



SUCCESS STORY

Joanna Diaz building a tool box as part of the construction training skills component of the NJ Jobs4Vets program.

NJ/NY Hazardous Materials Worker Training Center

Provides New Career Paths to Veterans

Joanna Diaz was one of 17 under-employed or unemployed veterans who enrolled in a five-week training program offered in 2012 by *Rutgers School of Public Health* through the New Jersey (NJ)/ New York (NY) Hazardous Materials Worker Training Center (the Center). Now, four years later she is a Union Carpenter working in a job she loves.

The Center, funded by the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) *Worker Training Program's* (WTP) *Environmental Career Worker Training Program* (ECWTP), has a long history of providing training to workers on health and safety issues related to: cleanup of hazardous waste sites, handling and treatment of chemicals, and planning for emergency response scenarios. The Center sought to address a local issue in New Jersey by training under-employed and unemployed veterans in new careers and to help them find jobs. Through the ECWTP, the new program, called **NJ Jobs4Vets Training Program**, focused on providing training in the areas of environmental remediation and restoration, disaster preparedness, and construction.

The NJ Jobs4Vets program recruited and enrolled 17 veterans to participate in a five-week training program that included courses taught by the Center's partners: the Rutgers School of Public Health and the New York City District Council of Carpenters Labor Technical College. Fifty-nine percent of the trainees enrolled in the program were of a minority population.

"We identified a significant need to re-train veterans, and the NJ Jobs4Vets program was created to provide environmental remediation and construction training. It gives me great pleasure to see the success that Joanna has attained with the assistance of our program. She has found a career that she loves, and it has positively changed her life!"

—Mitchel Rosen, Center Director
Rutgers SPH, NJ/NY Hazardous Materials Worker Training Center

Courses provided by Rutgers School of Public Health through NJ Jobs4Vets

- 4-hour Mold Awareness and Remediation Safety Procedures
- 8-hour Program Introduction
- 10-hour Construction Safety
- 16-hour Disaster Site Worker
- 32-hour Lead Abatement
- 32-hour Asbestos Worker
- 40-hour Hazardous Waste Site

Course provided by New York City District Council of Carpenters Labor Technical College

- 80-hour Construction Skills

A Graduate's Story

Joanna Diaz served for three years as an Administrative Specialist with the U.S. Army. Upon completing her service, Joanna worked as a server and bartender, which left her unfulfilled and unsure about her future career. After seeing a posting for the Jobs4Vets program on NJ.com, she applied. Joanna was the only female in the class, and welcomed the challenge to learn about mold, asbestos, and lead, while gaining new construction skills. Joanna excelled in the program and was drawn to the construction portion of the program. She expressed interest in joining the Carpenters Union to continue her growth, and gain more experience in construction. After completing the NJ Jobs4Vets program, Joanna was accepted into the Carpenters Union apprentice program and has never been happier. Now, four years later Joanna is still enjoying her new career. "I actually have benefits now, I have a 401k," said Joanna. Joanna now has the capacity to help her soon-to- retire parents – something she never imagined she would be able to do. Joanna Diaz remains grateful to the Center for the life-changing opportunity.

"Thank you and your team for offering this opportunity to us, it has helped me a lot! I'm still in the union and I still love working with everyone. You guys have given me a chance to make some major positive changes in my life and I love going to work now."

—*Joanna Diaz, Program Trainee and Graduate*

Trainees Learn Diverse Skills

Through the eight-course program, trainees gained health and safety knowledge and skills in a range of areas, including construction, disaster preparedness, hazardous waste site remediation, management of chemicals, and public health threats. Trainees engaged in lectures, hands-on learning, and scenario-based training. Scenario-based training depicts real-world incidents, allowing trainees to experience situations like the removal and remediation of mold and how to ensure proper fit of personal protective equipment (PPE). The courses provided trainees with the ability to recognize, avoid, and prevent hazards in the workplace.

The core component of the program was to provide skills to the veterans so that they could work safely in new careers focusing on environmental remediation or construction. Each course had a hands-on component so that trainees could apply the knowledge and skills gained. During the training, the veterans built containment areas to safely remove asbestos (using a simulated product for the asbestos), conducted an assessment of a hazardous waste site, and constructed walls with metal studs and

sheetrock. Throughout the program, emphasis was on safe work practices and controls to put in place to reduce hazards.

Upon completion of the eight-course program, trainees were well-equipped to pass licensing and permitting exams in the State of New Jersey. Of the 17 enrolled, 15 completed the program.

Jobs Attained

The Center follows up with trainees to evaluate the success of program graduates attaining employment after the program. More than 50 percent of trainees were employed after completing the program. Employment opportunities included acceptance into the New York City District Council of Carpenters Labor Technical College's apprenticeship program, a start-up environmental cleanup business that employed multiple program graduates, and state agencies conducting environmental assessments. The NIEHS-funded ECWTP provides new careers for hundreds of workers each year across the U.S. Each graduate has a story that shows the success of the program, just like Joanna Diaz.

About ECWTP

Since 1995, the ECWTP has provided pre-employment and health and safety training to thousands of people from underserved communities nationwide. The Program focuses on delivering comprehensive training to increase the number of disadvantaged and underrepresented minority workers in areas such as environmental restoration, construction, hazardous materials/waste handling, and emergency response. Life skills training is also a fundamental component of the ECWTP. The instruction provides trainees with the personal and interpersonal skills required to deal with the challenges of everyday life and to obtain and sustain employment.