

## **Overview describing the innovative best practice**

The MNBest Health Care Credential Initiative provides Dakota and Scott County public assistance recipients with barriers to post-secondary education the opportunity to earn a Nursing Assistant – Registered (NA-R) credential. The instructional model blends Adult Basic Education (ABE) with traditional college education. One ABE instructor will present material along with the college instructor to ensure participants fully comprehend the information. Individuals in the program are enrolled into Inver Hills Community College (IHCC) without having to pass the Acuplacer test or provide a secondary school certificate. In addition to the occupational skills credentials, they earn 5 college credits that can transfer to other health care or college programs. Students receive additional tutoring and educational retention opportunities from IHCC staff and Project Coordinator.

Upon graduation, participants work with Dakota-Scott Workforce Services (DSWFS) Job Developer to create On-the-Job Training (OJT) contracts with area employers. DSWFS pays for 50% of the participants' wages for up to 12 weeks as an incentive to encourage employers to hire MNBest students. Clients receive site visits and added supports to help them learn the skills needed to excel in their new positions. Participants may also enroll in several retention programs designed to help the students make the transition from student to professional, seeking ongoing professional development and advancement.

MNBest employs an ongoing quality improvement process to ensure each cohort is evaluated, that all customer satisfaction data is collected and reviewed and that elements that need to be addressed for improvement are identified and modified as appropriate. Through this system, performance measures are expected to improve with each consecutive cohort until the program reaches optimum performance. This process also guarantees that the clients' needs and input are at the forefront of program planning.

## **Jobseeker impact**

Individuals targeted for enrollment must have at least one of the following barriers to post-secondary education, in addition to receiving public assistance: lacking a high school diploma or GED, history of dropping out of post-secondary education, low basic skills, limited English proficiency, and a learning disability.

To date, all the participants in the program have been public assistance recipients, 98% are single mothers, 80% are people of color and 20% have limited English proficiency. These are individuals who believed going to college was not an option for them. Many had dropped out of high school to have their children. We estimate 30% enrolled in the program without a GED or high school degree. Actually becoming college students and having the support to be successful has been life changing for them. They exude confidence they did not have prior to enrolling. This confidence travels with them to their job interviews carried over to a strong positive outlook for their futures. Not only do they now have credentials that are in demand, but they see themselves as being able to overcome obstacles and meet their goals. This has been transformative and moved the clients from difficult to employ to very employable.

For the first cohort, 90% graduated and 40% are currently employed. The remaining clients are working with the job developer to continue their job search. 90% have passed their clinical testing, received their certificate and college credits, and are registered with the state as eligible to work as home health care or nursing home workers.

### **Community impact**

The obvious benefit to the community is that these clients will eventually move off of public assistance. In addition, their children will have the example that education is important and provides a better life, thwarting the costly cycle of education underachievement. In addition, the community gains skilled community members who are able and willing to participate in a positive manner.

In addition, the Nursing Assistant – Registered vocation is a high demand credential that shows significant job openings over the next 10 years. However, the number of students expected to complete it is very low. The program helps fill the gap for such positions that is expected to continue for some time.

### **Identification of those involved, including collaborators**

The MNBEST project consists of Inver Hills Community College (IHCC) staff, South Suburban Adult Basic Education (SSABE) and Dakota-Scott Workforce Services.

### **Leveraging/alignment of outside resources**

Dakota County uses Supported Work dollars to provide on-the-job training contracts with employers, paying 50% of the clients' wages for up to the first week of employment, providing an incentive for employers to choose MNBEST graduates.

Upon graduation and/or entering employment, African American and Native American clients may enter the HIRED PS program, which addresses employment retention through culturally appropriate services.

### **Ideas for replication/lessons learned**

Developing a strong relationship between the post secondary institution and Adult Basic Education is paramount for such a program, as the two need to find a way to seamlessly provide training that meets the learning needs of the clients. Thus a lot of preparation defining the curriculum and areas each entity will emphasize needs to occur prior to the training. In this case, it worked well to have the nursing instructor go over the information, and then have the ABE instructor emphasize key concepts and areas that would be emphasized during testing. Some clients would also attend individual tutoring after class if their reading levels were low.

Clear expectations of each partner are also paramount. The two sets of instructors need to work well together or the clients will not get the full benefit of the program. The ABE instructor chose to participate in hands on clinical lessons and often was a volunteer "body." This helped her better understand the nursing requirements and ensure the students were learning the higher level concepts at sufficient levels. The high level of rapport between the two instructors really added to the success of the program.