

RURAL HEALTH WORKFORCE

READY!



**RURAL
HEALTH**
ASSOCIATION OF TENNESSEE
WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT

RECRUIT, TRAIN, RETAIN

A MESSAGE FROM THE CHIEF PROGRAM OFFICER

Dear Friends,

The past two years I've had the pleasure of connecting with K-12 schools, technical and community colleges, and healthcare employers across the state through Rural Health Association of Tennessee's (RHA) Workforce Development Program. Our goal has been to leverage our many relationships to address healthcare workforce shortages in Tennessee.

Through our work we've learned there are many talented people with the skills and interest in healthcare, but some experience barriers to entry. Some experience financial hardships that make paying for certification courses, textbooks, and exam fees difficult. Some certifications require 80 hours of unpaid clinicals – oftentimes while students are working other jobs and caring for children. Upon new employment, costs are often incurred for background checks, scrubs, and supplies.

Thanks to funding from Delta Regional Authority, Tennessee Department of Health, and Amerigroup, we have supported nearly 300 people working toward certification and on-the-job training. To introduce students to careers in healthcare, we have trained more than 700 students using our in-house Workforce Readiness Curriculum. These classes have been so successful, several community colleges and non-healthcare educators have adopted them.

RHA is seeking funding to sustain and expand this program. In 2023 we are partnering with Jackson State Community College, Meharry Medical College, TCAT-Jackson, and Vanderbilt on various efforts related to workforce development. It is our hope the state of Tennessee and more private partners will join us in our efforts to grow and sustain a strong healthcare workforce for future generations.

Sincerely,

Patty Lane

Patty Lane, MS, MHM, MA
Chief Program Officer, RHA



WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT TEAM



Beth Keylon, BS
Workforce Development
Assistant Director



Christy Belong, BA
Workforce Development
Coordinator



Maddie Rymer, BS
Workforce Development
Coordinator

ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF FUNDING PARTNERS



Over the past two years, the Rural Health Association has been awarded over \$100,000 from Amerigroup to advance health equity and expand access to healthcare services in rural communities across Tennessee. Through our collaborative approach, we were able to address the ongoing healthcare workforce shortages that continue to impact rural areas where services and resources may be limited.

The Rural Health Association of Tennessee has a strong leadership team, hyper-local healthcare provider workforce expertise and a passion for impacting our next generation of healthcare heroes. Through their work with community health workers, nursing and medical assistants, and behavioral health specialists, they are able to reduce health disparities in rural areas and create a pathway to equitable access for passionate medical professionals that care for others and for their rural communities.

The Rural Health Association plays a vital role in creating and sustaining health across Tennessee. The organization has developed solutions that enhance rural healthcare access while improving health outcomes and they will continue to be at the forefront of making positive, lasting change to improving the overall health and well-being for all Tennesseans.



- Natalie Cooper, Plan President, Amerigroup Tennessee

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT PROGRAMS

Small supports can go a long way in addressing Tennessee's nursing and allied healthcare workforce shortages. We help individuals interested in healthcare build a viable career path that matches their talents and interests.

For individuals who experience barriers to obtaining certifications and/or employment in healthcare, RHA's specialized case management services provide extra support needed to accelerate success.

meet

Ian Touche

**Certified Medical Assistant,
LifeSpring Community Health**

Ian Touche had healthcare experience in his home country of Honduras but did not have recognized certifications to provide care in his new home, Chattanooga, Tennessee. To achieve his goal of providing compassionate healthcare in his new community, he began working as a COVID Testing Coordinator at LifeSpring Community Health. LifeSpring partnered with RHA to assist Ian successfully obtain certification as a Certified Medical Assistant in December of 2022.



“ I participated in RHA's Workforce Program to help understand our patients in an effective way, and because it benefits the clinic to have professional employees on board.



“ This is a great program for individuals in healthcare for gaining more professionalism.

meet

Danielle Baker

**Certified Phlebotomist,
Jackson State Community College**

In Spring of 2022, Jackson State Community College partnered with RHA to support their EKG, Phlebotomy, and CMA students. Students participated in RHA's Workforce Readiness Curriculum, were provided study guides, case management, and received assistance with certification fees and scrubs. Danielle Baker worked with RHA's Workforce Coordinator on setting SMART goals, resumé writing, and interview skills. Ultimately, Danielle completed her Phlebotomy Certification, EKG course, and became a Certified Medical Assistant before obtaining employment at a clinic in Jackson, Tennessee.

meet

Goldie Whaley

**Certified Phlebotomist,
Cleveland State Community College**

In 2022 Cleveland State Community College contacted RHA about training assistance for Goldie Whaley. Goldie wanted to take a Phlebotomy course to expand her skills but needed financial assistance. Though funding from a Tennessee Department of Health grant, RHA covered the cost of tuition and provided case management supports. Goldie shares, "Even after the program ended, RHA continued to check in with me via email and video chats, getting to know me, my life, and how school is going. It really means a lot to me, and I couldn't be more grateful for having the opportunity - many thanks to RHA." Now Goldie is a Certified Phlebotomist, pursuing an associate degree as a Medical Assistant.



“

I could not afford the Phlebotomy program and did not qualify for the scholarship. I am beyond grateful to have been connected with RHA's support. I passed the course and I am now a certified Phlebotomist.



“

I am and have been completely supported and helped in so many ways to be able to achieve my passion in the medical field.

meet

Marlene Rogers

**Medical Assistant,
Community Clinic of Shelbyville and
Bedford County (CCSBC)**

Through relationships with rural charitable clinics across the state, RHA learned about CCSBC's need for a Spanish translator in their clinic. Fredia Lusk, Executive Director of CCSBC, obtained board permission to hire Marlene Maldonado provided she participate in RHA's workforce program. Lusk says, "Using RHA's workforce program has greatly benefited our dental and medical clinics, both serve a large Hispanic population. Marlene's duties have expanded to assist with both clinics - she also manages the databases. We are successful because RHA's staff provided personal and professional resources for Marlene. We look forward to continued support of RHA's program."

WORKING WITH EMPLOYERS AND COMMUNITY PARTNERS

The key to RHA's success is our ability to customize the program based on the needs of the employer. By applying U.S. Department of Labor models to the healthcare setting, RHA supports employers looking to recruit, retain, and upskill healthcare workers. We work

with employers who wish to offer on the job training, apprenticeships, or other professional development training opportunities for employees. RHA's Workforce Coordinators also serve as a liaison between employers, schools, and businesses to facilitate partnerships.

NHC Healthcare Pulaski, Giles County



“

NHC is proud to partner with the Rural Health Association of Tennessee to attract and grow the healthcare workforce in Tennessee. Our patients and partners (employees) have greatly benefited from this partnership through additional support and services provided by the leadership at the RHA. We have worked hand in hand with them to introduce more Tennesseans to the healthcare profession and improve access to healthcare in Tennessee.

NHC looks forward to continuing this strategic partnership with the Rural Health Association of Tennessee and improving the lives of all Tennesseans.

- Chris West, Vice President, Human Resources, NHC



“

I am thankful for my paid tuition for the Phlebotomy training. Professional Allied Health gave me the confidence to pass the Phlebotomy test.

- Lenette McNeil

**Professional Allied Health
Training Partner**



“

RHA's support of our new medical assistant's development has been critical for our team and allows us to see more patients in a busy season.

- Heather Naggar, M.D.

**LifeSpring Community Health
Chattanooga, Hamilton County**



“

The recruitment of qualified individuals is a struggle for rural clinics. RHA assists with recruitment, retention, and training of these individuals.

- Fredia Lusk

**Community Clinic of Shelbyville
and Bedford County
Shelbyville, Bedford County**

WORKFORCE READINESS CURRICULUM

Often youth are unaware of the many career opportunities in healthcare. To support pathway development, RHA partners with schools to explore healthcare careers, host job fairs, conduct mock interviews, and more. Our Workforce Readiness Curriculum

prepares students with the soft skills needed to be successful in the workplace and introduces them to the variety of careers in healthcare. This curriculum is available at no cost for K-12 educators and a small fee for community and technical colleges.



Milan High School
West Tennessee



Lenoir City High School
East Tennessee



Cumberland County High School
Southeast Tennessee



Livingston Academy
Northeast Tennessee



Giles County High School
Middle Tennessee

“ Rural Health Association’s Workforce Readiness curriculum has been such a success with our EKG students that we have decided to incorporate the curriculum into our Medical Coding certificate program.
- *Chrystal Taylor, MALS, RN*
Jackson State Community College

REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAM

For positions that do not have existing certification pathways, such as Community Health Workers and Workforce Development Specialists, RHA serves as a Registered Apprenticeship Sponsor through the United States Department of Labor.

Apprenticeships are paid on-the-job work experiences paired with mentoring over the course of 2000 hours. When the requirements of the program are met, apprentices receive a nationally recognized certificate in their field. Apprenticeships are a great value for employers with a

return on investment of \$1.46 for every \$1 invested in an apprentice, according to sources cited by the U.S. Department of Labor. Importantly for healthcare professions, apprentices are shown to have higher retention rates, more engagement, and often choose to advance in their professions.

In Tennessee, RHA assists employers with registering their program, tracking apprenticeship hours, and providing supportive services. If the employer is not ready to commit to becoming a Registered Apprenticeship Partner, we discuss other avenues of support.



February 9, 2023, RHA and LifeSpring Community Health hosted a signing event for the state's first Community Health Worker Apprentice, Wendy Wellington

LifeSpring hired Wendy to support the COVID Response Team and increase care coordination. As a professional development incentive, LifeSpring partnered with RHA to register her as an Apprentice and support her through her training. Wendy is expected to complete her apprenticeship August 2023.

Also pictured is Beth Keylon, RHA's Assistant Director of Workforce Development. Beth has more than 15 years of experience in workforce development, however like most state workforce programs, she was more experienced in non-healthcare sectors. RHA registered Beth as the state's first Workforce Development Specialist Apprentice to support her professional growth goals. Beth completed 144 hours of Related Technical Instruction and 2000 hours of on-the-job training, successfully completing her apprenticeship February 2023.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

Rural Health Association of Tennessee has learned much from our workforce participants, K-12 schools, rural providers, and community and technical colleges. The following is a synopsis of our lessons learned along with some policy recommendations:

- ▶ Exposure to careers in healthcare is often dependent on whether a school/district has a healthcare focused Career and Technical Education (CTE) instructor. To build stronger healthcare pathways, RHA recommends programs that introduce middle and high school students to career opportunities in healthcare through strengthened CTE programs.
- ▶ Tennessee leads in supporting young adults working toward an associate degree, however RHA has worked with youth who require a different pathway into healthcare. For some, gaining work experience is necessary before successfully obtaining certification. RHA recommends programs like Tennessee Promise that reduces costs for low-income students working to obtain certification in entry-level healthcare professions such as Medical Assistant, Phlebotomist, and Behavioral Health Technician.
- ▶ Many participants RHA has supported are working women, sometimes mothers, looking to establish a viable career in healthcare. As part of the certification process, these women are expected to work 80 unpaid clinical hours, which is a financial hardship to most. RHA supports policies that require healthcare students are paid for clinical hours.
- ▶ Through a small Delta Regional Authority grant, RHA attempted to work with a large healthcare system to implement the Department of Labor's Apprenticeship model but found greater success with small employers and long-term care facilities. Apprenticeships require employers to provide two wage increases throughout the training period, which is a barrier for most healthcare employers. For successful adoption of the apprenticeship model, more resources are needed to work with, and sponsor, rural apprenticeship programs.



WORKFORCE PROGRAM IMPACT

\$133,348

TOTAL PROVIDED TO
WORKFORCE PARTICIPANTS

743

WORKFORCE/ WORKFORCE
READINESS PARTICIPANTS

325

INDIVIDUAL
SUPPLIES PROVIDED

273

STUDENTS SUPPORTED
IN PAYING TUITION/FEES

46

WORKFORCE
EMPLOYER PARTNERS

**RURAL HEALTH
WORKFORCE** *READY!*
— RECRUIT, TRAIN, RETAIN —