

PARTICIPANT PROFILE:

# José Romero, Scoring with GOAL!



## Spanish-language training program provides career opportunities to onetime asylum-seeker

José Romero once had a comfortable life in Venezuela, with a job he enjoyed at Corpoelec, the state-owned electric company. But in 2016, as his country's political crises escalated, he knew he needed to get his family to a safe place with more opportunity, so he and his wife packed up their two young sons and sought asylum in the United States.

José made that move out of necessity. His family's safety was his main concern. But he ended up finding not just security in his new home, but new opportunities as well.

A training program designed for Spanish-speaking workers helped José tap into skills and capabilities he had never fully used, opening doors to new career prospects.

When José and his family arrived in the United States, they made their way to Goshen, Indiana, where José got a job on the assembly team at Lippert Components, a manufacturer of parts for recreational vehicles, manufactured homes, trailers, buses, boats, heavy trucks, and more.

José saw the job at Lippert as a means to an end. It gave him a way to provide for his family and build a better life for his sons and new daughter. "The job wasn't something I necessarily liked, but was started out of necessity," he said through a translator.

But Julio Cruz, one of Lippert's personal development coaches, felt that José had the potential to move beyond the assembly operation and help the company in other ways. "Julio told me he saw leadership in me," José said.

Julio encouraged José to participate in a program called GOAL! (Growing Opportunities in America for Latinos!). A training program that helps Spanish-speaking workers develop the skills necessary for in-demand production jobs, GOAL! combines English language instruction with a Spanish version of the Manufacturing Skill Standards Council's Certified Production Technician (CPT) program. It's funded by a U.S. Department of Labor TechHire Grant to the Labor Institute for Training (LIFT), an Indiana-based workforce intermediary. JFF provides executive support and services to assist with LIFT's program delivery.



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José initially looked at GOAL! as an opportunity to understand what he could get out of the CPT certification. “I wasn’t sure what I was getting myself into,” he said.

But his point of view changed when his professor, like Julio Cruz, let him know that he had potential. The professor picked him out on his first day and told him, “You’re going to be a leader,” José recalled. “I couldn’t let him down!” From that day on, José dedicated himself to the program, learning skills such as tool identification, workplace safety, and conflict resolution.

If there was any downside to participating in the GOAL! program, it was the fact that José had to make sacrifices as he juggled work, training, and his life at home. Most notably, he didn’t have very much time to spend with his family. “I’d leave at 5 a.m. to go to work, then go to class, then get home so late in the evening,” he said. By the time he returned home, his infant daughter would be asleep and he would have just a little time with his boys.

And just being home didn’t mean he was always available to his wife and kids, either, because he often needed to study. “I had to make tough decisions that were unpopular with the family,” he recalled, explaining that his children would be sad when he was unable to play because he had to take time to review course materials.

It was “physically, mentally, and emotionally exhausting,” he said.

But in the end, it was well worth it.

GOAL! helped José understand the importance of quality and process, and the training he received prepared him to put those lessons to work on the job. He notices details he hadn’t noticed before, including safety concerns (such as cables on the floor), and he has a newfound confidence.

**“It’s helping me tremendously,” José said. “This course will give you a better appreciation for what you do. You’ll no longer look at your job as just a job.”**

José also believes that people who participate in GOAL! will find that supervisors and managers will no longer see them as just employees, either. “I really believe leadership sees me through a different lens,” he said.

Shortly after José earned his CPT credential, management approached him with an opportunity to join Lippert’s engineering department. “That isn’t the norm,” he said. “They don’t ask anyone to join that. The certification gave me that opportunity.”

In addition to opening up new opportunities, the training José received through the GOAL! program also spurred him to shift the way he approaches his work. “I’ve noticed a tremendous change in myself,” he said. “It’s contributed to the way I approach my job and how I’ve changed my practice. I put more emphasis on the quality and production of my work.”



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The change must be evident to José’s colleagues and managers. He was named employee of the week and he received an excellent evaluation in his two-year performance review.

**“When you enter the program, you may enter as a participant,” he said. “But when you end, I’m positive that you will exit with the possibility of becoming a supervisor. All it will do is benefit you.”**

The program inspired José so much that he took on a part-time position as a coach for GOAL! and is now a CPT teacher for Horizon Education Alliance at Goshen College. “This is where I’ve gotten the most satisfaction,” he said. “I’m helping others who are in the same situation as I was, and I can help people understand the materials. It’s a great feeling when people get it.”

José noted that the Spanish-language coursework not only gives more people an opportunity to learn, but also helps foster a sense of belonging among Spanish-speaking students.

“I’ve talked to many Latinos about the program,” he said. “In all their time they’ve been in America, they’ve never seen a program so focused on helping Latinos. It’s an opportunity of a lifetime. I highly encourage all of them to take advantage of the opportunity.”

José attributes his success to the support he has received from friends and members of his

family—both those in the United States and his parents in Venezuela, who he often speaks with by phone. “They are so proud of me,” he said through tears, describing how worried he is about them because of the suffering they have endured in his home country.



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José said that all of the sacrifices he made and all of the work he put into the GOAL! program and the CPT certification were more about his family than they were about himself.

“My wife is elated,” he said. “She’s super excited about the doors that have opened up for me.”

“There’s nothing better than for your children to see that your hard work does pay off,” he said. “It warms your heart the way your family looks at you. It’s well worth all the sacrifices I made.”

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