in several industry sectors outpaced the statewide numbers in leisure and hospitality employment (up 4.8 percent), government employment (up 4.3 percent) and education and health services (up 4.1 percent).

In February, St. John’s County continued to record the lowest unemployment rate in the region (3.0 percent), followed by Nassau County (3.1 percent), Baker County (3.2 percent), Clay County (3.3 percent), Duval County (3.4 percent) and Putnam County (4.3 percent).

The current top-five most advertised job occupations among all industries in the region included first-line supervisors of retail salespersons (1,153 positions), retail salespersons (1,127 positions), fast food and counter workers (674 positions), stocker and order fillers (493), and first-line supervisors of food preparation and serving workers (449).

In February, CareerSource NEFL received 2,643 job postings from its partner-employers.

CAREERSOURCE NEFL MOVES QUICKLY TO IMPLEMENT HEALTHCARE GRANT

Last July, FloridaCommerce awarded a grant to CareerSource NEFL for more than \$900,000 over two fiscal years. The grant is aimed at reducing the shortage of employees in healthcare occupations, reducing turnover in these occupations and assisting eligible participants with placement in training and work-based learning opportunities in support of healthcare occupations.

By mid-February 2024, the organization had identified participants and allocated over \$238,000 of the \$245,000 funds received for the first year of the grant – supporting nearly 80 people into healthcare training at various hospitals, clinics and other healthcare facilities in Northeast Florida – leaving only about \$7,000 for disbursement through June.

“We worked really diligently to identify people eligible for the funds to put these dollars to work immediately throughout the region,” said Carmen Lamboy, CareerSource NEFL Director of Program Services and Analytics. “We’ve used the grants for both alternative training models, like Customized Training, in addition to standard Individual Training Accounts (ITAs).”

Participants have received funds to train for a variety of healthcare occupations including nursing, medical coding, medical assistance, pharmacy technicians and laboratory technicians.

The grant, the Florida Healthcare Training Initiative (FHTI), is a specialized program funded through Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) state set-aside funds – created to help expand access to high-quality healthcare training programs and develop a skilled healthcare workforce in Florida.



Sonya Speights, CareerSource NEFL Director of Training and Career Pathways, says there are currently three customized training projects funded through the grant totaling just over \$99,000, including:

- Ascension St. Vincent’s Hospital, where 14 people are training to become Surgical Technologists
- UF Health Flagler Hospital, where six participants are receiving Patient Care Technician Training
- Clay County, involving 19 trainees for Clay County Fire & Rescue

“For many of these participants, these training programs will put them on a new career path – and in many cases they’ll receive wage increases after they successfully complete their training,” she said. Speights notes that the projects exemplify a healthcare career path progression, which the FHTI encourages.

“I commend our team for their focus on putting these additional funds to work so quickly so people can receive the training they need to start a new career in the healthcare industry,” said CareerSource NEFL President Bruce Ferguson. “The healthcare industry continues to be a growing and it has critical needs in Northeast Florida. Through these grants, we’re working with our long-time partners in healthcare to provide more training opportunities to residents to meet the workforce needs of this sector.”

CSNEFL CUSTOMER SERVICE AND ADMINISTRATIVE VIRTUAL HIRING FAIR
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- CHAT DIRECTLY WITH HIRING MANAGERS AND RECRUITERS.
- DISCOVER YOUR DREAM JOB IN VARIOUS INDUSTRIES.
- INTERVIEW FROM THE CONVENIENCE OF YOUR HOME.

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APRIL 11, 2024
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ONLINE
10 AM - 1 PM

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CareerSource
NORTHEAST FLORIDA

View all events at www.careersourcefl.com

Event Spotlight!

MONTHLY VIRTUAL JOB FAIRS!

Every month we host a Virtual Job Fair connecting Job Seekers with the hottest jobs open in Northeast Florida. Employers can connect with applicants before, during and after each event easily in the online portal.

The next event is April 11th, [learn more!](#)

JOB CORPS, CAREERSOURCE NEFL PARTNERSHIP LEADS KEMP TO A JOB ‘LOVE’S CONNECTION’

Thanks to a long-time relationship between Job Corps and CareerSource NEFL, Lana Kemp is preparing for a full-time position with Love’s at its facility on Pecan Park Road in Jacksonville.

And it wasn’t even the job she was going for at the travel company.

“This young lady has a really wonderful story,” said CareerSource NEFL Apprenticeship Navigator Doreen Lund. “I found out about Lana when Tanzy James at Job Corps contacted me asking about Love’s Diesel Mechanic Apprenticeship that Lana was interested in. Tanzy’s email also included Cynthia Owens (CareerSource NEFL Director of One Stop Operations), so I could tell that she had been working with us for a while.”

James says she’s worked as a partner with CareerSource for more than 20 years while administering training and employment grants in Jacksonville. Jacksonville Job Corps is one of 120 campuses across the country that provides free career training and education for 16-through 24-year-olds.

James recently took on the role as advanced career coordinator at Job Corps – working with advanced manufacturing students and their instructor.

“Because our students come from all over, they weren’t familiar with CareerSource NEFL and neither was the instructor, so we took a group of five students on a tour at the Gateway Career Center in February...and Lana was in that group,” James said. “Cynthia Owens set it up, and her staff gave us a great overview of all the programs and resources available to them.”

Kemp had already completed three trades with Job Corps, including the advanced manufacturing trade, and was very anxious to move on with her career.

“Johnson & Johnson Vision sponsors the Advanced Manufacturing program and typically hires our graduates,” James said. “However, Lana had a sense of urgency to transition from the program with employment as soon as possible. Through an in-person recruitment event at a career center, Lana also had an interview with Coca-Cola in the works at the time, so she was motivated to



A long-time connection between Job Corps Advanced Career Coordinator Tanzy James (left) and CareerSource NEFL led Lana Kemp to a full-time position at Love’s, a national travel company, as a service advisor at its north Jacksonville location.

find meaningful work. That’s when she mentioned the apprenticeship opportunity at Love’s and I connected with Doreen.”

The connection between Kemp and Love’s came quickly.

“I have a contact at Love’s and shared what a great job Lana had been doing and forwarded her resume on and they must have been pretty impressed,” Lund said. “They called her the next day and Lana had an interview the following day.”

However, instead of the apprenticeship she was inquiring about, Love’s offered Kemp a full-time position as a service advisor and a higher care technician for the company. In her new role, Kemp will be working with customers to fulfill service needs, providing cost estimates, sales promotions and customer service, along with assisting maintenance crews with some projects.

“I love hands on work, so I’m looking forward to the maintenance part of the job,” she said.

Kemp says she appreciates the help she received from Job Corps and CareerSource NEFL in leading her to the position.

“I’m very happy,” she said. “I’ve had a lot of people around me talk about how hard it is to find a job, and applying for so many jobs not hearing anything back is discouraging, so to have these connections and these people around me who are so willing to assist me....I’m so grateful. And, after the tour at Gateway, I told my mom she should move out and get with CareerSource NEFL and get a better job. I’ll definitely be recommending to other people, for sure.”

James agreed.

“As far as CareerSource NEFL is concerned, they’ve been a great partner in funding different programs for summer job opportunities, internships, paid internships and just career readiness opportunities for our young adults -- which is so needed,” she said. “A lot of people in the community are not aware of the services they provide. I definitely encourage people who are in the market for a new job or want to continue their education or start a new career, to definitely go to CareerSource Northeast Florida ...which is a great job resource.”

WELCOME ABOARD!



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Employment Security Representative
Clay Career Center



Nelson Orta

Youth Pathways Specialist
Clay Career Center



Rosa Haynes

Workforce Services Representative
SNAP E&T



Sootaga Utu

Workforce Services Representative
SNAP E&T



Marshelle Berry

Reentry Navigator
Mobile Access Points



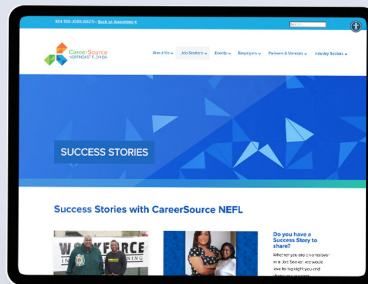
Schanell Harrington

Employment Security Representative
Gateway One-Stop Center



Kim Reynolds

Employment Security Representative
Palatka Career Center



WEB FEATURE

Read Highlights of our
Job Seekers Success Stories
on our Website.

We're spreading the word about how CareerSource NEFL helps Job Seekers with our Success Stories page. View it at <https://careersourcenortheast-florida.com/success-stories/>.