



**Shamari Ferguson** has been volunteering at the Greater Cleveland Food Bank for two years. As she walks into the kitchen and puts on her gear, a smile starts to spread across her face. The kitchen is Shamari's favorite place to volunteer at the Food Bank.

Shamari is a student at Cuyahoga East Vocational Educational Consortium (CEVEC) at the Mayfield City School District. CEVEC's mission is to Educate, Empower, and Employ. Through volunteer work and 16 vocational training programs, at sites including the Food Bank, students from 21 school districts develop job skills with a goal to gain competitive employment.

Through her work at the Food Bank, Shamari has blossomed into an independent young woman with hireable skills. "Shamari has grown with her independence. She's looking for competitive employment. She's understanding the value of work," explained her instructor, "She's had great community mentors here."

Community mentors are a huge part of preparing Shamari for competitive employment. At the Food Bank, Dee, who works in our kitchen, and Shamari have a special bond. They work alongside each other and talk and laugh, all while making meals for seniors and children in need. "She's a special person," explained Dee.



Both Shamari and her instructor would describe her as a social person. You can't miss Shamari's big smile, positive attitude, and work ethic as she focuses on the task at hand. She feels good about the work she's doing. Not only does working at the Food Bank help Shamari get ready for competitive employment, but it also allows her to do something she loves - help.

At school and at her CEVEC sites, Shamari is always willing to help because, simply, it feels good to help people. Shamari knows that when she walks into the kitchen, puts on her gear, and gets to work that's she's providing food to someone who might need some extra help.



Shamari's instructor, Sarah, is also grateful for the opportunities given to Shamari and other CEVEC students. "The Food Bank is special for us; we're working to help people in need," she explained, "We're not only making an impact with our students, but we're making an impact in everyone's local communities."

To everyone at the Food Bank who has helped her develop skills and help the community, Shamari has an important message: "Thank you!" she exclaims with a smile.

And to the Food Bank, celebrating 40 years of service to the community, Shamari has another message: "Happy Birthday!" Birthdays are her favorite, she enjoys celebrating her own and others.

Last year, 50 CEVEC students, including Shamari, volunteered 3.5 hours per day, five days per week at the Greater Cleveland Food Bank. 90% of CEVEC students achieve their post-school outcomes goals. Shamari could be one of those students. She's actively looking for work and has a job interview next week.

Volunteers like Shamari and her peers at CEVEC are the backbone of the work done by the Food Bank. For the last 12 years, students volunteered at the Food Bank five days per week. The Greater Cleveland Food Bank is grateful to have CEVEC as a partner.

