

# Workforce development specialist helps residents re-imagine their futures



## BACKGROUND

This case study explores how TCC dollars have helped Ontario residents find training and employment opportunities that meet their career goals. Specifically, the case study spotlights the stories of a TCC-funded workforce development specialist, Tamika Tonge, and three individuals that she has served. Tonge’s work represents just one component of Ontario’s larger Workforce Development Plan. For more details about this plan, see page 56.

*Interviews for this case study were conducted between June and November 2021.*

Tamika Tonge (left), Ontario’s workforce development specialist, with client Alex Segura (right). Photo credit: Tamika Tonge

**TAMIKA TONGE** has a long résumé helping others get through difficult times. With an undergraduate degree in criminal justice and a master’s degree in public health, Tonge has held a number of different positions providing supportive services to vulnerable populations, including individuals who are formerly incarcerated, have limited English, lack stable housing, or have experienced mental health challenges. Over the course of her career, Tonge has developed a passion for helping these individuals set vocational goals and mentoring them to achieve their goals. This passion is what led her to the Workforce Development Department at the City of Ontario, where she now works as a workforce development specialist, a position that is funded by TCC.

**“I love making a difference in people’s lives by tapping into their gifts. I believe that everyone has a gift.”**

TAMIKA TONGE

Ontario residents can work with Tonge by filling out an application and making an appointment to meet at her office in Ontario’s downtown library. During an appointment, Tonge conducts an assessment of each client’s professional history, skill set, and goals. She then works with clients to create a plan to achieve those goals through realistic

steps. She points clients to relevant resources, such as job training and educational opportunities. TCC has expanded Tonge’s menu of resources. For example, Tonge can now point clients to the job training programs offered by GRID Alternatives, which include tracks for careers in construction, solar system design, and marketing.



**ALEX SEGURA** first met Tonge while job hunting at the Ontario library. Segura was recovering from a car accident at the time and was struggling to balance his job at Taco Bell with his physical therapy appointments and his bigger career goals. Segura’s real passion is sustainable architecture, and he hopes to eventually land a job in construction management. Until then, Segura needed a new day job with more flexibility so he could so focus on his other priorities. After working with Tonge, he landed a job at a local pizzeria that provides the flexibility he needs to pursue his bigger career goals.

**“Tamika keeps me accountable to focus on what I want to do as a career. Before working with her, I didn’t even think a ‘career’ was an option for me.”**

ALEX SEGURA

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Even though Segura is happy with his new gig, Tonge’s work with him is not done. She continues to help him identify apprenticeship and internship opportunities that allow him to gain more experience in the construction sector. Segura is particularly excited to train with GRID Alternatives as soon as its in-person programming, which has been on hiatus due to the pandemic, resumes.



**JOCELYN OROZCO** was at a pivotal moment in her professional journey when she first met Tonge. She recently graduated from college and came to Tonge for help with getting certified as a nursing assistant. During Orozco’s intake session, Tonge used motivational interviewing techniques to help Orozco articulate her desire for a more specialized career in neurology. Tonge then encouraged Orozco to explore multiple career options in the health sector before fast-tracking her career toward nursing and assisted Orozco in setting up two volunteer positions toward that purpose: one at the Alzheimer’s Association as an educator, and one in the transplant center and heart lab of a nearby hospital as an administrative assistant.

The two volunteer positions ultimately instilled in Orozco the confidence to go after her dream of becoming a neurosurgeon. Now Orozco is gainfully employed at the neurology center in Orange County and is studying for her entrance exams to medical school. Tonge is continuing to help Orozco through that process, and has connected Orozco with a tutor to boost her test-taking skills.



**MITCHELL DEVIN** also came to Tonge at a turning point in his career. Due to the pandemic, he was furloughed from his position as a facilities manager at an AMC theater. Devin saw the lapse in employment as an opportunity to retool his skill set but was short on money to invest in himself. He came to Tonge to sort through his options. Tonge recognized Devin’s passion for technology and connected him to a fully funded pre-apprenticeship program at Chaffey College’s Industrial Technical Learning Center. The program teaches trainees how to operate and maintain a variety of electrical, mechanical, and hydraulic technologies.

After completing the program, Devin was quickly recruited by Walmart to work as an Industrial Maintenance Technician. In his new position, Devin is enjoying a higher salary with better benefits, as well as plenty of continued learning opportunities. Despite the challenging year, Devin’s work satisfaction is at an all-time high.



Jocelyn Orozco, client of Tonge. Photo credit: Tamika Tonge

**“Tamika challenged me to pursue what I’m passionate about, not just something that pays me money.”**

JOCELYN OROZCO



Mitchell Devin, client of Tonge. Photo credit: Mitchell Devin

**“I’ve taken my career in industrial technology to the next level ... the workforce development specialist made it all happen.”**

MITCHELL DEVIN