



Student Nahlee Suvanvej (right) and her career mentor Tracee Wells are pictured outside the Portland Metro Workforce Training Center, located at Northeast 42nd and Killingsworth.

A Degree and a New Lease on Life

Workforce training center puts student on new path

Enrolling in Portland Community College's Metro Workforce Training Center gave Nahlee Suvanvej not just a degree but a new lease on life.

The Humboldt Neighborhood resident had overcome past addiction issues and mental health challenges to move to a frame of mind where she could start looking at career training possibilities. But it wasn't until the 38-year-old entered the "Discovery Options" class at the workforce training center, located at Northeast 42nd and Killingsworth, that everything became clear. Through that class, Suvanvej received intensive one-on-one coaching and guidance that allowed her to build skills, examine interests and create a plan.

In 2019, Suvanvej participated in the center's Career Launch, which is a one-week workshop held exclusively for non-traditional and non-credit students who are interested in either an academic track with the college or other vocational training. Staff members help them identify career goals and create a personalized plan for success in college, and introduce them to key PCC services like financial aid, academic advising and more.

The Career Launch program is a precursor to PCC's Career Pathway certificate and college degree programs.

"I had a point of contact who knew my situation and created a positive experience," Suvanvej said. "I think this made a major difference and I felt connected to a larger community throughout the entire journey."

Tracee Wells is part of PCC's Community Workforce Development team that oversees Career Launch and connects people to family-wage jobs.

Through a partnership with the Department of Human Services, her team offers career coaching and exploration, skills workshops, and ongoing wrap around support.

"This is pretty much the idea behind Career Launch," Wells said. "Students focus on which academic program or other vocational training track they would like to pursue."

The center's work echoes the college's commitment to equitable student success with 83% of the students being served identifying as women, 56% people of color and 23% persons with disabilities.

"Everyday, we serve some of Oregon's most marginalized and vulnerable students," Wells said. "Nahlee symbolizes the successes we strive to gain from the workshop, as many of our non-traditional students may have multiple academic and employment barriers and can most greatly benefit

from an on-ramp class to better prepare for school.

"We also work closely with our partners like DHS, who provide students with a means to receive an income, food subsidies, healthcare, transportation, and other critical support service assistance while they are in school," she continued.

Wells said that the next Career Launch group of about half dozen cohorts will start in March. Those interested can visit the Portland Metro WTC webpage at pcc.edu/workforce-development/metro/.

As for Suvanvej, she completed the "Peer Support Specialist" and "Basic Life Support" training certification through HealthCareers NW, which is another college workforce development program that is supported by Worksystems. She then moved on and finished the "Foundations in Hu-