

Meet Helen Idaho SCSEP participant



After many years in the workforce, when Helen Martinez reached her 60s she did what many people do. She retired. Later on though, life circumstances shifted unexpectedly and Helen found herself needing to go back to work.

While she had many valuable work skills such as being bilingual, she knew her age and limited computer skills would make her job search more challenging. So, Helen came to Easterseals-Goodwill's SCSEP program in Twin Falls, Idaho for help.

SCSEP stands for Senior Community Service Employment Program. It's designed to help older, unemployed workers like Helen, gain skills, confidence and experience to overcome the barriers to employment many in this age group face, such as long gaps in employment, inexperience in the workplace, or lack of tech and computer skills.

Easterseals-Goodwill provides SCSEP services in Idaho, Montana and Utah. In addition to working with job seekers age 55+ on updating their skills, we also partner with local non-profit and government agencies to provide vital on-the-job work experience for participants. It's a win-win for both the agencies and our participants.

"Helen was extremely determined to learn computer skills," says Nanette Fisher, SCSEP employment specialist.

"She never let anything stand in the way of her achieving her goal." Through Easterseals-Goodwill's SCSEP work training experience, Helen gained valuable on-the-job computer skills. This on-the-job experience was also the first time she formally provided Spanish translation services in a work environment, even though she had done this as a volunteer for many years.

When a job opened at Idaho Legal Aid Services Inc. in Twin Falls, Helen applied. She is now an Outreach Worker assisting agricultural workers, enabling her to use both her bilingual skills and newfound computer skills.

Helen's knowledge of the community, experience working with the same population that Idaho Legal Aid Services helps, and her life experience relating to people from a variety of backgrounds and experiences are assets to her work. "I haven't always been outgoing, but I discovered I really like interacting with people," says Helen.

Mike McCarthy, Helen's supervisor at Idaho Legal Aid Services, says that hiring an older worker was an ideal choice for this position. "It's helpful to have someone who has long-time ties to the community. Helen knows how to reach people, knows how to approach them, and is willing to go anywhere to help them," says Mike.

He says that Helen takes her job seriously, and is willing to work some of the odd hours that the job requires to reach current, retired, or former ag workers in a very rural area of the state. "She has been a really good asset to our team," he says.

Beyond a paycheck, Helen says that a benefit of working is that she's always learning. "Never stop learning something new. It broadens your horizons," she says.