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## **New Orange County Initiative to “Level Up” Residents’ Income & Address Region’s Labor Shortage**

*“Level Up Orange” elevates income with free career support, training, paid internships, and neighborhood resources to overcome employment challenges and increase wages*

**ORLANDO, Fla. (May 31, 2022)** – Orange County Commissioners have invested \$10.3 million in federal grant dollars with CareerSource Central Florida, the region’s official workforce development board, to drive equitable recovery of the region from pandemic employment issues through a new program called *Level Up Orange*.

Using federal funding from the American Rescue Plan, the new *Level Up Orange* initiative is designed to help Orange County residents overcome challenges that are sidelining their earning potential, and support Orange County businesses in developing new audiences for potential employees.

The program provides free personal career coaches, job search support, paid college and technical training, and paid internships for those seeking to elevate their income or career path.

Any Orange County resident who has been financially impacted by the challenges of the COVID-19 pandemic is eligible. This includes not only unemployment, but also reduced work schedules, diminished income, lost advancement opportunities, or barriers to employment such as childcare, transportation or unique personal challenges.

“Orange County Government is proud to work with CareerSource in funding the Level Up program,” said Orange County Mayor Jerry L. Demings. “It will hopefully provide a path forward for individuals affected by the pandemic by giving them new workforce skills. It’s exciting to have a partnership that benefits the entire community.”

“The pandemic changed the workforce industry forever,” said CareerSource Central Florida President and CEO Pamela Nabors. “The loudest message right now is how the new employee mindset is creating unprecedented hiring challenges for businesses. What is *also* true is there are populations whose earnings still remain disproportionately impacted by pandemic-driven changes due to childcare, transportation, and personal employment challenges. Level Up Orange helps find these individuals and create personalized paths to employment – at no cost to them – so that our entire region benefits.”

### **Who’s Eligible?**

Any Orange County resident impacted by challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic is eligible. There will be special focus on personalized outreach in nine priority zip codes whose residents tend to have lower incomes and higher employment barriers, such as reliable transportation. (*See end of release*). To reach these residents, CareerSource Central Florida has launched a new Neighborhood

Navigator program, a street team that connects daily with residents at their neighborhood libraries, community centers, churches, schools, community service organizations and local events. Special outreach also will be given to businesses within a five-mile radius of these zip codes, so that residents may find jobs conveniently close to home.

Level Up Orange will provide special consideration and programming for veterans, justice-involved individuals, and residents with disabilities.

**Services Offered:**

The Level Up Orange program will offer county residents valuable resources -- at no cost to them -- including career exploration, skills training, and job placement services under the guidance of a personal career coach. Coaches will work closely with career-seekers to assess their abilities, enroll in paid training programs, prepare for and secure interviews, and land positions paying a minimum \$15/hour. Those who apply will have the opportunity to upskill and seek higher-wage careers in advancing industries across Orlando.

The program extends through December 31, 2023, and will include initiatives to:

- Increase interest and awareness in public service jobs;
- Support specific industries disproportionately impacted by the pandemic and/or are in emerging, high-demand sectors;
- Launch a paid internship program for Orange County high school seniors;
- Develop innovative, technology-fueled training programs.

**To Register:**

Businesses and residents may visit [www.LevelUpOrange.com](http://www.LevelUpOrange.com) to fill out a brief, two-minute form. Qualified individuals will receive a call from their own personal career coach within 48 hours.

**Priority Zip Codes/Neighborhoods:**

Parramore (32801), Clear Lake (32805), Pine Hills (32808), Lockhart (32810), Orlo Vista (32811), Hiawassee (32818), Apopka (32703), SE Orlando (32822), Edgewood/Pine Castle (32839)

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**About CareerSource Central Florida**

CareerSource Central Florida (CSCF) is Florida's second-largest regional workforce board, responsible for developing talent across the five counties of Orange, Osceola, Seminole, Lake, and Sumter. The non-profit is state and federally funded with an annual operating budget of approximately \$46.2 million and provides comprehensive services to train and connect career seekers with local businesses at no cost. Services include screening and hiring talent; employee training and education; paid internships and no cost skills training and education programs.

In fiscal year 2020-2021, CSCF served more than 54,000 career seekers and 2,700 businesses. The organization placed more than 6,300 individuals in jobs and helped advance skills for more than 5,100 career seekers in the five counties. For more information, visit [www.CareerSourceCentralFlorida.com](http://www.CareerSourceCentralFlorida.com).