

FROM CLASSROOM TO CAREER: TWO STUDENTS FIND THEIR PATH THROUGH ON-THE-JOB TRAINING

By Jennifer Cordasco

In their final year of high school, Angel Martinez and Keshawn Williams took an important step toward independence and success. The two students in the community-based instruction program at Hobbs High School had been learning valuable life and work readiness skills in their classes, and when a brand-new opportunity arose to participate in On-the-Job Training (OJT) in the high school cafeteria, they eagerly accepted.

The fast-paced cafeteria environment was new and challenging. Angel and Keshawn learned how to manage their time, follow a schedule, and work as part of a team. With guidance from teachers and cafeteria staff, they mastered tasks such as food preparation, serving food, stocking and restocking items, and maintaining cleanliness and safety standards. They developed strong communication skills, built confidence, and took pride in contributing to the school community each day.

As the weeks went by, their hard work and dedication didn't go unnoticed. Both students consistently showed up on time, demonstrated responsibility, and showed genuine enthusiasm for their work. By the end of the OJT experience, the cafeteria staff and school district recognized their outstanding performance—and offered them permanent employment.

“Angel and Keshawn have been successful because they had an opportunity to work with us while they were still in school,” says Food Services Coordinator Sonya Moore. “This early exposure was key in preparing them for the workforce. We value their contribution to our team.”

NMDVR had worked with them for several years to develop their job skills and explore potential career paths. With limited OJT options in the Hobbs area, the agency joined with the high school to offer this opportunity in the cafeteria and paid the students' wages during their training.

Now, both young men are thriving in their roles. They continue to work successfully in the cafeteria, maintaining the same positive attitude and strong work ethic they showed as students. Their journey is a powerful example of how hands-on experiences and supportive instruction can open doors to meaningful employment and lifelong confidence.

“I got to learn and got a good job,” Keshawn explains.

For information about how both employers and participants can benefit from On-the-Job Training, contact your nearest NMDVR office. There are two dozen locations across the state: dvr.state.nm.us/locations/.



Angel Martinez (left) and Keshawn Williams on the loading dock at the Hobbs H.S. cafeteria.

The New Mexico Division of Vocational Rehabilitation helps individuals with disabilities find suitable employment. To do so, NMDVR partners with employers seeking to enhance their workforce. With a long history of success and proven methodology for making the best fits, NMDVR is committed to helping participants thrive in their communities. For more information, visit dvr.state.nm.us or call 505-954-8500.

The Vocational Rehabilitation program receives 78.7% of its funding through a grant from the U.S. Department of Education. For federal fiscal year 2025, the total awarded was \$26,800,619. The remaining 21.3% is funded by state appropriations and transfers from the Commission for the Blind and Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing.

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