

# Vocational Rehabilitation

## Victory Story

September 1, 2023

## David's Story

**With a certificate in Computer Information Systems, David is ready to work**



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David Soto-Gonzales has come a long way since his first try at Chemeketa Community College in Salem.

“The first time I was here, I was fresh out of high school. I didn’t have a clear idea of what I wanted to do,” said Soto-Gonzales, 27.

The second time he went to Chemeketa, he set a goal and reached it, thanks in part to the one-on-one support he received from the [Inclusive Career Advancement Program](#) (ICAP), a program for clients of [Vocational Rehabilitation](#) (VR).

In June 2023, Soto-Gonzales graduated with a certificate in Computer Information Systems (CIS). The certificate prepares him for a job in software and systems troubleshooting, technical support or end-user training. It also sets him

on a pathway to his dream job in cybersecurity. With the help of Vocational Rehabilitation, he is ready to look for a job in a high-demand field.

“Before, I didn’t have anyone,” he said of his first attempt going to college. Help through the ICAP program changed everything.

## **Finding help – and a way forward**

Going to college and selecting a course of study can be daunting for any young person. Having a disability may present additional barriers.

“First, you have to figure out what careers fit not just your interests, but also your abilities,” said Heather Lindsay, Deputy Director of VR. “Second, you may not know how to ask for accommodations, and that these accommodations could help you succeed.”

Soto-Gonzales’s story shows how having a support team can make all the difference.

When he first went to college, he did his best. But he felt aimless in his general education requirement classes. Eventually he dropped out.

What followed was a difficult time for him. He stayed at home playing video games, uncertain about next steps. His mental health suffered.

“I just didn’t have a lot of motivation,” he said.

He knew he needed to get back to school, for his mental health and to create some positive momentum for himself.

“When I’m not busy, I have more time to think about stuff,” he said. “When I’m busy, I don’t get sick as often.”

One day, he mentioned to his doctor that he knew he needed a change. The doctor connected Soto-Gonzales to a Marion County Education Support Specialist to explore training programs at Chemeketa Community College. When he discovered the school's 9-month program in [Cybersecurity](#), he was hooked. The discovery was the catalyst that shifted his career trajectory.

## **ICAP helps students navigate college**

From there, David was referred to ICAP. All ICAP students have both a VR counselor and a college career coach to help them find the right college training program, get support while in school and get help finding a job after they complete their program.

Chemeketa's Career Coach, Mayely Polanco, checked in weekly with Soto-Gonzales to see how he was doing in his classes and if he needed extra help

to overcome obstacles. She gave guidance on his academic plan and helped him practice for job interviews and build his resume.

Soto Gonzales worked with the college's accommodations specialist to get the accommodations he needed, such as extra time on homework and tests as well as notetaking services if he had to miss a class. He had the option to use a private room for testing too, which he liked "because there are less distractions. Having a room full of people is kind of distracting sometimes because of the noise," he said.



David Soto-Gonzales meets with his career coach, Mayely Polanco, at Chemeketa Community College.

When he got disappointing result on a certification test, Polanco helped him move forward.

“I did really bad. But she encouraged me to retake it and get math tutoring first,” he said.

Soto-Gonzales said tutoring helped him feel more prepared, more confident and less stressed.

## **Pathway to employment**

ICAP’s support doesn’t end at graduation. Each participant has a VR Counselor who helps students find a career in their chosen field. All training programs available to ICAP students are part of Oregon’s Community College [Career Pathways program](#) — short-term training programs that prepare students for jobs in high-demand industries.

Career Pathways include hundreds of certificate programs in accounting, healthcare, construction, manufacturing, technology, transportation, hospitality and more. Many take less than a year to complete.

“ICAP opens doors to not just a job, but to a living wage and opportunities for career advancement,” Lindsey said. “Stories like David’s make my heart happy. With a little support, his confidence grew and so did his success at Chemeketa. This is a great example of how ICAP can help.”

With his certificate in hand and help from his VR Counselor Mackenzie Gallo, Soto-Gonzales began looking for work in an IT Help Desk role. He said he feels he has a lot to offer employers — he’s punctual and a hard worker.

With Polanco’s guidance, he’s also thinking long-term. His plan is to gain the necessary work experience in the cybersecurity field to continue building his

resume. Ultimately, he hopes to earn his Associate of Applied Science in Cybersecurity, then to transfer to Western Oregon University for his Bachelor's degree.

“David is very committed to his success!” Polanco said. “I encourage all potential students to find a support system. Reach out for extra support even when you think you do not need it. It's free!”

## **Get started**

ICAP is for people with disabilities who are officially eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation. If you are not a VR participant, contact your [local VR office](#) and ask for an intake appointment.

The eligibility process can take three to four months, but it will open doors to ICAP and many other services and supports to help you on your path to your future career!

If you are already a VR participant, email [icap@odhsoha.oregon.gov](mailto:icap@odhsoha.oregon.gov).

For more information about ICAP, visit the [ICAP website](#).