Stepping Up

STEPPING UP IS AN EMPLOYER-LED PARTNERSHIP COMPRISED OF HEALTH CARE, LABOR, EDUCATION AND COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS THAT ADMINISTER AN EMPLOYMENT PATHWAY PROGRAM. IT OFFERS TRAINING, EDUCATION, AND CAREER SUPPORT SERVICES FOR LOW-SKILLED RESIDENTS AND INCUMBENT WORKERS, SUPPLYING LOCAL HEALTH CARE EMPLOYERS WITH A SKILLED WORKFORCE.

In 2006, Rhode Island’s hospitals were competing with and struggling against each other to hire skilled talent from the surrounding communities. The United Nurses & Allied Professionals/Rhode Island Hospital Education Fund and Women & Infants Hospital pooled their resources and began a health care employment pathway program to respond to the current and projected health care workforce shortages. The result was Stepping Up, a private/public collaborative, which was created with financial support from the local United Way and the strong support of the unions representing employees at both hospitals. It administers the career pathway in two distinct phases: the community pipeline track, which offers work skill development and internship opportunities for low-skilled adults to prepare for entry-level health care jobs; and the incumbent employee track, in which employees receive training and career navigation support to progress on a defined career pathway into credentialed occupations. This employment pathway approach benefits the health care employers and allows them to develop a strong and diverse workforce; to build a culture of continuous learning; to decrease recruitment costs; to increase retention rates; to strengthen community partnerships; and to provide the best quality healthcare.

Business Outcomes
» Fill labor shortages with diverse workforce
» Create skilled and educated entry-level talent pool
» Strengthen community partnerships
» 98 percent retention rate for tuition reimbursement program

Student Outcomes
» Life and work skills training
» Internship opportunity
» Participate in career pathway
» Career navigation support
» Workplace flexibility
» College credit attainment opportunity
» Various levels and opportunities for training/advancement

Stepping Up:
» Business-driven collaborative
» Health care pathway partnership
» Targets low-skilled residents and incumbent employees
» 22 percent of community participants are disconnected young adults
» Over 70 percent graduated from the community pipeline program and received jobs

Soft Skills and Relevant Work Experiences for Low-Skilled Workers

Stepping Up coordinates the initial phase of the employment pathway program – the community pipeline track. It offers unemployed/underemployed community residents the opportunity to gain necessary skills and workplace training so that they can compete for entry-level health care positions while providing the hospital with a diverse and ready talent pool. 80 percent of recruits are unemployed and 22 percent are disconnected young adults who are recruited from local community organizations. Recruits must possess a GED or high school diploma and pass eighth grade-level math and literacy tests. If the applicants are unable to meet these benchmarks, Stepping Up refers them to the appropriate community program to gain the necessary remedial skills and education.

Delivered and developed jointly with health care employer partners, the Healthcare Career Orientation program includes seven weeks of classroom training focused on soft skills instruction, job readiness skills, resume writing, job shadow opportunities, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPAA), Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation (CPR), first aid, blood-borne pathogens certification, basic medical terminology, Customer Service certification, National Work Readiness Credential, Myers-Briggs type indicator, goal setting, career interest inventories, and other self-development tools.
“Why do we [Women & Infants Hospital] do this? It’s the right thing to do. This is how we advocate for our employees. We find the employees that are most motivated and who want to move up the career pathway and we remove the barriers, and allow them to realize their dream. It is a great way to invest money that we are already spending.”

– Michael J. Paruta, Director of Workforce Development, Human Resources, Care New England Health System

Participating health care employers provide 100-hour unpaid internships that allow the participants to gain relevant work experience and the employers to evaluate these students for future job opportunities. Career Advisers assist participants with career exploration exercises and necessary wraparound supports. Upon completion of the classroom training and the internship, the participants are evaluated on their academic learning and work performance. Since the inception of the program, 412 community members have participated in the community pipeline program, and, as of spring of 2014, 380 people have graduated from the program and 86 percent have been placed in jobs. The employers benefit greatly from risk-free talent exploration and a ready local diverse pool of entry-level skilled talent.

Learn and Earn Initiative Professionalizes Workforce

Through the incumbent employee track, Stepping Up, the Community College of Rhode Island (CCRI), community-based organizations and health care employers offer employees the opportunity to gain education and training requirements and to advance up the career pipeline into professional high-growth/high-demand occupations, including patient care, technical and administrative positions.

To be eligible, the employee must have worked at the hospital for six months and prove that they are able to excel in collegiate-level courses. Employers provide tuition reimbursement benefits (up to $2,500 per year) and flexible work scheduling. CCRI delivers 15 classes per year with 18-25 students per class; currently, there are 205 incumbent employees enrolled in collegiate-level classes. Two hospitals, Rhode Island Hospital and Women & Infants Hospital, found that it was more cost effective to purchase general education classes from CCRI and host the classes on hospital campuses. The hospitals fund these classes directly and, as a result, employees do not have to draw down on the tuition reimbursement dollars for them. They offer the collateral benefit of enrollment in these classes to Healthcare Career Orientation graduates of Stepping Up.

Stepping Up offers a Career Adviser who provides career navigation, soft skills training and wraparound supports. The collaborative works closely with human resources, front-line managers and supervisors to ensure that the curriculum delivered is meeting business needs, that the class schedules are coordinating with work demands and that the employees are succeeding. To date, there is a 99 percent completion rate for college courses, and the Women & Infants Hospital claims a 97 percent retention rate for those who participate in tuition reimbursement program. Employers report that they spend a large amount of time and funds to hire travel nurses to fill labor shortages, but by participating in Stepping Up, they are growing their own and filling labor shortages more cost effectively.

Strong Partnership Produces Strong Outcomes for All

Stepping Up has now grown to over 50 partners consisting of about 30 employers across healthcare sectors, as well as community-based organizations, labor unions, and educational partners because of the strong outcomes reported by the employers, the partners and the participants. The health care employers are able to fill their labor shortages with a strong pool of ready and diverse talent, and realize a decrease in recruitment rates and an increase in retention rates. Employers have built better relationships with community and education partners, all seeing the benefits of continue with this innovative solution to address their labor shortages. The partnership has grown to include new initiatives such as:

1. RI Nurse Residency Passport to Practice: for unemployed, underemployed newly graduated nurses
2. Peer Specialist Training: for adults with developmental disabilities to become community health workers to others with like disabilities
3. Incumbent training program for Medical Assistants in healthcare facilities transitioning to the Patient Centered Medical Home model.
4. Delivering a statewide healthcare skills gap study as an Industry Partner of the Governor’s Workforce Board RI

Personal Story

Vivian F. was unemployed, and barely made it into Stepping Up with a reading score below the normal cut-off, but the Career Advisor saw motivation and potential in her. Vivian worked on her English communication and soft skills during the Healthcare Career Orientation program. During internship, Vivian demonstrated her work ethic, and was the first participant in her class to be offered a Housekeeping job at Rhode Island Hospital. Prior to this exciting news, a Career Advisor coached her on soft skills, particularly a habit of calling someone multiple times without leaving messages. The Career Advisor helped her to understand that one’s urgency does not translate equally to others’ urgency. Now when she calls someone, she leaves a message and waits an appropriate amount of time for a reply. This is one example of how career coaching led to a successful recruitment, interview, and on-boarding process. Vivian is thrilled with her new job, and excited about the career ladder ahead of her. She will continue to work on her education goals while getting job retention and advancement coaching from Stepping Up.

Background Information

ABOUT STEPPING UP

Stepping Up helps unemployed and underemployed Rhode Islanders start their careers in the healthcare workforce through an inventive job skills program that provides participants with internships, training, certifications, and college opportunities.

For more information about Stepping Up, visit www.steppingupri.org

ABOUT THE EMPLOYMENT PATHWAYS PROJECT

The project is catalyzing a national effort to “flip the switch” on employer demand for opportunity youth - young adults ages 16 to 24 who are out of school and work. The project works to harness the power of the private sector so that employers play an active role in developing new sources of skilled talent.

For more information, please visit: www.employmentpathwaysproject.org