

Award: Special Recognition Award
Recipient: Kamel Alomari
Presenter: Claudia Lennhoff, Anne Gargano Ahmed

Claudia Lennhoff:

Good evening. My name is Claudia Lennhoff, and I'm the Executive Director of Champaign County Health Care Consumers.

I am here with Anne to help present the Special Recognition Award to Health Care Consumers' own Federal Work Study staff member, Kamel Alomari.

I wanted to be up here with Anne in order to help honor Kamel, of course. But I'm also up here because I'm not afraid to admit when I'm wrong, even in front of 200 people and a video recording that will end up who knows where.

Three years ago, when Health Care Consumers was hiring for Federal Work Study student employees, Anne volunteered to be in charge of the hiring process. I was glad for Anne's leadership, and I only made a few rules for hiring – common sense rules, based on over 10 years of experience that I had working at Health Care Consumers.

One of the rules was that we only hire people who can be around for about 2 years, but we do not – I repeat – we do NOT hire freshmen. This bias of mine – I mean rule – was based on lots and lots of truly terrible experiences hiring freshmen as Federal Work Study employees. I don't have time to tell you the horrible stories of how we squandered precious resources on freshmen hires.

Well, Anne interviewed a bunch of people and was really impressed with Kamel. She told me about him, and he sounded great, but then she said – but he's a freshman. And I said "oh no." But Anne really insisted and she was very impressed by Kamel, and I finally relented and said okay, give him a try, but don't be surprised if he doesn't work out.

Well, I'm here to say that in Kamel's case, I was 100% wrong, Anne's intuition about him was right on, and I'm very happy to stand before you all and admit this.

Health Care Consumers does not typically present awards to staff members, because we are already honored to work at Health Care Consumers and we expect great things from staff. However, as you will now hear from Anne, Kamel has really distinguished himself, and out of gratitude, respect and tremendous affection, we want to recognize Kamel and his great work tonight.

Anne Gargano Ahmed:

So, not to boast, but I think I did a pretty good job picking this one. Kamel has been working for CCHCC as a federal work-study for 3 years now and he just gets better each year.

When he first began, he helped out with a lot of general office activities, including doing turnout calls, clipping newspaper articles, making copies for Task Force meetings and community meetings, and helping with fundraising efforts.

He continues to help with all of these things but as we got to know Kamel, we realized that he was really smart and could be helping with a lot more high-level projects. He is a political science major

and he enjoys reading news and political blogs in his free time, so we decided to put that to good use by making him CCHCC's official legislative staffer. Kamel has helped us stay up to date on a number of legislative issues, but his help was most needed with the passage and rollout of health reform. It seemed like things were changing day to day during the fight to get health reform passed and Kamel's reports made it possible for us to keep our membership updated with regular emails and strategize actions when necessary.

Kamel is an excellent writer so he often helps write Letters to the Editor for the Health Care Access Task Force, Medicare Task Force, and 5th and Hill Neighborhood Rights Campaign. He is also a great public speaker so we often call on him to give updates at our monthly Health Care Task Force meetings. Kamel did an excellent job speaking at our press conference about gender discrimination in health insurance premiums. It was his first time speaking at a press conference but he did it with the laid back confidence that he brings to everything.

Basically Kamel is our go-to-guy. He is willing to do anything and everything that needs to be done and no project is too big or too small for him. He is not too proud to do grunt work but we know if there is a project that needs to be done by someone we trust and someone who can understand complex instructions, it goes to Kamel. In fact, on Monday mornings at our staff meetings, we often fight over who gets Kamel for their projects.

On top of all of his excellent work for all of our campaigns, Kamel does a lot of work on our grassroots fundraising efforts. He pursues ads for our Adbook, makes calls at our annual Phone-a-thon, helps put together Direct Mailings, sells raffle tickets, and he solicited the donations of nearly all of the prizes for our annual raffle this year.

With such a small staff, people often ask how Health Care Consumers does so much. Well, having a dynamo like Kamel on staff certainly helps!

Kamel, thank you so much for your commitment to CCHCC. I'm proud to say you are my most successful hire, and we're glad to have another year with you before you graduate. We are pleased to present you with this special recognition award for your abiding commitment to social justice and your high level work at CCHCC. Keep up the good work!