

A New Leaf: Telling Untold Stories, Jason's Story

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by Candy Thompson

Jason worked as a professional plumber for more than 20 years but found himself unemployed when Arizona's housing market collapsed. He had never competed for employment before and wasn't sure where to start. Jason's meager savings dwindled over the next four years while he worked odd jobs and without adequate health insurance. He struggled to find the necessary care his wife Shawna's multiplying health needs required. When he did, it wasn't affordable.

Although Jason had decades of professional work experience behind him, he had absolutely no experience in navigating a competitive job market. He worried that his age was a barrier for obtaining employment. Jason learned about A New Leaf's MesaCAN Workforce Development Program at a job fair and with their assistance, quickly got to work on developing his resume and interviewing skills. He also met with an onsite financial coach to address his delinquent credit, which over the past few years had become a barrier for employment as well.

While working on employment, the bills and the anguish continued to mount. Over time, Jason and his wife found themselves facing eviction from their rental home. Through MesaCAN, he was able to pay the rent and buy some additional time.

A few weeks later, staff assisted Jason with submitting several online job applications which led to his securing three interviews for positions he was qualified for. With an updated resume, a Letter of Explanation regarding his credit history, and practiced interview skills, Jason set off to meet with employers. He was ecstatic to receive not one, but two job offers.

Jason now maintains a full-time position in his professional field, earning \$24 an hour with the benefits he so desperately needed. Jason and Shawna are grateful to have been able to stay in their home. He continues to work on his financial plan, to repair his credit history and rebuild his savings. Jason has even participated in home buying education classes and has added "owning a home" as a five-year goal. A New Leaf's MesaCAN will be there every step of the way as he works toward long-term financial stability.

A New Leaf's MesaCAN provides community assistance programs including Workforce Development and Individual Development Accounts (savings plans with matched funds) for those interested in easing the burden of college costs and/or purchasing their first home. Additional collaborators on site include the WIC and Immunization programs, MariSol Federal Credit Union and VITA Volunteer Income Tax Assistance (during tax season). Visit www.TurnaNewLeaf.org for more information.