



From the Entry Level to Licensed Practical Nurse:

Four Case Studies of Career Ladders in Health Care

- *Community College of Denver*
- *1199C Training and Upgrading Fund*
- *Workforce Alliance and Hospital Corporation of America*
- *WorkSource Partners*

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From the Entry Level to Licensed Practical Nurse

Introduction: Strategies for Designing LPN Programs for Low-Skill/Low-Income Workers

Fueled by government funding and increased employer investment in “grow your own” strategies to address the severe shortage of nurses, a handful of innovative Licensed Practical Nurse training programs has arisen to serve low-income adults working in entry-level health care. These programs share several features that set them apart from traditional LPN training programs and account for their success in helping low-income working adults with limited education enter and complete demanding LPN training programs:

- They provide intensive academic remediation in math, reading, and writing to prepare students for college-level work and pass program entrance exams.
- They offer part-time or evening/weekend schedules so that participants can continue working while they are in school.
- They provide formal tutoring and counseling support to students once they enter the program to help them meet the demands of school, work, and family.

Most important, they incorporate their programs of study into well-defined steps of employer-sponsored career ladder programs that offer financial support, classes at or near the worksite, and clear rewards in pay and promotion for successful completion of each step. Sponsoring employers typically pay tuition costs in return for the student’s commitment to continue to work for them for a period of time upon graduation.

While the programs profiled here share many similarities, they vary in the types of educational providers they use and the nature of program sponsorship. Two programs use community colleges to provide training, another uses a non-profit vocational school, and another runs its own vocational LPN program. Program sponsors include a large nursing home employer, a jointly administered union-management training fund, a community college-initiated partnership with local nursing home employers, and a Workforce Investment Board-initiated partnership with local area hospitals.

The research for these case studies was conducted in conjunction with the preparation of *The Right Jobs: Identifying Career Advancement Opportunities for Low-Skilled Workers*. This guide for workforce development practitioners is available on the Jobs for the Future Web site at: www.jff.org/jff/kc/library/0261.



FROM THE ENTRY LEVEL TO LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE:

Community College of Denver

CNA-to-LPN Program

Overview

Community College of Denver, in partnership with the City of Denver's Division of Workforce Development and local health care employers, has developed a part-time, evening and weekend worksite program to prepare Certified Nursing Assistants and other entry-level workers to become Licensed Practical Nurses (LPN). The program begins with a nine-hour Nursing Success Course in which students receive counseling on life skills, time management, and study skills. Customized to meet the needs of each student, the program provides a Learning Lab that offers up to thirty weeks of remedial instruction in math, reading, and writing to prepare students for college-level course work. This accelerated remedial instruction, delivered in three ten-week modules, can take students with as low as a third- to fifth-grade math, English, or reading level up to the eleventh-twelfth grade level required for entry into the LPN program. Tutoring is provided in all Learning Lab courses, and students have access to additional tutoring support at the college campus.

Once students complete the Learning Lab, they take all prerequisite courses required for entry into the LPN program, including nutrition, medical terminology, English composition, and anatomy and physiology. After completing the prerequisite courses, students move into the nursing classes required for licensure. All courses are delivered at the worksites of participating employers, who provide classroom space and coordinate work schedules for employees. Courses meet two evenings per week and are offered consecutively, so students are only enrolled in one class at a time. In addition, students complete five clinical rotations over fifty-five weeks, with rotations taking place one to two days a week, depending on the specialty. To the extent possible, clinical rotations are scheduled for Saturdays, and the first rotation is done at the employee's worksite.

This worksite LPN training program is designed to meet employer needs for skilled nurses while providing a career advancement ladder for dedicated, frontline caregivers. As such, it relies upon employer support for its success. Employers adjust work schedules of participating employees to accommodate program demands. In addition, most employers provide funding to help pay for tuition and fees; some provide paid release time.

Program Design and Entry Requirements

To be eligible, employees must meet their employer's criteria for program participation—such as a minimum period of employment at the facility, exemplary performance evaluations, and the recommendation of supervisors. While there are no minimum academic requirements to enter the program, all participants have tested at a sixth-grade reading level or higher. However, many have scored in the third- to fifth-grade range in math. In order to take prerequisite nursing courses, participants must raise their reading, writing, and math skills to an eleventh- to twelfth-grade level.

To accomplish this goal, the program begins with an intensive academic remediation component, the Learning Lab. This is divided into three ten-week modules customized to the entering skill levels of participating students. It is designed to enable incumbent Certified Nursing Assistants and other entry-level staff to advance from the lowest development skill level into college-level courses in half the time required in traditional development education. Each ten-week module consists of ten hours of instruction a week: two three-hour classes after work, and a four-hour Saturday morning learning lab. The first ten-week module is reserved for those who are at the lowest developmental math level (i.e., third- to fifth-grade level). Those assessed at a sixth-grade or higher reading and math level skip this first module. The second ten-week module covers math, reading, and writing; it is



designed to move students who start at a sixth- to eighth-grade level in these subjects up to a ninth-grade level. Employees who initially test at a ninth-grade level or above may skip the second module. The final ten-week module moves students from a ninth-grade reading, writing, and math level to college-ready standards (grade eleven or twelve).

In addition to offering classes at the worksite, the program provides several layers of support: counseling from a case manager, on-site tutoring throughout the Learning Lab, and peer support, which is encouraged by grouping employees from the same facility together for classes. Students also have access to all Community College of Denver support services. Tutoring and peer support are not the only ways the program promotes academic success. The program also makes the academic content more accessible by using health care examples as the context for teaching math and literacy skills. Class sizes average 12 to 15 for modules delivered at the worksite.

Entry into LPN Program

Employees who complete the Learning Lab modules move on to take four college courses required for entry into the LPN nursing courses. These prerequisites include medical terminology (1 credit), nutrition (1 credit), English composition (3 credits), and anatomy and physiology (4 credits). Once employees pass these courses, they can enroll in the nursing courses.

Participants can bypass the general waiting list for entry into the college's LPN program because this part-time, employer-supported program is specially designed and funded to serve employees of participating facilities. All Learning Lab, prerequisite, and nursing courses are offered at the worksite.

The entire program takes about two and a half years to complete:

Learning Lab	30 Weeks
Prerequisite Courses	23 Weeks
Nursing Courses	74 Weeks
	<u>127 Weeks</u>

Description of Participating Employees and Employers

Since 2002, when the city's Division of Workforce Development asked the Community College of Denver to develop a nursing career ladder program for entry-level health care workers, the program has partnered with 10 health care organizations, most with

multiple facilities, to serve 230 workers at 26 nursing homes, hospitals, and outpatient facilities. Most employers support the financing of the program several ways, including providing classroom space, computers, and tuition reimbursement. Participants are low-income employees working as Certified Nursing Assistants and clerical, dietary, laundry, and house-keeping staff.

The program provides tangible benefits to employers, making it worth their investment. In addition to helping them fill critical nursing positions with staff who understand the culture of the institution and have previously demonstrated their abilities as caregivers, the program also helps employers to retain these proven employees. Employers are virtually guaranteed that program participants will stay in their employ for the duration of the program. Also, participants are typically high-caliber employees who are happy with their jobs and see the program as a job-related benefit.

From the student's point of view, the "cohort" model, in which employees from the same facility are grouped together for classes, provides important peer support. Additionally, they appreciate their employer's tangible support and encouragement. Both sides wish to see the students continue in their employ as LPNs after they complete the program and pass the licensure exam. However, it is also realized that employers may not be able to absorb all LPNs at one time.

Costs and Financing of Program

The cost of the preparatory or Learning Lab portion of the program varies by the number of modules that a student is required to take based on his or her entering ACCUPLACER math, reading, and writing scores. The cost for a student who places at the lowest level on the test, and therefore requires the full 30 weeks of preparatory coursework, is \$3,044. Students who place at the highest level (ninth and tenth grade) only need to take the final 10-week module; the cost for them is \$1,500 each. The cost for students who require 20 weeks of instruction is \$2,226. These cost figures all include tuition, fees, supplemental instruction (tutors), and textbooks.

The total cost of the LPN program for students requiring the full 30-week of Learning Lab courses is \$8,252. This includes the costs of Learning Lab, prerequisite, and nursing courses and all other costs, except for required immunizations and background checks.

U.S. Department of Labor grant funds secured by the Division of Workforce Development, along with general city funds and WIA funds, helped finance the program during its first two years. Typically, DWD grants covered half of the costs of delivering the work-site LPN program, with employers providing the other half in cash and in-kind contributions. Employees using DWD or WIA funds had no obligation to continue working for the employer after completion of the program. However, the employer did have the right to terminate funding contributions should the employee leave the facility during the course of the program. If a student qualified for a Pell Grant, he/she was expected to use that as a “first source” of payment, with DWD/WIA paying the remainder. Typically only a small portion (15 to 20 percent) of students qualified for Pell Grants as most were gainfully employed within the facility.

With the end of the federal grant in 2004, the tuition burden shifted to the students and their employers. Arrangements vary with these newer cohorts. In some cases, employers are providing tuition reimbursement; in other cases, it is the employee’s responsibility. A small portion of employees can secure Pell Grants to finance their education; those who are not eligible for Pell Grants are often eligible for low-interest student loans and other forms of financial assistance from Community College of Denver. The college strives to help employees find a way to finance their education.

The Community College of Denver has expanded its personnel to accommodate the site-based LPN programs. Two full-time employees are assigned to these programs (a program manager and case manager). Funding for the two program positions is provided by the college’s general budget; it is not included in the tuition costs charged to employers and employees. Program faculty are part-time and added as needed.

Program Results

The program began in 2002 with one cohort of twenty students. Since then, thirteen cohorts have begun the program, four of which have graduated.

Despite the low incoming reading and math levels of participants, the program has achieved a remarkable retention and completion rate. Seventy-seven percent of the participants who began the program have either earned their LPN diploma or are still enrolled. As of February 2005, 230 individuals had started the program, 42 had graduated as LPNs, and 136 were still enrolled in Learning Lab, prerequisite, or nursing courses; 52 left before completing the program.

In examining early attrition data, program managers realized that the original Learning Lab design (twenty-four weeks, in three eight-week modules) was too fast-paced for students who entered with serious academic deficiencies. As a result, the program extended the modules to ten weeks each, or thirty weeks total. The program continues to monitor and troubleshoot areas where students are having problems. For example, within the Learning Lab component, the highest rate of attrition appears to occur during the last module, as students move into more difficult material. Among the prerequisite courses, anatomy and physiology poses the greatest academic challenge to students. The program is in the process of identifying additional ways to support students in these gatekeeper courses to improve their chances of success.

FROM THE ENTRY LEVEL TO LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE:

1199C Training and Upgrading Fund LPN Career Ladder Program

Overview

A Philadelphia-based Practical Nursing program operated by a union-employer training fund is providing a route to LPN positions for hundreds of nursing assistants and other entry-level health care workers. One of only a handful of part-time nursing programs geared to the needs of working adults, it is also the only union-sponsored nursing program in the country.

The program is operated by the District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund. The fund is jointly administered by District 1199C of the National Union of Hospital and Health Care Employees—which is part of the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees—and representatives of the approximately 50 contributing health care employers. The fund opened the Practical Nurse (PN) training program in 1999, two years after the School District of Philadelphia closed its Practical Nursing Program. Since opening its doors with 31 students, the new program has grown steadily and now enrolls 120 students per year (60 students per class, with classes starting every 9 months). The program is approved by the Pennsylvania State Board of Nursing.

Program Design and Entry Requirements

The 18-month program is structured to accommodate the needs of working adults, with classes and other activities held part-time in the evening and on weekends. Classes take place two evenings a week from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m. and every other Saturday and Sunday.

Several supports help ensure student success. Each student is assigned an advisor for individual counseling. Group tutoring is available throughout the program, as well as individual tutoring and counseling from program faculty. Tutoring is also available through adult literacy programs that the fund also operates.

The participants begin with a three-week, fifty-hour bridge program that prepares them for both the

academic and life demands of a rigorous training schedule on top of work and family obligations. The curriculum for the bridge program includes mathematics, medical terminology, life skills, and computer skills. The bridge program is also used to help identify applicants who have met the program's entry requirements but, after experiencing the time demands of the program, realize that they are not in the position to make an 18-month commitment. Typically, about five to ten of the seventy students admitted to the bridge program decide not to enroll in the training.

Applicants to the PN program must have a high school diploma or GED and demonstrate that they have sufficient academic skills. They must pass the mathematics, English, and scientific reasoning sections of the Nursing Entrance Test (NET); a passing score on this exam approximates a grade level of 11-12 in reading and math. In addition, applicants must meet the state's standard of having a satisfactory criminal and child abuse check required for working with children and in long-term care. (See www.pde.state.pa.us/career_edu/lib/career_edu/CRIMINAL_HISTORY_RECORD_INFORMATION.pdf)

Of the approximately 400 applicants who take the NET test each enrollment period, about one-quarter pass. Those who do not pass can enroll in free preparatory classes and reapply for the next session (see below). Once the other screens are applied (e.g., valid diploma), about ninety qualify for admission and seventy are selected to fill sixty slots. Five to ten students typically decide not to enter the program after the bridge experience.

Preparatory Classes to Expand Program Access

Given the weak educational backgrounds of many entry-level health care workers, the fund designed a preparatory program to raise participants' math and reading skills to the standards required to enter the PN program. Individuals who test at an eighth-grade level in math and a ninth-grade level in reading are eli-



gible to attend an intensive Pre-Nursing Program. This is a sixteen-week program, with classes meeting three evenings or mornings a week for three hours a session.

As with the PN program, classes are open to community members as well as union members. The inclusion of large numbers of non-union members in 1199C fund training programs is the norm, not the exception. From its inception in the late 1970s, the fund's mission has been to serve the broader community as well as union members. It has aggressively sought government and private grants to underwrite the costs of extending services to non-union members.

The preparatory classes, which are intentionally small, averaging 15 to 20 participants, are held at the central Training Fund facility, as well as at the work-sites of sponsoring employers (e.g., NewCourtland and Golden Slipper long-term care facilities).

For individuals who test below the eighth- to ninth-grade level, the fund offers basic education and ESL classes for both members and community residents. The fund has developed four levels of basic education classes to assist students in acquiring the academic competencies needed to advance into the Pre-Nursing and Practical Nursing programs. Students are encouraged to work at their own pace in these classes. Practical Nursing faculty and administrators work closely with the basic education department to ensure that the curriculum prepares students adequately with the skills needed to succeed in the Practical Nursing program. The goal of the preparatory classes goes beyond helping students to pass the PN admissions examination. Faculty work on imparting the skills in studying, test-taking, time management, and critical thinking that are required to succeed in the PN Program.

Description of Participants

Most of the students in the preparatory and PN programs are low-income health care workers employed in entry-level positions, such as nursing aides in area hospitals and long-term care facilities. Almost 51 percent have completed a Certified Nursing Assistant program before enrolling in the practical nursing program. About 30 percent of the PN students are union members employed in facilities represented by District 1199C. The remainder includes health care workers employed at non-union facilities, workers employed in other industries who are interested in entering the nursing profession, dislocated workers, and TANF

recipients. Approximately one-third of PN program participants have attended fund-sponsored preparatory classes in order to raise their reading and math skills enough to pass the entrance examination. Another 25 to 30 percent attended classes elsewhere to prepare for the exam.

In recent years, a large percentage of the union participants have come from local nursing homes—NewCourtland Elder Services, a nonprofit subsidiary of the Presbyterian Foundation, which operates six facilities, and Golden Slipper, a stand-alone non-profit facility. Over the past two years, seventy-two NewCourtland nursing aides have participated in the Pre-Nursing course delivered at the worksite, with forty-five subsequently enrolling in the PN program. At Golden Slipper, twenty-two nursing aides participated in the Pre-Nursing course, with six subsequently entering the PN program.

Demographic data for the most recent class is consistent with previous classes. Just over 21 percent of the students are male, 63 percent are single, and 35 percent are single parents. At least 60 percent of the students indicate that they plan to work full time while in school. Seventy-five percent are African-American. Approximately 80 percent of the students were supporting themselves prior to starting school, and 45 percent indicated that they were paying their own tuition out of their own pocket. The average age of the class is 32.8 years, with a range of 21 to 50 years.

Costs and Financing of Program

The 2004-05 tuition for the 18-month PN program is \$8,200 per student. The cost of running a 16-week, 144-hour preparatory program is \$650 per student, assuming that 15 students are enrolled, but students are not charged for taking this course.

Union members whose employers contribute 1.5 percent of gross payroll to the fund are eligible for benefits, which include tuition reimbursement of up to \$5,000 a year for classes taken at area colleges, vocational centers, and the PN program. Members are expected to put up the first \$1,850 payment for Level I of the PN program. Upon completing each of the PN Program's five levels, the reimbursement is rolled over to pay for tuition for the subsequent level. At the completion of the 18-month program, members are reimbursed in full.

For other participants (i.e., union members whose employers do not contribute to the fund and non-union community residents), tuition payments are

due at the start of each of the five levels. Different sources of financial assistance may be available for each level:

Level 1: (months 1 to 3): The participant pays the first \$1,850. NewCourtland and Golden Slipper pay this for their employees.

Levels 2 and 3 (months 4 to 9): The fund has secured U.S. Department of Labor H-IB and WIA grant funds to cover the \$3,175 cost.

Levels 4 and 5 (months 10 to 18): Employers who are either sponsoring their own employees (e.g., NewCourtland and Golden Slipper) or have been recruited by the fund to sponsor a student make the final tuition payments of \$3,175 in exchange for the student's commitment to work for the employer for one to two years following graduation.

The fund covers the cost of preparatory classes for eligible members. The costs for non-members are covered through a range of government funds, including grants from the Pennsylvania Department of Education and other state funding, and through employer fee-for-service agreements.

Program Results

Since 1999, 396 individuals have entered the PN program upon completing the bridge experience. Of those, 185 (47 percent) have completed the program successfully, 85 (21 percent) are still enrolled, and 126 (32 percent) did not complete it; 81 percent of graduates passed the LPN licensure examination on the first attempt. Of those who entered the program, approximately 60 percent needed to take preparatory classes in order to pass the entrance examination.

Employees participating in PN training under the auspices of an employer-sponsored workplace advancement program have had a higher-than-average PN completion rate: 82 percent (37 out of 45) of NewCourtland's nursing aides who entered the PN program completed it; 83 percent (5 out of 6) of Golden Slipper's nursing aides graduated.

The success rate of students in the fund's preparatory course has varied a great deal, with as few as 30 percent completing the course, to a high of 80 percent or more. Fund staff say that attendance and pass rates are much higher for people who already work in health care as caregivers and are more committed to the goal of becoming nurses.

The next challenge for the Training Fund's PN program is to design and implement a nursing career ladder that articulates nurse's aide training to the practical nursing program and the practical nursing program to a Registered Nursing program, with the goal of aligning the curricula and shortening the total length of training. This will most likely involve offering a combination of college credit and non-credit courses. It will also require the fund to intensify and expand the preparatory classes to include pre-college course work.

FROM THE ENTRY LEVEL TO LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE:

Workforce Alliance and Hospital Corporation of America LPN Career Advancement Program

Overview

Three Hospital Corporation of America (HCA) facilities, in partnership with the local Workforce Investment Board (The Workforce Alliance), have developed an LPN career ladder program for low-income employees and other low-income residents of West Palm Beach, Florida. Geared to the needs of working adults, the two-year LPN program meets two days a week at the worksite for nine hours a day, with an optional third day for individual tutoring and remediation. Participants can work part time on non-class days and weekends, with participating employers guaranteeing flexible work schedules that fit student needs.

Florida's Career Advancement and Retention Challenge Initiative (CARC), a state-sponsored grant program designed to advance TANF (i.e., welfare) recipients and other low-income working adults into well-paying jobs, has served as a catalyst for the creation of the program. Funded through state TANF dollars and administered through the Better Jobs/Better Wages Committee, CARC has underwritten approximately 55 percent of the cash costs and about 40 percent of the overall costs of the HCA-sponsored LPN Career Advancement Program. Employer tuition payments and federal Pell Grants are the other major sources of program funding. Employers and The Workforce Alliance provide substantial in-kind contributions in terms of staffing and the use of facilities.

While CARC has been an indispensable source of financial support for the LPN Career Advancement Program, its requirements have restricted participation to employees who meet TANF family income guidelines of less than 200 percent of the federal poverty level. This restriction has created some difficulty for employers who seek to make educational opportunities available to all entry-level staff. Employers have responded by informing all non-income eligible

employees about tuition reimbursement benefits as well as other on-site adult basic education and college-level course opportunities. In addition to serving TANF-eligible employees at participating facilities, the program also serves TANF recipients; upon acceptance into the program, they are offered part-time jobs with participating employers.

The program contracts with several nonprofit vendors to deliver different services. The Academy for Practical Nursing and Health Occupations (APNHO), an accredited, not-for-profit postsecondary training institute that specializes in serving less-formally educated, low-income adults, delivers the LPN training program. ACS State and Local Solutions provides case management services to students, and the Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition provides remedial reading, writing, ESL, and math instruction to help candidates prepare for entrance exams.

The program enrolled its first class of 36 LPN trainees in January 2002; 23 (or 64 percent) of them successfully completed the LPN training. Since then, the program has launched two additional classes, one in December 2003 and another in December 2004, enrolling a total of 73 students. Of these, 56 (77 percent) are still enrolled in the program and on target to graduate in December 2005 and December 2006.

Program Design and Entry Requirements

The two-year LPN program delivered by APNHO meets two days a week, one day for classes and one day for clinical rotation; a third day is available for tutoring support. All students, not just those struggling in a particular class, are encouraged to attend the optional third day.

Originally structured as an 18.5-month program, the LPN program was extended to 24 months for the second and third classes in order to include preparatory classes for the state licensure exam, a required IV



(intravenous) certification course, and a module in supervision and delegation, which is particularly important for LPNs working in long-term care settings.

Another important change from the original design is the incorporation of intermediate credentialing. All participants in the LPN program qualify as Certified Nursing Assistants and Patient Care Assistants within the first six months. These certifications enable participants to earn pay increases before reaching LPN status; they also serve as marketable credentials for students who do not complete the LPN program, whether for personal or academic reasons.

Prior to the start of the second LPN class, the program added a non-HCA hospital partner. Morse Geriatric Center, a 280-bed, long-term facility, provides several levels of nursing care.

All classes are based at a worksite. Participants from the three participating hospitals attend classes at JFK Medical Center (the largest of the three participating HCA hospitals); employees of Morse Geriatric Center attend classes at the nursing home. Clinical rotations take place at participating employer sites.

Support for Students

Several levels of support promote student success. APHNO faculty provide academic tutoring. A part-time career consultant at ACS provides counseling and job-coaching support and connects eligible students to transitional support services funded by TANF, including transportation and child care assistance and housing referrals. The program also recruits LPN and RNs to serve as mentors to support and encourage trainees. Peer support is fostered by grouping employees from the same facilities together for classes at the worksite.

Entry Requirements

In addition to meeting the income-eligibility criteria, candidates must score at the eleventh-grade level on TABE reading and math tests. They must also pass a critical thinking and writing exam administered by APNHO. Candidates who are unable to pass the TABE are referred to the Palm Beach Literacy Coalition for skills enhancement instruction.

Preparatory Classes to Expand Program Access

Given the immigrant status and limited educational backgrounds of many entry-level health care workers

in South Florida, it is not surprising that many employees who aspire to become LPNs lack the academic and English language skills to pass the entrance exams. To address this issue, the program has included a remedial or skill enhancement component from its inception. The program contracts with the Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition to offer worksite skills enhancement instruction to candidates who do not pass the TABE and other employees who need to raise reading, writing, math, and English language skills. Classes, which are offered at the hospitals and nursing home, are open both to employees and to TANF-eligible clients from the community. Basic skills instruction and English language instruction use a variety of teaching methods, including classroom-based and computer-assisted learning.

To date, over 150 students have participated in skill enhancement classes. Approximately 30 percent of participants test at the ninth-grade reading level, 55 percent at the seventh- to eighth-grade level, and 15 percent at fifth-grade or below. Of those students who enrolled in one of the first two remedial sessions and attended at least 25 hours of instruction (approximately 75 percent of participants), 30 percent passed all sections of the TABE test and qualified for admission to the LPN program. An additional 78 students who attended at least 25 hours of instruction raised their reading and/or math levels.

Description of Trainees and Their Employer Sponsors

The vast majority of students are TANF-eligible health care workers employed in entry-level positions such as nursing aides in one of the sponsoring facilities: the three HCA-owned hospitals (JFK Medical Center, Columbia Hospital, Palms West Hospital) or Morse Geriatric Center. Senior human resources staff at JFK Medical Center play the lead role in organizing HCA hospital involvement in the program.

A few students are TANF recipients and/or TANF-eligible individuals recruited by Workforce Alliance staff from the community. Each is offered the chance to become an employee of a participating facility and work on non-class days. Most take up this offer, but some are already employed elsewhere and choose to remain at their current job until completing the program. Upon completion, they, too, must join the staff of the sponsoring employer that paid a portion of their tuition in exchange for a commitment to work at the facility for two years after getting an LPN license.

Costs and Financing of Program

The tuition, books, and fee costs for the two-year LPN program come to \$11,500 per student. The program employs a half-time coordinator and half-time career consultant, which adds another \$88,000, or about \$2,400 per student. The program also provides a nominal stipend of \$150 a year to each of 20 LPN and RN employee volunteers who serve as mentors.

The \$11,500 per student tuition costs are financed from three sources: employer contributions in the form of tuition benefits, federal Pell Grants, and the state CARC grant. Employers contribute \$3,500 for each student they sponsor. In exchange, students commit to work at the facility for two years after earning their LPN license. Pell Grants cover an average of \$3,500 per student; the state CARC grant finances the remaining \$4,500 per student, as well as the cost of program staff.

The state CARC grant also funds the worksite remediation classes delivered by the Palm Beach County Literacy Coalition. Costs for those classes run about \$700 per participant.

Employers make other important financial contributions to defray program costs, including classroom space, computers, and senior management time to coordinate their facility's participation. Employers also provide flexible work schedules to their employees to allow them to work on their off-class days and weekends. And they offer employment to TANF recipients who enter the program.

Program Results

- Of the 36 students who began the first two LPN classes, 23 students successfully completed the program. As of July 2005, 21 of the students who graduated had passed the state licensure exam on their first attempt.
- Of the 38 students who began the second LPN class in 2003 and 35 who began the third LPN class in 2004s, 58 are still enrolled and on target for graduation.
- Across the three classes, over 150 employees have participated in remedial literacy and math instruction. Of those who attended at least 25 hours of instruction, 30 percent subsequently passed the TABE and qualified for admission into the LPN program. An additional 78 students raised their reading and math levels.
- In 2003, Workforce Alliance received the First Place "Best Practices" award for this program from Workforce Florida, the state's Workforce Board.

FROM THE ENTRY LEVEL TO LICENSED PRACTICAL NURSE:

WorkSource Partners Regional Advancement Centers

Overview

WorkSource Partners, a workforce development firm that designs and implements career development and education programs for entry-level workers, has helped long-term care employers and their community college partners develop comprehensive CNA-to-LPN career ladder programs to fill nursing vacancies. By bringing pre-college and college education to the workplace in conjunction with career counseling and case management support, WorkSource has helped employers design, implement, and expand a “grow your own” career advancement model: the Regional Advancement Center. The RAC, currently in operation in three regions of Massachusetts that have clusters of nursing home sites, creates sufficient scale to make it feasible for community colleges to deliver education and career counseling services at the worksite and to tailor nursing home programs for the long-term care industry.

The impact of the strategy for addressing the LPN shortage has been especially significant at the two sites that are further developed: the five facilities in Western Massachusetts owned by Genesis HealthCare, one of the nation’s largest providers of long-term care and rehabilitation therapy, and the eleven independent non-profit facilities in Worcester that comprise the Intercare Alliance. WorkSource has partnered with Genesis HealthCare since the inception of the RAC, and it has worked closely on the program’s design and implementation. Even before joining forces with WorkSource, the Intercare Alliance had demonstrated its commitment to workforce development by partnering with Quinsigamond Community College to develop the school’s initial evening LPN program. WorkSource then assisted Intercare in developing a nursing career pipeline: it set up career counseling services, remediation, and college prep classes, all of which made the LPN program more accessible to entry-level workers.¹

Since 2003, 69 Genesis and Alliance workers have entered the evening LPN training programs designed for them; 31 have graduated and 29 students are finishing up in the summer of 2005. Only 9 students (13 percent) have failed to complete the program. An additional 350 Genesis employees have received career counseling and education services since 2001, including 74 who enrolled in pre-college classes to prepare for the LPN program. In 2004-2005 alone, 141 CNAs employed in Alliance nursing home facilities attended a career ladder class through the RAC.

This grow-your-own strategy has yielded significant financial benefits to employers, as well as improved patient care as a result of reduced staff turnover and vacancy rates. Genesis HealthCare has ended its use of agency nurses to fill LPN vacancies at its five Agawam facilities—saving \$500,000 per year over January 2001. The model has also helped Genesis significantly reduce turnover of nursing assistants. The Alliance facilities have enjoyed similar benefits from reduced agency fees and reduced staff turnover and vacancy rates. CNA turnover rates have dropped by 30 to 40 percent at Alliance facilities in the past two years.

Seed funding for developing the Genesis and Alliance programs has come from an innovative state program designed to help the long-term care industry upgrade the skills of their entry-level workers: the Extended Care Career Ladder Initiative.² ECCLI grants have provided approximately \$100,000 a year at each of the sites to help cover program development costs as well as the costs of career counseling and pre-college classes. Employers have covered their employees’ LPN tuition and fee costs through tuition benefits plans.

Program Design and Entry Requirements

The CNA-to-LPN programs sponsored by Genesis HealthCare and the Intercare Alliance offer a sequence of educational steps coupled with counseling and support services to prepare workers to enter and succeed



in community college-sponsored LPN programs. Both sites contract with a local community college partner to deliver a full sequence of preparatory educational courses as well as a customized evening LPN program. Genesis partners with Holyoke Community College, and the Intercare Alliance partners with Quinsigamond. At both Regional Advancement Centers, employees receive counseling and support services on each step of the ladder.

The career ladder sequence begins with pre-college courses at the worksite in math and English for employees who need additional academic skill development to qualify for college-level coursework. Intercare Alliance employers have created a separate space for this part of the RAC: the Notre Dame Educational Bridge Center, owned and managed by one of the Alliance Members, Notre Dame Long Term Care Center.

Workers who complete the pre-college courses or who test directly into college-level work by passing the College Placement Test can enroll in the prerequisite college courses required for entry into the LPN program. The three prerequisite courses to enter the Holyoke Community College program are an introduction to psychology, human development, and human anatomy and physiology. Intercare Alliance employees selected for the program must take four prerequisite courses to enroll at Quinsigamond Community College: two psychology courses, biology, and “Math for Meds.”

To promote financial sustainability, the Genesis-Holyoke Community College evening LPN program is built on a community satellite model—that is, courses are part of college’s regular catalog and open to the community at large. This approach makes it possible to split program costs between community residents and the employer, and it also allows the college to tap into relevant state subsidies/FTE payments that may become available. For each cycle of the program, Holyoke holds a certain number of seats for Genesis employees, and those individuals who pass the prerequisite courses are then eligible to enter the program. Community members who wish to enroll for the other seats in the program must also complete the prerequisites.

The Alliance facilities collectively contract with Quinsigamond to provide an LPN program that can accommodate 24 students each year. After passing the prerequisite courses, students can enroll in the customized ten-month, evening and weekend, LPN program. The program is full time and has a very

demanding schedule: students are in class from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m., with additional clinical rotations every other weekend from 7 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. All remedial and prerequisite courses are held at the Educational Bridge Center and the college campus.

Genesis HealthCare contracts with Holyoke to deliver a similar sequence of educational courses, culminating in a ten-month evening and weekend LPN program. The students are in classroom instruction two or three days per week from 4 p.m. to 10 p.m., and the clinical rotation days are twice per week from 4 p.m. to 11 p.m., with no weekend instruction. All remedial and prerequisite courses are offered at the company’s five-facility campus in Western Massachusetts.

Employers at both RACs contract with WorkSource Partners to provide a comprehensive set of employee outreach and counseling services. Staff from WorkSource conduct outreach sessions at all facilities to communicate the employer’s commitment to career development and to solicit employee interest in participating in the CNA-to-LPN program. A WorkSource career development specialist then conducts a one-on-one session to help each interested employee develop a career plan based on an assessment of his/her academic skill level, career interests, and life circumstances. Employees who enroll in CNA-to-LPN career advancement courses (from pre-college prep through the pre-nursing program) receive ongoing academic and “life” coaching to help them juggle the conflicting demands of family, work, and school.

To help employees meet the demands of a full-time education, Alliance employers limit the work schedule of students in the LPN program to no more than 24 hours a week, and they provide flexible work schedules, especially around exams. All full-time employees who enroll in the LPN program agree to reduce their work hours until they graduate. At Genesis, the negotiation of work schedules is informal and conducted on a case-by-case basis. Managers across the Genesis Campus are committed to this program and have been supportive and flexible in this process.

Description of Participating Employees and Employers

The first class of 24 students entered the Intercare Alliance-Quinsigamond Community College LPN program in 2002. All have been CNAs in one of the 11 member nursing homes. Each Alliance facility had

up to three slots to fill in the program. For the second class, entering in 2004, the Alliance allowed a local, non-member nursing home to fill six of twenty-four slots. The Alliance anticipates a similar mix of member and non-member homes filling slots in the next class, due to start fall 2005.

After being selected to participate in the program, candidates take the College Placement Test to determine if they are eligible for the prerequisite college courses. The first year of the program, only nine of forty-eight candidates passed the CPT, forcing the program to delay its start for six months so that those who did not pass could take remedial math and English courses. Based on this first-year experience, the Alliance, with help from WorkSource, set up a formal “Bridge program” that provides remedial math and English instruction to employees interested in enrolling in the LPN program or other college-level courses.

The Genesis HealthCare-Holyoke Community College LPN program enrolls a mix of Genesis employees and community members in the evening/weekend LPN program. The inaugural 2004 class of twenty-five students included fourteen Genesis employees; eight of the twenty-four students who began the 2005 program were Genesis employees. Almost all the Genesis employees are CNAs.

The vast majority of Genesis employees who enroll in the LPN program need to take remedial English and math courses to qualify; fourteen of the twenty-two employees in the first two LPN classes completed remedial courses prior to enrolling. Genesis offers both adult basic education and pre-college math and English courses to any interested employees at the company’s Western Massachusetts campus. So far, 74 have taken pre-college courses towards nursing.

Costs and Financing of Program

The costs per person for the Alliance-Quinsigamond CNA-to-LPN program are as follows:

- \$400-\$450 for pre-college classes (includes book costs);
- \$450-\$500 for each of the four required prerequisite courses (including book costs);
- \$5,896 in tuition and fees for the LPN program (excluding \$775 in estimated book costs); and
- Approximately \$65 per person for counseling services provided by WorkSource Partners staff.³

The costs per person for the Genesis-Holyoke CNA-to-LPN program are as follows:

- Approximately \$700 for pre-college reading/writing and math classes;
- Approximately \$300 for each of three prerequisite courses;
- \$7,997 for tuition and fees for LPN program; and
- Approximately \$120 per person for counseling services provided by WorkSource.⁴

Employers cover the bulk of program costs at both sites. Alliance members and Genesis pay all LPN program tuition and fees. In exchange, Alliance employees are required to “pay back” this tuition benefit by committing to work at their facility for two years after earning the LPN license. Genesis employees are required to make a similar commitment: they pay back the benefit at a rate of one hour for each dollar of tuition they use.

Employers also contribute toward the cost of pre-college and prerequisite courses. For the Alliance, the prerequisite costs are paid by Intercare. The costs of the pre-college classes can be paid by the student (who may get financial aid), ECCLI, or the facility (through tuition reimbursement programs). At Genesis, these courses have been paid for primarily through ECCLI and tuition reimbursement. Genesis offers a tuition assistance program: employees can apply for funds to cover most of their LPN program costs. A major part of career counseling is identifying the types of financial aid that the employees might qualify to receive via scholarships and grants. In addition, each employee can get assistance in applying for financial aid through Free Application for Financial Student Aid (FAFSA) forms.

Federal Pell Grants help to offset employer tuition costs for eligible employees. To take advantage of this funding source, Alliance employers now require employees who enroll in the LPN program to fill out the FAFSA forms. Ten of the twenty students in the class of 2005 received Pell Grants ranging from \$1,000 to \$1,800.

Employers make other important financial contributions to defray program costs. Alliance employers provide flexible work schedules and continue to pay full medical and dental benefits for participating employees who work a reduced, 24-hours-per-week schedule. Genesis front-line managers work with employees on a case-by-case basis to provide flexible

work schedules to accommodate the LPN program, enabling employees to maintain benefits. Employers also contribute classroom space, computers, and a portion of the costs of a director to manage the program. Genesis also contributes the time of its RNs to serve as adjunct faculty to the Holyoke LPN program. For the Intercare program, all LPN instructors are from the college partner. However, staff development coordinators from the Alliance teach the Math for Meds prerequisite course.

State ECCLI funding has supported program development costs, including program design and planning assistance provided by WorkSource and the partial salary of a program director at the Genesis and Alliance RACs. ECCLI funds have also paid for the employee outreach and counseling services provided by WorkSource and a portion of the tuition for pre-college courses and prerequisite courses.

Program Results

The retention and completion rate for CNA-to LPN programs have been outstanding at both locations:

Seventy-five percent of the Alliance employees who enrolled in the first LPN class completed the program. Seventeen of the eighteen graduates passed the licensure exam on the first try. Twenty-three of the twenty-four students who enrolled in the 2004-2005 program passed the first semester.

Thirteen of the fourteen Genesis employees who enrolled in the first class completed the program. Six of the eight employees who entered the second class in the fall of 2005 are still enrolled and near completion.

An additional 17 Genesis employees and 29 Alliance employees were enrolled in the pre-college segment during 2004-2005.

Appendix

List of Interviews

Community College of Denver: *CNA-to-LPN Program*

Elaine Baker, Director of Workforce Initiatives,
Community College of Denver

Linda Merkl, Site-based Healthcare Program Manager,
Community College of Denver

1199C Training and Upgrading Fund: *LPN Career Ladder Program*

Cheryl Feldman, Director, District 1199C Training
and Upgrading Fund

Workforce Alliance and Hospital Corporation of America: *LPN Career Advancement Program*

Terry Eggenberger, RN, MSN, Workforce and
Organizational Program Director, JFK Medical Center

Debora Kerr, former Vice President, Resource
Development, Workforce Alliance

Marsha Thrower, Vice President, Resource
Development, Workforce Alliance

WorkSource Partners: *Regional Advancement Centers*

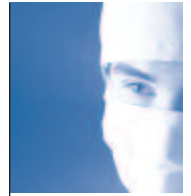
Shawntsi Baret-Stone, Vice President, Workforce
Development, WorkSource Partners

Patricia A. Campbell, Manager Training and
Development, WorkSource Partners

Neil Silverston, President, WorkSource Partners

Endnotes

- ¹ For the third cluster, WorkSource is in the process of replicating the Regional Advancement Center concept with a cluster of four Genesis nursing facilities in Lowell, Massachusetts.
- ² The ECCLI grant program, which has distributed \$11.6 million to long-term facilities in Massachusetts, has not cost the state a dime. Through an innovative funding arrangement, the state leverages federal Medicaid matching funds to finance the program. Ostensibly, the ECCLI program is funded through a “bed tax” or a user fee that the state assesses nursing homes on their non-Medicare bed days. The state collects approximately \$145 million from this fee. It then gives the fees back to the nursing homes in the form of increased Medicaid payments. In the process, the state can double the funds it returns to the nursing homes (i.e., from \$145 million to \$290 million) because the increase in Medicaid nursing home rates funded through the bed tax is matched by the federal government, which provides 50 percent reimbursement to states for federally approved Medicaid expenditures. The bulk of new funding secured for nursing homes through this innovative arrangement has been used to raise the wages of nursing home staff. About two dozen states use this “bed tax” to leverage federal funds and help finance state Medicaid payments to nursing homes; no other state has created a program like ECCLI, but the funding mechanism exists to do so.
- ³ This cost is calculated by dividing \$61,750 that Worksource receives to provide outreach and counseling services by a base of 950 Alliance employees.
- ⁴ This cost is calculated by dividing \$48,000 that Worksource receives to provide outreach and counseling services by a base of 400 Alliance employees.



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About the Author

SUSAN GOLDBERGER, Director of New Ventures at JFF, is responsible for promoting the development, testing, and scaling up of new educational and workforce program designs to help low-income youth and adults achieve academic and career success. Previously, she directed JFF's youth development and educational reform efforts, including a multi-city, urban high school reform initiative. Prior to joining JFF, Dr. Goldberger founded and directed several community-based organizations that advocated for improvements in health care, child care, and economic opportunity for low-wage workers. She holds a Ph.D. in social policy from Brandeis University and a B.A. from Brown University.



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Career Ladders: A Guidebook for Workforce Intermediaries (2003)

Earning While Learning: Maintaining Income While Upgrading Skills (2004)

The Next Challenge: Advancing Low-Skilled, Low-Wage Workers (2004)

Reinventing Workforce Development: Lessons from Boston's Community Approach (2004)

Workforce Intermediaries and Their Roles in Promoting Advancement (2004)

Employer-Led Organizations and Career Ladders (2003)

Getting Ahead: A Survey of Low-Wage Workers on Opportunities for Advancement (2003)

Opportunity in Tough Times: Promoting Advancement for Low-Wage Workers (2003)

Low-Wage Workers in the New Economy (Urban Institute Press, 2001)

Public Views on Low Wage Workers in the Current Economy (2001)

A National Survey of American Attitudes About Low-Wage Workers and Welfare Reform (2000)



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