



Rhode Island Provides Support Services and Educational Opportunities to Encourage Nursing Careers

Ladders in Nursing Careers (L.I.N.C.) Program

SUMMARY

From 1993 to 1997, the Hospital Association of Rhode Island, Providence, worked in partnership with a variety of organizations and agencies to build a nursing career continuum—spanning educational levels from current high school students interested in health care careers to master's level candidates—for minority and economically disadvantaged state residents.

The project was part of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF) *Ladders in Nursing Careers Program* national program.

Known as Rhode Island Project L.I.N.C., the project developed a fully accredited associates degree program for surgical technicians. It also partnered with community organizations to access day care, mental health services, health care, and other support services for students. All of the state's nursing schools and most of the state's hospitals participated in the program.

Key Results

- By June 1997, some 53 students had graduated from the program and six students had dropped out of the program.

Of participating students, 27 percent were minority, nearly 40 percent were economically disadvantaged, and approximately 30 percent were single parents. On average, L.I.N.C. graduates saw their annual salaries increase 43 percent, from \$21,800 to \$31,200.

More than 50 percent of Rhode Island L.I.N.C. students were enrolled in BSN or MSN programs and more than 18 percent of students were enrolled in allied health programs.

Funding

RWJF supported the project with two grants totaling \$540,851 between February 1993 and June 1997.

THE PROBLEM

Rhode Island faced a shortage of both nurses and allied health professionals in the early 1990s. In 1992, the RN and LPN vacancy rates were 8.4 percent and 11.1 percent, respectively.

Based on a study conducted by the Rhode Island Department of Health (RIDH), the state projected a need for 22 percent more RNs over the period 1990 to 1995. RIDH identified a need for more nurses at all levels—from RNs and LPNs to nurse practitioners and nurse midwives. An inadequate supply of nursing faculty and an aging nursing work force would likely exacerbate the shortage.

Among the allied health professions, physical and occupational therapists were in especially short supply. In fact, in 1992, the vacancy rate for both was higher than 28 percent. There were also shortages of laboratory and radiology technologists.

Like other Project L.I.N.C. sites, Rhode Island did not have enough minority nursing professionals. In a state with one of the fastest growing immigrant populations in the nation, and with urban areas where more than 60 percent of students in the school system were minorities, minorities were overrepresented in the lowest paying health care positions (such as housekeeping and dietary functions) and underrepresented in the better-paying professional nursing and allied health positions.

In fact, less than 5 percent of the professional health positions in the state were held by minorities. A case in point: although 81 percent of the population served by a hospital in Providence were minority, only 40 percent of the staff were minority and they mostly occupied entry-level and ancillary positions such as nursing assistant.

The Hospital Association of Rhode Island had surveyed health care providers in the state and nearly all of them expressed a strong interest in educational programs that would assist minorities in advancing within the health care work force. They agree that this would result in improved health care services for Rhode Island's diverse communities and improvement in the health status of the state's low-income and minority populations.

THE PROJECT

Because of the small size of the state, Rhode Island Project L.I.N.C. was able to operate statewide. All of the state's nursing schools and most of the state's hospitals participated in the program. The geography of the state allowed Project L.I.N.C. staff to visit the

hospitals and nursing schools on a regular basis, thus giving Rhode Island Project L.I.N.C. a great deal of visibility in the health service and education arena in the state.

Rhode Island L.I.N.C. also reached out into individual communities. Local and state grant money allowed the program to recruit 15 students from community-based health care organizations. All told, Project L.I.N.C. received \$471,212 in other support, including \$106,807 from member hospitals, \$44,600 from the Emma G. Harris Foundation, and \$300,000 from the Rhode Island Human Resource Investment Council (HRIC)—a state program that supports research, demonstration projects, and training activities that help to develop a productive and competitive business environment in Rhode Island.

Rhode Island Project L.I.N.C.'s goals were to:

- Provide career advancement opportunities for minorities and financially disadvantaged individuals.
- Meet employers' needs for a qualified work force and enhance retention.

RESULTS

By June 1997, some 53 students had graduated from the program and six students had dropped out of the program. Of participating students, 27 percent were minority, nearly 40 percent were economically disadvantaged, and approximately 30 percent were single parents. On average, L.I.N.C. graduates saw their annual salaries increase 43 percent, from \$21,800 to \$31,200.

To meet its goal of addressing employers' needs for qualified workers, Rhode Island Project L.I.N.C. shifted its recruitment efforts as the program progressed. Hospitals identified a need for:

- Nurses educated at the BSN and MSN level to meet a growing demand within the community.
- Professionals in shortage allied health fields such as surgical technology, occupational therapy, and physical therapy.

Rhode Island Project L.I.N.C. responded: more than 50 percent of Rhode Island L.I.N.C. students were enrolled in BSN or MSN programs and more than 18 percent of students were enrolled in allied health programs. Moreover, Rhode Island Project L.I.N.C. worked with New England Institute of Technology to develop an associates degree program for surgical technicians in response to both a lack of qualified professionals in this area and a lack of educational programs. Nine L.I.N.C. students graduated from this program.

Working in partnership with Health & Education Leadership for Providence (HELP)—a community partnership of hospitals and colleges—and the Rhode Island School-to-Work (RISW) Program, Rhode Island Project L.I.N.C. established a unique nursing career continuum for the state and simultaneously widened the nursing pipeline.

HELP's Providence Works initiative provided an avenue for minority and disadvantaged Providence residents to complete a certified nursing assistant training program. Rhode Island Project L.I.N.C. dovetailed with Providence Works and tapped interested and qualified minority students to further their nursing education in a degree program. RISW provided high school students with information on health care careers.

Then, Rhode Island Project L.I.N.C. stepped in and worked with students interested in nursing, offering qualified students the opportunity to pursue a nursing education through Project L.I.N.C.

Communications

The Hospital Association of Rhode Island (HARI) issued a number of brochures, a regular newsletter, and regular posters. It published a *Guide to Health Careers in Rhode Island*. It produced news releases and packets about graduates and received local press coverage. See the [Bibliography](#) for details.

AFTERWARD

Project L.I.N.C. expected that 46 enrolled students would be funded through graduation using \$28,000 in support from HRIC for the 1997–98 school year as well as remaining Project L.I.N.C. dollars, which were provided by local and state funders. The Hospital Association of Rhode Island (HARI) plans to use the L.I.N.C. model as a foundation for future health care initiatives. Specifically, HARI intends to:

- Conduct ongoing health care work force needs assessment to effectively meet future health care needs.
- Collaborate with the Regional Education and Training Board, the State School-to-Career Office, and the Department of Labor and Training to develop a statewide health career counseling, mentoring, and job-shadowing program for middle and high school students as part of School-to-Career grant initiative.
- Work with area employers and educators to enhance health education curricula to meet the industry's changing work force needs.
- Act as a clearinghouse for career information to better prepare individuals interested in health careers.

Prepared by: Karin Gillespie

Reviewed by: Patricia Patrizi and Molly McKaughan

Program Officers: Polly M. Seitz and Rosemary Gibson

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Books and Reports

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Brochures and Fact Sheets

Project L.I.N.C. Rhode Island: We're You're L.I.N.C. to Success (brochure). Providence, RI: Hospital Association of Rhode Island, 1994.

Project L.I.N.C.: The Promise of Things to Come (brochure). Providence, RI: Hospital Association of Rhode Island, 1994.

Project L.I.N.C. Rhode Island: Policy Statements (brochure). Providence, RI: Hospital Association of Rhode Island, 1995.

Newsletters

LINCnotes (newsletter). Providence, RI: Hospital Association of Rhode Island, 1994 and 1995.

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Project L.I.N.C. Rhode Island: Career Advancement Brochure 1996 (recruitment poster). Providence, RI: Hospital Association of Rhode Island, 1996.

Press Kits and News Releases

A news release on Project L.I.N.C. Rhode Island as it applauds its first graduates was sent on June 14, 1996.

A news packet on HARI to salute Project L.I.N.C. graduates was sent on June 12, 1996.

A news release on Project L.I.N.C. Rhode Island honors its star students was sent on April 2, 1996.

A news packet on Project L.I.N.C. to graduate its second class was sent on June 2, 1997.

A news release on 30 students graduate from Project L.I.N.C. career advancement program was sent on June 6, 1997.

Audio-Visuals and Computer Software

Project L.I.N.C. Rhode Island Slide Presentation. Providence, RI: Hospital Association of Rhode Island, 1995.

Print Coverage

"Women Today: Taking Charge: More Women are Moving into Key Positions in Health Care," in *Providence Journal Bulletin*, March 31, 1996.

"HARI Honors Health Care Professionals in Project L.I.N.C.," in *Hospital News Rhode Island*, May 1996.

"HARI Recognizes L.I.N.C. Star Students and Supporters," in *Currents* newsletter, March 28, 1996.

"Project L.I.N.C. Applauds First Graduates," in *Currents*, June 6, 1996.