

## El Barrio Success

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**M**aria’s husband lost his job following a surgery and not long after, she also lost her job. They could no longer afford their car payments or rent. Maria and her husband had to make the difficult decision to give up their vehicle and move to a more affordable home. “I had to go back to welfare, which I did not want to do,” the mother of three teenagers explained.

She first heard about the programs at El Barrio after her family moved to Cleveland a year ago. After losing her job in May, Maria asked her case worker at Cuyahoga County’s Employment & Family Services Program to join the Job Readiness and Job Search programs. “I said, ‘I want to go to El Barrio,’ and [my worker] sent me there,” she recalled.

Once enrolled in the programs at El Barrio, Maria expressed interest in joining the Customer Service Training program. She had a strong retail background and excelled in the exercises provided in the class. “I learned not only in the class, but from Miss Rosa [Beltre, the instructor], to be proud of myself, of what I do, and of what I want for myself in life,” said Maria.

El Barrio sent Maria through the Dress for Success program to obtain interview-appropriate clothing. She believes that the clothes provided helped her to achieve employment. “[Dress for Success] went all the way,” she said. “It is amazing what a few pieces of clothing can do for a person.”

Maria impressed the co-CEOs of Five Guys Burgers & Fries when they came to El Barrio to give a presentation about their company. She was interviewed, hired, and will begin training to become a manager after she reaches 90 days of employment. The company is a perfect fit for Maria, who enjoys the diversity and kindness of her coworkers. She credits El Barrio’s training and connection with Five Guys with helping her obtain employment.

“The people at El Barrio were there to help; they don’t just send you out [blindly],” said Maria. “Sometimes you need someone to lift you up—El Barrio did that.” Maria’s brother is now enrolled in El Barrio. She offered this advice for him and everyone else in the Job Readiness and Job Search programs, “El Barrio makes sure you get what you need. They give you the tools and it’s up to you to use them.”