**H-1B TechHire Partnership Grant**

**Participant Voices Podcast Series**

**Guest:** *Sujeiry, UAW-LETC – Los Angeles Valley College (Los Angeles, CA)*

**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 from across the country spent the last four years developing tech-focused training programs geared toward individuals with barriers to employment, including youth, returning citizens, and individuals with disabilities.

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. Today we’re speaking with Sujeiry, from TechHire L.A., which is UAW-LETC’s TechHire program. TechHire L.A. works closely with the Los Angeles Valley College to train individuals for careers in the IT industry.

So, Sujeiry, thanks so much for making time to be here with us today. We're really excited to learn more about your TechHire experience. Could you start us off by just telling us a little bit about yourself and how you found out about the TechHire program?

**Sujeiry:** My name is Sujeiry. I am from the San Fernando Valley. I think I've been machining for about a year and a half. The way I found out about the Tech program was, actually, I was actually taking a blueprint class, and the T.A. for the TechHire class was in my class. And I think he had mentioned it to the professor to see if he could advertise it there. And he advertised, and I had a lot of questions. Luckily, he was in my class, so I was able to get enrolled, like, the next day.

**Krista:** Wonderful. And where are you now on your TechHire journey? Are you are you still taking classes, or have you completed?

**Sujeiry:** I have completed the program. I'm currently still a student in the same kind of classes, in the same trade. But with the Tech program, I did complete it.

**Krista:** And can you tell us a little bit about your TechHire experience in general?

**Sujeiry:** Well, I really enjoyed it. I loved the program. It was kind of like an all-inclusive program where you can learn a little bit of everything in the trade. You know, when I take a class, if it's blueprints, we only read blueprints. If it's machining, we're only machine. And in the program throughout the week, we got to do a little bit of everything.

My favorite part probably had to be the conventional machining. It would be, like, two whole days out of the week, where we just got to be in the shop. And that was the best part.

**Krista:** Definitely. Definitely. Hands-on learning is so important.

Well, Sujeiry, we really like to start at the beginning with the enrollment process and just learn more about your experience, hearing about the TechHire program, and getting started. So I'll hand it over to Lee to talk a little bit about recruitment and enrollment.

**Lee:** Yeah. Thanks, Krista. Sujeiry, it’s so awesome to hear that you heard about TechHire through another course that you were engaged in. We'd love your thoughts on what Krista was talking about, enrollment, what was your experience while you enrolled in TechHire. And then, also, your insight on recruitment. Did hearing about it through another course feel like it was really influential? Are there other strategies that you think would be useful from a recruitment standpoint that you would want to share with us?

**Sujeiry:** Yeah. The enrollment was really easy. I talked to the T.A. the day before, and he's like, “Oh, well, we were having an orientation next week. Come, and we'll do the paperwork.” And I came in. I met with the TechHire counselor, and she had all the paperwork. She told me, bring this, bring this, bring this. The next day I brought it. I had it all there. It was just, like, filling out a few papers, and I started the orientation the next week.

It was really—it was really easy. I didn't find any problems, and I really don't have suggestions on how to make it better, because it was so easy.

And the way I found out was in the school where the TechHire program was in, and I think maybe if they—I think they only advertised at the school. That’s where I saw the fliers. So maybe if they were to recruit outside of the school, would get maybe a little bit more recruits.

**Lee:** Yeah. That makes sense.

You mentioned the enrollment being pretty quick and easy and then kind of jumping right into orientation. I'd love to talk a little bit about your experience with orientation. What did you find really helpful from an orientation standpoint, right before you start this intensive training program, and then maybe some things that were missing? Were there elements of the orientation that maybe could have been stronger or just things that, looking back, you wish were a part of it?

**Sujeiry:** The orientation was really helpful because I really wasn't sure if I was going to make that commitment, because it was, like, eight hours a day for a whole week. So I wasn’t sure. I was like, “Ooh, that’s kind of like a whole—that’s a 40-hour job, basically.” So I wasn’t sure if I was going to make that commitment. And also, I was kind of afraid that it was going to be really difficult. So when I went to the orientation, they really let me know it was going—like, we're going to start off really slow. And they really explained the stages of the program really well. So I understood at what week, where I would be. And okay, week 10, we're doing this. Week 12, we're doing this. I think that really helped me decide whether I was going to do the program or not.

**Lee:** Awesome. Krista, I might pass it back to you for some questions around education and training.

**Krista:** Thanks, Lee.

Sujeiry, we’d love to learn more about your TechHire classes and your experience with the actual training component of the program. Were your classes mostly in person or online?

**Sujeiry:** We did have all of our classes in person. Since it was manufacturing, it was very much group lessons, and we were all learning it together. They were all in person. And we had one class where we were online, but it was in class. We were just using a program to learn how to program. But the lessons were in person, and I think it helped us a lot.

**Krista:** That’s great. And were there particular things about learning in person or even other aspects about the way the TechHire program was structured that really contributed to you being able to be successful in the program?

**Sujeiry:** Yes. Especially in the conventional machining, we were in groups, different groups, every single time we were learning something. And the professor, or the instructor, the way he structured it was really helpful. He would have one student lead the group. We were all learning it together, but he would assign one student to be the leader of the group, and in that way, making sure we were all safe and following instructions.

Yeah. It was really helpful being in a group, learning it all together.

**Krista:** That makes sense. And it sounds like that sense of community and being able to learn with and learn from your peers is really important.

**Sujeiry:** Yeah. I think, especially machining, you think you know something, but you really don't know until you can explain it and teach it at the same time. So when you’re with your group of people in your group and you're able to explain them how the mill works, how the lathe works, what kind of tooling works for what, then you know you really understand it.

**Krista:** Definitely. That makes sense.

And do you have any thoughts on how the classroom experience can be improved? Or was there anything that you feel could have been done differently to make the classroom experience better for learners?

**Sujeiry:** The training program, the way was set up in stages. We got a calendar every week. It was organized so nicely that we really didn’t have difficulties following along. All the students, we knew on Monday, we had to be here. On Tuesday, we had to be there. They organized it really, really well.

**Krista:** And so it sounds like some of the aspects of the training that played a role in helping you be successful were being able to engage in that in-person, hands-on learning; peer support and that sense of community within the program; and clearly mapped out course sequences that kind of let you keep track of how you can progress through the program.

**Sujeiry:** Yes.

**Krista:** That's awesome. Thanks for sharing your classroom experience with us.

And we'd love to hear a little bit more about how your TechHire program helped you navigate challenges that you faced outside the classroom. So I'll hand it over to Lee to talk a little bit about student-support services.

**Lee:** So, Sujeiry, you touched on this earlier, TechHire program being a huge commitment. I mean, it's definitely a hard decision when you're weighing other things outside of a training program. And one of the things that TechHire grantees and programs really try to do is build out as much student support as possible. So we'd love to know what supports were offered to you that really helped make a difference in terms of maintaining your commitment to the TechHire training, and if there were any challenges that came up in particular that your work with TechHire was able to help you navigate.

**Sujeiry:** Yeah, there was a lot of research. I remember, like, the first week of work, they told me I needed steel-toed boots, and I was like, what? And I reached out to the counselor, and she was like, “Yeah, go ahead and buy them. We'll reimburse you. That’s the TechHire resource that we have.” And I was like, “Oh, great. They’re real expensive.” And they also offered us, like, we can get interview clothes. And that was another resource that I used that was extremely helpful. I know some of my classmates, they would have, like, bus passes, thanks to the workforce resources. And when we were ready to graduate, we were all very nervous about interviews, and we had about four different sessions of different kind of interviews. That was all through workforce.

**Lee:** That's awesome. I love the anecdote about the steel-toed boots. That's great.

If you were to give advice to other programs out there, other TechHire programs or advanced manufacturing-training programs across the country, in terms of student support, what are, like, the top three things you'd recommend to them in terms of considering the needs of their students?

**Sujeiry:** I think the scheduling, maybe having alternative schedules for different students that are maybe full-time. Having bigger reach for maybe, like, someone who wouldn’t hear about manufacturing or other trades.

**Krista:** Earlier you mentioned that as you neared the end of the TechHire program, you were nervous about interviews. Can you tell us a little bit about how your job-search process went and what kinds of supports your TechHire program offered to help you kind of connect with employers and get out to the labor market?

**Sujeiry:** Well, we were really lucky, our graduating class, because it happened to fall a week before manufacturing day. And we were all in this really big job fair. And we were like, “Well, you know, we'll go see, and see what they're about.” And there were 30 different companies offering different apprenticeships, training. Oh, this is starting off. You're an operator; let’s starting off operating and moving up. And what I ended up working for was an apprenticeship, and I'm still in it today, and it's amazing.

**Krista:** Mmm. And was there anything you felt could have been done differently in terms of supports for helping students face challenges outside of a classroom? Any recommendations on student supports that would have been helpful to have in place?

**Sujeiry:** The only kind of support that I think would better the program is continuing, like, more than basic trade skills. You know, having intermediate and advanced, I think those programs would be incredibly helpful.

**Krista:** Definitely. That's a great point.

And I actually wanted to shift gears just a little bit and talk about the rise of technology. As you know, the role of technology in the workplace has really grown significantly over the last few years. And in some ways, the pandemic has actually accelerated the rise of technology in the workplace, as many of us have transitioned to working remotely. And so we’d love to just hear about how technology has shaped your work and get your thoughts on the types of tech skills that workers need to succeed in today's labor market.

**Sujeiry:** Yeah. The technology aspect, I think is really important. Where I work, we do all of our programing through MasterCAM, and this program is computer-aided manufacturing, and there's different levels to it. And in the Tech program, we touched it, we looked at it, we were like, “Okay, we're learning the basics,” and I got very lightly familiar. And when I went to work, I found out that they do all of their programing, all of their 3D printing, machine, everything through that program. So it was nice to be familiar with it.

**Krista:** That's awesome. It sounds like your TechHire program did a really good job preparing you to be able to compete in this increasingly tech-focused economy.

**Sujeiry:** Yeah. They really prepared me, so it didn't really scare me when I saw it. I was like, “Oh, yeah. I'm familiar with that program,” because it's a really intimidating program.

**Krista:** Wonderful.

Any other questions, Lee?

**Lee:** Yeah. Sujeiry, I'm wondering, what are your thoughts on, like, how employers—now that you've gone through a TechHire training program and have interacted with employers—I've heard about this job fair through the Los Angeles Valley Workforce Training Program and have heard great things, and it seems like such a great way to have TechHire participants engage with employers. Do you have any advice in terms of what employers should keep in mind when it comes to reaching talent pools from workforce-training programs, and especially now with regard to COVID-19 and how workplaces are transforming, anything that employers should consider based off your experience?

**Sujeiry:** Yeah. I think employers should really focus on a well-rounded machinist, where, you know, in the program we learned blueprints to conventional to CNC machining. And that's not really common, I think. You know, they gave us a little touch of everything, where all my coworkers, when I ask them, they only do CNC, they only do programing, they only do conventional. So it was a little bit of everything, and I think that's important for employers to consider.

**Lee:** I love that. That's a fantastic answer.

Any other information we should be aware of about your TechHire experience?

**Sujeiry:** I really liked the TechHire experience. I'm still going back to learn more because I didn't think I'd like certain aspects. Like, I really didn't think I would be a really, really good CNC machinist. But since I was exposed to it in the TechHire program, I was really interested. And now I've gone back and followed up on those classes and done setups and done programing. So I really liked how they exposed me to those kind of things.

**Krista:** Sujeiry, I’m curious to know how participating in the TechHire program has changed the trajectory of your career or helped shape your long-term goals.

**Sujeiry:** I used to be a T.A., and I was really set on I was going to be in education and maybe a teacher. That was the path I was going. And I just happened to take a blueprint-reading class, and that's where I was aware—or someone talked about the TechHire program. And it's completely changed what kind of the field that I want to be in. Now I think it's taken over completely over my life. It really changed from day to night, and yeah, it completely changed where I thought I was going to be in, like, five years. Now, if somebody asks me, I’m like, “I just want to be a really good machinist.”

**Krista:** Excellent. That's great to hear.

Any final thoughts or recommendations that you’d like to leave us with?

**Sujeiry:** I think it would have been really nice for the TechHire program to have more of the equipment that we use in the actual trade. You know, we use technology or equipment that they might have used maybe 10, 20 years ago. And when you start working in the field, you're familiar with it because you've seen it before, but it's the things that you actually handle measure with and use, and put in the machines are a little different. And I think that would have been really helpful.

**Krista:** Well, Sujeiry, congratulations on all that you've achieved in the TechHire program, and best of luck with your future endeavors. Thanks so much for speaking with us.

**Sujeiry:** You’re welcome.

**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.