

# **Executive Summary**

Jobs to Careers: Transforming the Front Lines of Health Care

Jobs to Careers: Promoting Work-Based Learning for Quality Care was a seven-year (2005–2012), \$15.8 million initiative that explored new ways to help front-line health care workers gain the skills and credentials they need to advance their careers.

Sponsored by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation (RWJF), in collaboration with the Hitachi Foundation and the U.S. Department of Labor, Employment & Training Administration, *Jobs to Careers* awarded three-year grants to 17 partnerships between health care employers, educational institutions, and other community organizations to:

- Create lasting improvements in the way health and health care institutions train, advance, and reward their front-line workers.
- Test new models of education and training that incorporate work-based learning.

Read the full report. Learn more about the program here.

### **CONTEXT**

Front-line workers fill about half of all health and health care jobs, with their work ranging from direct care to support and administrative roles. Despite their critical and growing responsibilities, most front-line workers have little if any direct preparation for their work beyond brief in-service training. Many barriers prevent front-line workers from advancing on the job, including high turnover rates among poorly paid workers and

employers that do not offer clear pathways for advancement or provide career counseling or the educational and financial support they need to upgrade their skills.<sup>1</sup>

### THE PROGRAM

*Jobs to Careers* aimed to improve the quality of care and services provided to patients and communities by establishing systems that train, develop, reward, and advance front-line health and health care workers. It had three key elements:

- *Partnerships:* To be eligible for funding, at least one employer and one educational institution had to form a partnership; unions and other organizations that contribute resources or services to advance front-line workers were encouraged to join.
- Work-based learning: All partnerships tested innovative models of work-based learning, an approach to adult learning that captures, documents, formalizes, and rewards learning that occurs on the job.
- Systems change: To support work-based learning, employers and educational institutions made significant adjustments in the way they conducted their business. Employers adjusted human resource policies (e.g., tuition reimbursement), for example, while educators altered curricula and delivered training to workers onsite.

From 2006 to 2008, *Jobs to Careers* awarded three-year grants of approximately \$430,000 to 17 partnerships in 15 states: Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, Mississippi, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Texas, and Washington.

### **OVERALL RESULTS AND FINDINGS**

The 17 partnerships used work-based learning strategies to train more than 800 front-line workers, the majority of whom achieved pay increases, professional credentials, college credits, or other outcomes. Their efforts focused on four types of health and health care settings: hospitals (eight projects); community health centers (four projects); long-term care facilities (two projects); and behavioral health institutions (three projects). Sites ranged from densely urban to rural and included diverse populations of workers.

An evaluation team at the University of North Carolina Institute on Aging<sup>2</sup> (in collaboration with its Cecil G. Sheps Center for Health Services Research) found the following:

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Workers Who Care: A Graphical Profile of the Frontline Health and Health Care Workforce. San Francisco: Health Workforce Solutions, 2006.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Grant ID#s 57290, 59245, 61026 funded the evaluation. In addition, RWJF awarded grants for research on selected partnerships to three institutions: Aspen Institute (Washington), Grant ID# 63058; University of Texas at Austin, Grant ID# 63056; and Portland State University (Oregon), Grant ID# 63057.

- About half of front-line workers who participated in Jobs to Careers training programs received a wage increase during the course of the grant period.<sup>3</sup>
   Among workers who completed a training program, a higher percentage (67%) received wage increases.
  - Many workers (65% of total; 71% of completers) acquired a certification that recognized their advanced skills and competencies.
- Some 60 percent of front-line workers could articulate career and educational plans by the end of the project period. The solidification of career goals combined with knowledge on how to reach those goals represented an important building block to career advancement, according to the evaluators.
- The large majority of front-line workers (93%) reported improved selfconfidence, with the majority calling that the greatest benefit from participating in the project. Workers were confident they could perform their current job well and obtain the skills and credentials they needed to advance to a better job.
- Although investing in front-line worker training was new, employers and
  educational institutions found that it created valuable returns. Benefits for
  employers included improved skills of front-line workers and better quality of patient
  care, revenue generation, and reductions in vacancies. For educational partners,
  benefits included better alignment of educational offerings with local workforce
  needs and increased enrollment.

## **Eight Overarching Themes**

The University of North Carolina Institute on Aging, identified eight core themes emerging from the work of the 17 partnerships over the course of implementing the *Jobs to Careers* training programs.

- Theme One: Curriculum is Embedded in the Work Process
- Theme Two: Learning Is Embedded in the Work Process
- Theme Three: Assessment is Embedded in the Work Process
- Theme Four: Front-Line Workers Help Design and Deliver Curricula
- Theme Five: Employers Create Pathways to Career Advancement
- Theme Six: Organizations Reward Front-Line Workers for Upgrading Their Skills
- Theme Seven: Educators Adapt Curricula and Requirements to Address Learning Needs of Front-Line Workers
- Theme Eight: Employers Adjust Policies to Support Front-Line Workers

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Some of the increases were cost of living adjustments.

### SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PROGRAM

In April 2010, the Council on Foundations conferred its annual Critical Impact Award on RWJF and the Hitachi Foundation for providing an example of how philanthropy seeks to enhance the common good. As Hitachi Foundation president and CEO Barbara Dyer noted, the award recognized *Jobs to Careers*' impact "in developing work-based learning approaches applicable to the millions of men and women working on the front lines; providing them not merely jobs, but meaningful careers."

### **AFTERWARD**

Findings from *Jobs to Careers* were incorporated into two initiatives of Jobs for the Future, <sup>4</sup> the organization managing the program.

- CareerSTAT establishes an employer-led advocacy council to promote investments in career development for low-wage, front-line hospital workers.
- Accelerating Opportunity is a four-year (2011–2015) initiative targeting adults in need of basic education skills to succeed on the job. Eleven states received one-year grants to design a plan to engage community colleges, employers, and other partners in promoting educational opportunities for adult learners. Five of the 11 states (Illinois, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, and North Carolina) each received three-year grants of \$1.6 million to implement their plans.

#### **Program Management**

National Program Office: Jobs for the Future

Program Director: Maria Flynn, MS

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> For more information on CareerSTAT and Accelerating Opportunity, see the Jobs for the Future website and the Accelerating Opportunity website.