**H-1B TechHire Partnership Grant**

**Participant Voices Podcast Series**

**Guest:** *Patrick, Goodwill Industries of the Valley (Roanoke, VA)*

**Intro:** Welcome to the *TechHire Participant Voices* podcast series. As part of the Department of Labor TechHire Partnership grant, 39 community colleges, workforce development boards, and nonprofits across the country spent the last four years developing accelerated IT workforce-training programs geared toward individuals with barriers to employment, including youth, returning citizens, individuals with disabilities, and more.

In this five-part podcast series, TechHire participants and alumni share their experiences with TechHire, and insights into what makes a quality workforce-training program.

**Krista:** I’m Krista Ford, and I’m here with my colleague Lee Domeika. We’re both JFF staffers and TechHire technical assistance team members. On today’s episode, we’re talking to Patrick from Goodwill Industries of the Valley.

Goodwill’s TechHire program focuses on expanding employment opportunities in the IT industry through a wide array of IT-related credentials and on ramps to paid internships and registered apprenticeships.

So, hi, Patrick. Thanks for joining us. Very excited to speak with you today. Could you start us off by maybe just telling us a little bit about yourself?

**Patrick:** Thank you so much for having me. My name is Patrick Curtis. I am a native and current resident of Roanoke, Virginia, sitting here in the middle of the mountains. I am a long-time tech enthusiast. I love mobile phones, computers, anything technology based and kind of new innovative technology that's coming out. And, I mean, I have a beautiful family. I'm married. I have one son who's three years old and one more bundle of joy who will be here in February.

**Krista:** That's excellent. Congratulations.

So where are you now on your TechHire journey? Are you finished, or are you still enrolled?

**Patrick:** So, I have completed the initial TechHire program that I signed up for. The course material that I was given, I finished that. I completed the CompTIA A+ certification, took the exams, and I was put into a job. And that's my new technology career. And that happened back in July. So I've been on the job at Bank of Botetourt for a little over 90 days, probably a little over 100 days now. And that's been going great.

But actually, on my TechHire career, I am kind of in phase two. So Goodwill Industries of the Valley, they actually had another couple sets of certifications that they had available. And the one that I'm taking now is the CompTIA Network+.

**Krista:** That's really excellent, and congratulations to you on your new job.

Could you tell us a little bit about what you're doing now?

**Patrick:** So, right now, like I said, I'm working with Bank of Botetourt, which is a community bank here in Roanoke, Virginia and I work as a help-desk technician. So I support our employees and their computers and printers and peripheral devices just to make sure everything works and is flowing well and all their applications don't crash and make sure everyone's happy for the most part. So I'm glad that everyone has taken me in so well so far. And it's been a good little transition. I've been through a few transitions over the past year and a half, so this has been a positive one.

**Krista:** Yeah, that's excellent. I'm glad to hear that you're getting settled in to your help-desk technician role. And we're definitely going to want to dig into just the role of technology in your workplace and how technology has shaped your work, a little bit later in the conversation.

But for now, I’d love to just know—could you just give me, like, a brief overview of your TechHire experience? What was the program like for you, and maybe any highlights that stood out.

**Patrick:** I went on Goodwill Industry of the Valley, their website, and I filled out, like, an interest form. And so they contacted me. And I think maybe the next day or maybe two days later, I was going into an office with them. And I sat down with them, and we were kind of getting the logistics worked out, seeing if I would be a fit for the program.

And I mean, just to give you a little kind of background of my history, I guess, here in Roanoke, my family had a longstanding business here, and it was a funeral home. And we had that funeral home for—we were a part of it for 67 years. I was actually in the midst of going to funeral school. And I think I had maybe 12 more credits left to become a licensed funeral director.

And so I ended up just stopping that funeral-service degree, enrolled back into our local community college, and started working on an associate degree in business administration. I had, like, four or five credits left. I mean, four or five classes left to taking that, so I started doing that along with this TechHire program. So I was taking kind of two things at once.

**Krista:** Wow. It sounds like TechHire came into your life during a period of transition, and it sounds like it really changed the trajectory of your career.

**Patrick:** That is for sure. I mean, it's been a big transition for us, that's for sure. Like I said, I've always been interested and always been kind of accustomed to technology, so I was kind of the IT man there at the funeral home. So I was the one who installed and operated all of our computers and our server and our printers and stuff like that, the stuff that we didn't outsource. So I was kind of the tech guru at the funeral home. And so it was just a perfect fit of me being able to go into a career in technology.

**Krista:** Mm. That’s awesome. And you know, you started to kind of allude to how you heard about the TechHire program, and I know that we want to go deeper on your experience with our recruitment and enrollment. So I'm actually going to pass it over to Lee to dig into that conversation.

**Lee:** Yeah, definitely. Thanks, Krista.

I’d love to get a deeper sense of what your thoughts are on good recruitment in general. What are some ways you think are really effective in terms of reaching new individuals who are curious about the IT industry? What do you think good recruitment looks like?

**Patrick:** Recruitment is just kind of getting the word out there about your program. That's just one of the main things that I saw kind of a problem with our program here, just because our program was through Goodwill. I mean, when you think about Goodwill, most people just think about going to a thrift store and being able to buy clothes and being able to drop off things that you don't want anymore, that you’re trying to get out your house. So, I mean, I never knew anything about the programs that Goodwill offers and the different career opportunities that they provide for people in need.

**Lee:** So it sounds like what you're saying is for other programs to really be explicit and clear about their mission and the good work they're doing and really do a clear job of communicating that with the community so there's a better understanding of the programs and the services that they're offering.

**Patrick:** Yeah, definitely.

**Lee:** Going back to—and you kind of talked about this a little bit earlier—but your experience with the enrollment process. So getting started with TechHire, after you heard about it but before you started classes, can you tell us more about the enrollment process? What did you really like about it, and what do you think could have been different or strengthened?

**Patrick:** We scheduled a meeting for me to come in, and I sat down with a gentleman named Chris. After that conversation with him, I felt like I could do anything. And I think he did a great job of making you feel like this is what you need to do. It made me just want to drop everything I was doing and concentrate on getting into this Career in Technology.

**Lee:**. I really feel like the enrollment part of a training program can really make or break whether or not a participant wants to advance and go on. And you mentioned the supportive staff, and that's also such an integral part of enrollment. So it's really good to hear you speak more about that.

I guess my last question related to recruitment is kind of on the employer side. You know, TechHire programs partner with local employer partners and giving employers a chance to kind of expand their hiring process and expand their own recruitment. And I'm wondering if you had any thoughts on that or any recommendations in general for employers, IT employers, who are striving to diversify their hiring process, their recruitment, or even just their workplaces in general.

I just wish they would have gave the candidates maybe a heads up on the time commitment that was needed to complete this program, or maybe just give us a disclaimer saying, “Hey, it's not going to be easy breezy,” So, I mean, I'm not sure how bad the rate is of people not sticking with the program just because of the nature of it, whether it's a time commitment or whether they just are not meant to be in or it's just not for them. But that's something that maybe they should think about.

**Lee:** Patrick, thanks so much for sharing those thoughts. It sounds like, to sum it up, you're really recommending that program staff be kind of clear about expectations, whether it's length of time for training or expectations around an internship. Thanks so much for your thoughts on that. And I'm going to actually pass it back to Krista to talk more about education and training.

**Krista:** Yeah, that's perfect.

And so, Patrick, we kind of want to dig into your training experience within the program. So to start us off there, I'm curious to know, were most of your classes in person, or did you do any online classes?

**Patrick:** Well, lucky for me, I got to do a little of both. So the CompTIA A+ certification is split into two tests. And for the first test, which is known as the Core 1 or the 1001, that was all in-classroom training. And for that, I mean, I had night classes. They were three days a week for maybe, like, two to three hours. Again, the pace of that program or that class was pretty swift. We were given a big, thick textbook that was probably, I mean, it was at least 1,000 pages. And that one book was just the first test. And so we were expected to read a chapter or two per night and then come to class with questions about what we read or what we didn't understand.

And our teacher, my instructor for that part, for the 1001 made things really fun for us, that's for sure. He was really hands on. Luckily for us, which was great, he actually taught at a local university here, and he had access to a lab with a lot of equipment and a lot of devices. And, I mean, kind of anything we could think about that was in this book, he had in his classroom. And so maybe one or two nights per week we would go over to that university, and he would allow us to kind of play hands on with the equipment that he had, whether it was taking apart a computer or looking at a motherboard or teaching us how to read sticks of RAM or looking at routers and switches. He had all the cable in there. He had everything there that he could show it to us in person. And so that made things very fortunate for us, and that made things kind of click a little bit better rather than just from reading it in the book and just looking at it on PowerPoint slides.

Now, for the second part of the A+ certification exam, which is known as the 1002 or the Core 2, that ended up being a remote-learning experience for me. And it was a little different. It was more self-taught. But for that, they ended up having kind of like a virtual study session with an instructor, and he was great. He knew his stuff. But we just didn't have the hands-on experience. So he gave me access to some virtual labs, and so those virtual labs, they kind of coordinated with the book. And they had you do exercises on a computer that were provided in the book, per se.

And so I got to work through those hands-on labs, per se. So I had to do stuff at the Command prompt, and I had to learn how to access wireless networks and troubleshoot them. I had to learn how to go to text editors and maneuver things around and make things—see how if you change a line in a text editor and save it to something, it might change your whole system in the registry. So I had more of a self-taught, self-paced—not so much self-paced, but it was self-taught—in the second part. And I met with him every, I think, Thursday, and we would just do question-and-answer sessions, and he would kind of make sure I'm on pace reading wise. And he would try to give me a lot of hints and a lot of intel of how the test will be and how the questions are worded and how to just do my best on it.

**Krista:** That’s excellent. And, you know, it's interesting that you kind of got to experience both in-person learning and remote learning.

And I'm curious—and it sounds like you really enjoy the opportunity to have some hands-on experience and to really learn in a way that was interactive. And so I'm curious as to whether you have any advice for both educators and for students who are kind of navigating remote learning, you know, given our current situation. You have any kind of key pieces for how to make it interactive or for how to support students in being successful in a remote environment?

**Patrick:** I think one of the key things that was positive for me was just the constant contact that we had with the whole program. Like I said, every week, we just had a standing meeting on Thursdays, to get on the computer and look at each other's face and ask questions and talk about technology and talk about what's in this book and make sure I understand what the words are saying or what I'm reading. And so that constant contact made, it was almost as good as being in the classroom, but it made things click. And I think with the program as a whole, the whole TechHire grant program as a whole, they stayed in constant contact with us weekly, kind of biweekly. As I said earlier, there was a list of jobs that were sent to us that were virtual job fairs that we could attend with employers throughout our community who would get on and do interviews with us. And I mean, they would be looking to hire. And so we had access to that. They had different—other professionals in the community would come on to what they call tech talks, and they would give us interview tips, or they would give us things to work on for our resume, or they would just tell us how to dress in an interview. I mean, it was things like that that they provided for us throughout this whole pandemic experience for this Careers in Technology program that made us succeed in it. And I mean, they stayed on top of us, for one. They didn't, okay, when the pandemic hit, it’s not they just didn't lose contact with us. It’s not like they just didn't call us anymore or they didn't email us anymore. They kept in contact with us, and they made sure that we were on track and that we were still planning to take this examination and do the best we could.

**Krista:** That's a really great response. And it sounds like constant communication is really helpful, that interactive learning and finding a way to kind of continue that, even if it’s remote, was really helpful. And it makes me wonder about kind of the inverse. Was there anything that was particularly challenging about the training experience, either in person or when you transitioned to remote learning? Or was there anything that you kind of wish had been in place that would have made the experience a little bit smoother for you?

**Patrick:** For the in classroom, I think the toughest part for me was just the time commitment. I would wake up, go to work. After work, I would shoot over to wherever we were having classes at, and I mean, for three hours I was in class. And the opposite days, I might have had to go to my local community college because, like I said, I was taking classes there at the same time. And so every day I was going to work, going to school, then coming home at the end of the day. And so I might get home at 8:00 or 9:00. And I mean, lucky for me, I got a beautiful wife who can hold the fort down and make things run. And our son, he helps her out as much as he can, and he's very cooperative. That was probably the toughest thing for us was just the time commitment.

**Krista:** Yeah, absolutely. And that's a really common challenge for adult learners, is just figuring out how to balance school and work and life. So, yeah, thank you so much for sharing that.

And actually, that's a perfect segue. We want to talk a little bit about any supports that you may have been able to access outside of the classroom, whether that's tutoring or advising. And so I'm actually going to hand it over to Lee to talk a little bit more about the student-support aspects of the program.

**Lee:** Thanks, Krista.

Patrick, you talked about having access to really enthusiastic, and what sounds like, incredibly communicative TechHire program staff, which sounds like it was really helpful. I’d love to hear from you maybe more broadly about the student support that they offer. This could be anything from academic or tutoring support, or even helping with challenges that students experience unrelated to TechHire or school-related work. But would love to get a picture of that from you.

**Patrick:** Well, I guess with school related, the two instructors that I had, they were very knowledgeable. They knew their stuff. I think they both had college degrees. They both had certifications. So they had a mix of both things that you need to succeed in this field. And not everybody has certifications, not everybody has formal education who work in IT, but they had a mix of both so they could kind of give you pointers from both ends of it or what direction to go in if you're interested in cybersecurity or what direction to go in if you're interested in networking. They could kind of give you a hunch of those things because they've worked in jobs in those fields. So they had a lot of intel and a lot of advice to give us outside of just teaching us the material.

On the administration side of it, they stayed in contact with us, whether it was calling us or it was scheduling some kind of event that they wanted all of us to come to. They had those tech-talk events. At first we were going in person. It was just kind of like a meetup hangout. And they would have, most of the time they would have an employer from our area come out who was seeking employees, and they would tell us about their organization or their place of employment, and they would tell us about the job and what it entails and what they're looking for and what they want to see on a resume and what skills you need in order to kind of get your foot in the door. And so they would set up things like that monthly. And they would set up workshops for us to attend. And they just always had something for us to kind of do, other than just going to class, so it made things good for us.

**Lee:** That’s awesome. I'm really happy to hear that.

And I'm really curious to know if you—kind of going off of that, what you were just talking about—if you have any recommendations for other training providers or other supportive staff engaged in programs like this as they think about expanding supportive services and then thinking about, you know, like you said, everything else that's happening in the world that can sometimes take priority in people's lives. What are your recommendations for other programs in thinking about meeting the needs of participants effectively?

**Patrick:** I think for organizations in general, just when they're going kind of virtual, they just need to be patient with their participant or whoever they're trying to communicate with. Not everyone has done this type of thing before.

And I mean, luckily at Goodwill, they had a computer lab. So if you didn't have a computer at home, they had a computer lab on site that you could go in and do all the work. Right beside Goodwill was a library that they had just built. I think it's not even two years old, and so there's another computer lab in there. So our community, we had a good place for people to get the things they needed technology wise.

**Lee:** Awesome.

And I guess my last question before I give it back to Krista, going back to what you were saying around the supportive services that were offered for job placement and career readiness, getting more involved with interacting with employers or beefing up your resume, and did you find those services really helpful, and did that kind of help you lead to the position you’re in now or help you think about the positions that you would like to aspire to?

**Patrick:** Oh, for sure. The kind of workshops that they provided for us and the handouts that they gave to us, that was, I mean, a lot of them involved interviewing. I went on probably, I think I applied to maybe 15 or so jobs before I landed this one with Bank of Botetourt. And I mean, I had my hand full of interviews, whether they were—most of them were virtual just because the time we’re in. So they started off either being a phone interview or a Zoom meeting or something like that. And so the things that we went through in those workshops, they immediately went into effect when I was interviewing.

I mean, one of the employers who came in and talked to us, they talked about how they interview, and they gave us insight of they're going to ask specific questions about technology just to see where you are technology wise. And so that gave me thinking like, yeah, we need to really hit these books hard and know our stuff, because when they come and ask us questions about different types of servers or different types of switches and connections to those devices, we’ve got to know something, and we’ve got to have an answer ready for them. We can't just be like, “Oh, I don't know,” because, I mean, of all the many applications to fly across their desk, it doesn't take much to get an *x*, right?

But I definitely think all the workshops that they put on, I mean, they really helped us. We send in our resumes to one of the professionals, and they would read over them and give us feedback. And they would tell us, “Oh, you should do something to make your name pop in the heading,” or “Maybe make this list style instead of sentence style.” They would do little tips like that just to make our resume stand out from others and make it more concise and make it just pop out from the table, because I'm sure most of them only get glanced at for about 20, 30 seconds, then they're on to the next one. So it was a lot of effort on their part to provide us with some tools.

**Lee:** That’s excellent. And I feel like we have such a great picture of the many ways that Goodwill was able to provide support to their participants. So thank you so much, Patrick.

I'm going to pass it back to Krista to kind of cover our last topic around future of work. And really just maybe your thoughts on where technology is going in the workplace. So, Krista, I'll kick it back to you.

**Krista:** Patrick, at the beginning of our conversation, you talked a little bit about working as a help-desk technician, obviously a role that involves a lot of technology. And so I'm kind of curious to get your general thoughts on kind of the rise of technology in the workplace and how it's shaped your work.

**Patrick:** So I think with my job in particular, technology is very relevant with the banking industry, just because there’s transactions being made. Of course, going back to older times when I'm sure banks just didn't have technology, and they operated off how much cash was in your drawer, and you had to keep track of that and tally it in the books throughout the day, but now everything is operated in a database system.

And so we have to make sure that that database is up and running and running smoothly.

**Krista:** That makes a lot of sense. And, you know, just going back to your experience with the TechHire program, I'm curious to kind of connect the dots here. And could you talk us through how the TechHire program prepared you to kind of succeed in this changing labor market?

**Patrick:** I think this TechHire program, for one, it just gave me a chance. At that point in my life, I didn't know what I was going to do. I was kind of really at a loss because so much stuff had happened to me over that month. And throughout this whole TechHire program, so much stuff has happened to me and my family. And I mean, it's a long list. And so they provided just a breath of fresh air, and it provided me a way of just being able to stop everything I was doing and concentrate on one thing and learn this material and complete these labs. And luckily for me, I knew probably half of the stuff in the first book, if not three-quarters of the stuff in the first book, because I had been around technology so long and I’d worked with technology so long. And so they just provided a way for me to put my skill set and the knowledge that I already had to better use and get me placed in the job. But that was the main thing: they provided a way.

**Krista:** That's perfect.

And actually that's a perfect segue to our last question, which is just around your plans for the future. I know at the beginning of the conversation you mentioned that getting into the TechHire program was a little bit of a career shift for you, even though you had been exposed to technology before the TechHire program. But I'm curious to know how participating in the TechHire program has kind of changed the trajectory of your career or shaped your long-term goals.

**Patrick:** this program just provided me a way to get a job in a career that I love. I think it’s definitely a career that I'm going to stick with right now. I'm working towards another certification called the CompTIA Network+, and I'm in the midst of tightening the screws with that, just making sure I know all my material so I can take that exam and hopefully get certified in that. And hopefully, after that, I can take another certification that Goodwill offers through the same TechHire grant called the CompTIA Security+. Hopefully, by that time, I’ll know which direction I want to go in IT wise, but, I mean, I love the place that I work for right now. I like the fact it's community oriented. It's great. I think it's—I mean, it's a small business. I know that I’m making a difference there. I know that the community loves this place. It's not just a big bank that’s in a place that has kind of no ties to the community. They do a lot of tuition stuff, like scholarship wise, for students. They do a lot of—they sponsor a lot of events and programs in our area. So they're doing a lot of good, and I'm glad to be a part of that.

**Krista:** That's excellent. And I'm glad to hear it. Congratulations on your successes so far, and good luck on all your future endeavors with TechHire and beyond.

And to close this out, I guess I just wanted to ask, would you leave us with any kind of final pieces of advice, either for training providers, for learners, for educators?

**Patrick:** Definitely keep the program going. It's making a world of difference, definitely in my life and I'm sure in the lives of others who have, whether it was like me, they were in a transition period of going from a company that was 67 years old to starting brand new in a new career, or they were fresh out of high school and they just wanted to do what they do well and work with computers. Just keep doing this. Keep it going. And main thing is put the word out about it so people know what is out there for—I mean, this was free. It was a free program for me to take a part of and to just embrace and just to make my life easier because it's been a big, big blessing for me and my family.

**Krista:** That’s perfect.

Thank you so much, Patrick. It's been a pleasure speaking with you. We definitely appreciate your time.

**Lee:** Yes. Thank you, Patrick.

**Patrick:** Thank you so much, Miss Krista and Miss Lee. This has been a pleasure. I mean, I really appreciate you all getting a hold of me and finding my local organization to have an interview with me. And I want to thank what the U.S. Department of Labor and what JFF and all the other organizations that helped put this together. Thank you so much.

**Outro:** Thank you for listening to the *TechHire Participant Voices* podcast series. Please be sure to check out our other podcast episodes found on WorkforceGPS. For more information on the TechHire Partnership grant, please visit www.doleta.gov.