

Marlana Armstrong



GAINESVILLE, Fla. — You might be surprised to learn that Marlana Armstrong is just 19 years old. After all, it's not just any teenager that has the drive to start their own company.

"My entire life I've been in school... I step into Startup Quest and I'm introduced to an **entirely different world**,"

Marlana, the CFO of O-Bio Inc., has done just that. At the age of 19, Marlana enrolled in Startup Quest® with a STEM Ready scholarship from CareerSource NCFL.

"My entire life I've been in school... I step into Startup Quest and I'm introduced to an entirely different world," she says.

With the resources she found at Startup Quest, Marlana was able to talk with professionals who have actually lived many of the experiences she was learning about through her research. Through the support from the staff, the trained researchers, and her team, O-Bio Inc. was born.

"What 19-year-old gets to start up a company that is biomedical with all of these really smart people who are professionals? It's just been a crazy opportunity... and all because of Startup Quest," she says.

CareerSource NCFL gave Marlana access to an internship with STEM Ready, a program for which she has nothing but praise.

"STEM Ready is an opportunity for employers to experience subsidized... labor for months at a time, and I personally think that is so valuable for people in general," she says.

Providing opportunities for paid, real-work work experience to those who are unemployed who are unemployed stimulates both the local and national economy, not to mention providing a mutually beneficial situation for employer and employee.

"If you're not employed, you feel like you're in a rut. If you're on the employer's side [and] you don't have the people to do your jobs, you're in a rut," Marlana says. The STEM Ready program "takes businesses from level 1 to level 5" by giving employers and employees alike the chance to work together towards a common goal.

Marlana is grateful for the opportunities she has found because of her time with Startup Quest.

"Because I was introduced to it early, it's motivated me to go and do something way bigger than I could have ever imagined myself doing," she says. With big ideas and strong motivation like Marlana's, we're confident her successful career is only just beginning.



James Coats



GAINESVILLE, Fla. – Finding, hiring, and training the right people to fill open positions can be a daunting task for any business. Fortunately, for businesses in Alachua and Bradford Counties, CareerSource North Central Florida can help.

Take Phalanx Defense Systems in Gainesville, Florida. Phalanx develops and manufactures advanced life-saving equipment such as protective vests, personal concealed armor, and helmets for emergency first responders and other protection and defense organizations.

Phalanx depends on their partnership with CareerSource NCFL to find talent for their business and help cover the expenses of preparing those workers for long-term careers.

James Coats, the founder of Phalanx Defense Systems, is very vocal about his positive experience working with the team at CareerSource NCFL. “The partnership between Phalanx Defense Systems and CareerSource is a very unique one. Working with CareerSource is something that most businesses don’t get the opportunity to do. We make advanced life-saving equipment. CareerSource has become part of our tool bag to help us save lives,” he says.

Recently, CareerSource NCFL hosted a career fair and invited local businesses in the Advanced Manufacturing industry to exhibit and give potential job seeking candidates the opportunity to see which companies are looking for new talent. Attendees are able to speak with hiring managers about current company openings, something James believes is very beneficial.

In addition to participating in industry-specific job fairs, Phalanx continues to work closely with CareerSource NCFL to find dedicated workers for their team.

“[Our partnership with CareerSource NCFL] has allowed us to find qualified interns that bring something to the team – that all focused on life-saving equipment,” he says. “We’ve been able to work exclusively with [CareerSource NCFL] to find qualified interns.”

With the help of STEM Ready, an internship program provided by CareerSource and USDOL, Phalanx is able to provide paid internships for vetted talent.

Working with CareerSource NCFL is very helpful, James says, because they provide a selection of applicants who are interested in the industry rather than job seekers who simply apply for every position available.

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As the products Phalanx develops and manufactures are vital for saving lives, finding a new hire that’s a good fit for the team is imperative. Working with CareerSource NCFL and exhibiting at the Advanced Manufacturing Fair provided another group of promising applicants for them.

“As a small business – as a niche business – that focuses on saving lives, this is one of the best partnerships that one can imagine,” says James.

The best part of that partnership? Finding and hiring qualified candidates who are committed to their work and giving them the opportunity to begin a long-term, promising career.



Paul Jackson

GAINESVILLE, Fla. – Paul Jackson is a recent graduate who didn't feel like he had a lot of direction. He enlisted the help of a career counselor at the former Job Corps Center in Gainesville to start searching for work.

After working with his counselor, she recommended Paul talk to a Staffing Specialist at CareerSource North Central Florida. Paul took her advice and was eager to learn more about what other career options might be available to him.

"We started talking – she was around my age, so she kind of understood what I was going through," says Paul.

When asked how his life compares with how things might have been just a year ago, Paul answers without hesitation. "Oh, there's no comparison, whatsoever. This has actually gotten me out of the house and moving forward, and actually being focused," he says.

Working together, Paul and his Staffing Specialist prepared a resume and applied for an internship position with Phalanx Defense Systems, a Gainesville-based small business that develops and manufactures safety equipment for emergency first responders and other defense and protection-centered organizations. After he had applied, Paul attended the industry-specialized Advanced Manufacturing job fair hosted by CareerSource NCFL a few days later.

At the job fair, Paul was able to meet James Coats, founder of Phalanx Defense Systems. James is no stranger to working closely with CareerSource NCFL to find hard workers and vetted talent for his company. "We absolutely use CareerSource, 100 percent. It's my hope that they continue this program because most



of the people that we ran through this [internship] program, we've kept. That's an amazing percentage" James says.

Thanks to STEM Ready, a paid internship program provided by CareerSource NCFL and USDOL, Paul was able to participate and gain valuable work experience.

Paul has nothing but positive things to say about his time working with CareerSource NCFL. "[My Staffing Specialist] was amazing! She walked me through everything; her communication was stellar. I never felt like I was being ignored or not helped or assisted with the goals I wanted to work on," he says.

With support and training from the team at Phalanx Defense Systems, Paul has gained a number of valuable skills and has found a place with a company that appreciates his work and dedication.

Paul has some advice for those considering working with CareerSource NCFL: "I definitely recommend doing it. It's life-changing! You won't regret it. As long as you put in the work and effort required, people will see that and give you a chance."

Paul's story, like the countless other job seekers that CareerSource NCFL has helped, is unique. Thanks to his commitment to himself and his career and continued hard work, Paul has a bright future ahead.



SUCCESS STORY

James Parenteau



GAINESVILLE, Fla. — James Parenteau, Business Development Lead at Viper Q, knows the value of a good employee. That's why he went to CareerSource NCFL when his company was hiring.

"We heard about CareerSource through a friend and knew that they were offering a grant to start hiring more employees, and they'd pay to train them," James says. "We looked into it, we decided it was a fit for us, we started to use it, we hired a number of employees through it and it allowed us to train them."

ViperQ is a tech startup that works with bars, restaurants, and other brands to build marketing software that helps them run and market themselves more efficiently. But finding the right talent to bring on was a struggle.

"When we heard about STEM Ready, the main interest for us was being able to hire employees and not actually have to pay them. We could groom them while they're getting funded by the state—it allows us to really look into what they can do, what they can't do... and allows us to find out a lot about them before actually committing to hiring them," he says.

Through the STEM Ready program, the employee's first 480 hours on the job is funded by the state. This allows employers and employees to get a feel for each other and discover whether they're a good fit. According to James, this is the perfect amount of time to acclimate a new employee to the job and evaluate their performance.

"If it's a good fit for us and a good fit for them... we bring them on board. If it's not, they still learned a lot from us... both parties end up happy."

Were it not for CareerSource NCFL and the STEM Ready program, ViperQ might not be where it is today.

As James says, it's hard for them to take a risk on hiring new employees—before STEM Ready, a huge portion of their funds was going towards hiring.

"This really allowed us to **grow a lot quicker** than we anticipated, so this is something that has tremendously helped us,"

The CareerSource and USDOL paid internship program has allowed them to use that part of their budget on marketing instead, which in turn gave them the opportunity to test their product and develop new iterations of it before it hit the market.

"This really allowed us to grow a lot quicker than we anticipated, so this is something that has tremendously helped us," he says. "CareerSource seems to be really helpful for us especially. A lot of startups in the community we've talked to seem to really benefit from what they're doing."

"I would definitely hire through CareerSource again. We had a great experience."

VIPERQ



Nick Bivilac

GAINESVILLE, Fla. – Some people just need a little boost to get them to where they want to be. For Nick Bivilac, that boost was the STEM Ready program offered through CareerSource NCFL.

Nick is currently working for ViperQ, a software development company he found with the help of STEM Ready, a paid internship program provided by CareerSource NCFL and USDOL. Previously he'd had some experience in both marketing and web development, but lacked the direction and the opportunities he needed to build his career.

That's when he found CareerSource NCFL. "I worked with [a Staffing Specialist] and overall, it was a pretty smooth process," he says. "She was very attentive and I would say, empathetic. I felt like I wasn't just a number—she took my case seriously."

Nick had the opportunity to sit down with one of the ViperQ employees and immediately felt a connection. "I met with [James Parenteau of ViperQ] and we started to discuss the possibility of me helping out... It seemed to be a good fit for where I was, and also for him," he says.

Within two weeks, Nick was approved for STEM Ready and was working for ViperQ. "I feel like [my Staffing Specialist] did everything she could to get me through efficiently," he says.

Today, Nick is filling in gaps in his knowledge and learning valuable skills that he never expected to encounter (along with some he did.) He feels he's clicked well with his employer and works with a skilled, tight-knit team.

"Life is good, overall. I'm much happier, I feel like I have more experience," Nick says. "I'm working on something



that I truly enjoy, I think I'm working on something important that will make an impact."

He credits this opportunity to STEM Ready and the helpful staff at CareerSource NCFL.

"I feel like [my Staffing Specialist] **did everything she could** to get me through efficiently,"

"STEM Ready was such a lubricant for putting me in front of really skilled people and getting me a hire, getting me experience," he says. "It was just such a good segway into [my career], it definitely accelerated me getting experience and working in this field that I want to continue [in]."

As for the future, Nick hopes to stay with ViperQ. "The culture is a good fit for me and, like I said before, I'm really happy working there and I like what I'm doing," he says. "I feel like I'm [making] an impact and I'm learning a lot every day and doing a lot of actual stuff that creates results."

But even if it doesn't work out with ViperQ in the long run, he's not worried. "Worst case I can put [the experience] on my resume, but I think it'll go a lot further than that," he says.

VIPERQ

