

Southern Border Region

San Diego County Veterans' Employment-Related Assistance Program

Santana Belmont desperately needed a second chance in life. Last fall, he got that second chance at Able-Disabled Advocacy, a non-profit organization in San Diego that provides employment and training services to individuals with disabilities and other barriers to employment.

Santana served as a military officer in the U.S. Marines. But a tough adjustment to civilian life led him down a path of crime and to a prison sentence. After serving his time, Santana was determined to turn his life around and was referred to the Veterans' Employment-Related Assistance Program.

"When I met him, he was a sweet guy, very motivated and cooperative," said August Balilo, case manager/IT instructor at Able-Disabled Advocacy. August said he'd never met a client with so many barriers. Santana has no family in the U.S., a criminal history, and had no transportation.

But with August's support, Santana completed IT training and received his Microsoft Office Certifications, in both Word and Excel. The VetWORKS staff also assisted him with job readiness training, résumé preparation and interview practice. "He was consistent, focused, and created his own opportunities," said August.

Santana is now using the mistakes he made in his life to help others in theirs, according to August - "He has a good heart and believes in second chances."

Santana got a full-time job as a residential advisor/computer support specialist at the San Diego Job Corps. Working with disadvantaged and at-risk youth has fulfilled one of Santana's greatest goals: to show others that no obstacle is insurmountable and that through hard work, they too can overcome great odds and give back to others.