

A CHANGE OF COURSE

RGV Careers Helped Former Teacher Enter Medical Field

By Lori Houston
Photos by Kevin Martinez

Making a career change can be a daunting prospect. However, the way you approach it makes all the difference in the results. Julianna Luera is making that change in a big way, transforming herself from a kindergarten teacher into a licensed physician's assistant.

Changing jobs is stressful enough, but Luera's strong desire to reach out to her community and make a difference through medicine led to her switching fields from education to medical. Though such a change takes some extra work, Luera has started her journey to become a physician's assistant by getting medical experience with RGV Careers in their nurse's aide program. According to Luera, "Ships in harbor are safe, but that's not what ships were built for. You need to detach your anchor (get rid of inhibitions), gather up your crew (support system), and set sail."

Luera's "crew" is made up of a supportive husband, mother and father, and her four children. "They are my sole reason for wanting more in life," said Luera. "I want to be their role model - not some super star they see on television, but me." Throughout this process, Luera has modeled hard work and determination for her family. One of the hardest parts of the program for her was missing out on family time because she was teaching during the day, and attending classes at night. However, she says this has, if anything, instilled in her children that if you want something bad enough, "stop at nothing to get it."

Enrolling at RGV Careers was easy for Luera. "I can remember wanting to join this program one day and literally being enrolled in the course the next day." The

staff and administration were very helpful in seeing her through the enrollment process and getting her settled in to the nurse's aide program. "It seemed like every person there was genuinely interested in me and were there to help me." Luera found the courses challenging but manageable because it was exactly what she wanted to learn while at the same time providing her a stepping stone into a career in health care. "I enjoyed role playing with other students and actually getting hands-on training by spending time at a local nursing home."

The nurse's aide program at RGV Careers left Luera well prepared for her further studies in the medical field. "Learning about patient care / safety definitely gave me huge insight on better ways to help my future patients." She is continuing her education with a physician's assistant masters program at the University of Texas Rio Grande Valley and is thankful for the solid base in patient care she received at RGV Careers. "I learned a lot about compassion and although that is something you can't be taught, you can definitely learn ways to express it."

RGV Careers helps their students from the very beginning of the chosen program all the way through job placement. "Another thing that impressed me about this program was the way they track their students after the classes end. I received several follow-up calls for job placement assistance for months after I finished. I felt like the staff really wanted me to succeed ... and I did!"

Here in the Rio Grande Valley, healthcare jobs are numerous and Luera recommends RGV Careers to others seeking employment in the field. "RGV Careers can open up one door that can open up a hundred doors. You have nothing to lose and everything to gain," said Luera.



Julianna Luera
STUDENT PHYSICIAN'S ASSISTANT