

College: North Arkansas College

Location: Harrison, Arkansas

Practice: North Arkansas Partnership for Health Education

Meeting critical needs—adequate health care, job creation and job retention—through an innovative training partnership

Year Started 1996

Budget \$130,000

Program Participants 5,500+

College FTE 3,000

Target Sector Healthcare

Staff Size 3 FT

Structure Partnership between North Arkansas College, North Arkansas Regional Medical Center and Boone County Health Unit

Key Outcomes Trained over 100 students as nursing assistants
Filled critical job shortages
Retained needed jobs within community
Provides general public with health education

Introduction

With the aging of the population, advances in (and expectations for) medical care are driving up the demand for health care and also its importance to local economies both as a driver and an amenity. Demand for people trained in allied health has shot up. Community colleges, which have long been major sources of health care technicians and nurses, are in a good position to fill these needs.

Two of northern Arkansas' largest institutions, North Arkansas College and North Arkansas Regional Medical Center, have joined forces to form the North Arkansas Partnership for Health Education. The partnership combines the resources of both institutions to provide quality, certified

health care training for community needs. Because health care is a growing employment sector, this partnership has been able to attract many interested individuals who might not have otherwise considered a career in health care.

Community Background

Boone County in northwest Arkansas is becoming known as a retirement area. And with a growing population of senior citizens, the need for a variety of health care services has grown as well. The demand on the local health care system, however, is not only for nurses and doctors, but also for allied health care professionals, those who provide

| Program focus | Sector specific | Economic condition | Economic base | | | Target populations |
|---------------------|-----------------|--------------------|---------------|-----|-----|--|
| | | | Mfg | Agr | Svc | |
| Technical education | Yes | Growing | 26 | 3.9 | 27 | Dislocated workers, economically disadvantaged, existing workforce, youth/students |

| | |
|--------------------------------|--|
| <i>Service Area</i> | <i>Boone, Marion, Carroll, Baxter, Searcy, and Newton Counties</i> |
| <i>Total Population</i> | 121,000 |
| <i>Median Household Income</i> | \$20,000 |
| <i>% Below Poverty Level</i> | 19.3 |
| <i>% Unemployment Rate</i> | 5.6 |
| <i>% Minority Population</i> | 1.2 |
| <i>% Rural Population</i> | 79.0 |
| <i>% High School Graduates</i> | 63.1 |
| <i>% College Graduates</i> | 9.2 |

extended and support services both within and outside a medical environment—a trend mirrored at the national level.

With the recent closing of a local industrial plant, the unemployment rate for Boone County has risen slightly. Combined with welfare-to-work reform laws, this has created a pool of citizens ready for retraining and employment. Consequently, the growing demand for trained health care professionals seemed like an opportunity—one that would provide the unemployed with training and ultimately jobs in health care and at the same time provide the region with needed health care professionals that will further attract retirees.

Program Description

The North Arkansas Partnership for Health Education (NAPHE) was formed in 1996 to bring “dependable, quality, convenient, and affordable healthcare programs and education services to the healthcare professionals and citizens of north Arkansas.” Program specifics include classes for nurse assistants and home health aides, classes in first aid and CPR, and continuing health education. NAPHE also provides certification and re-certification coursework, equipment and facilities for training, career development assistance, and distance learning programs. For students pursuing continuing education units, NAPHE has various affiliations that provide accreditation and can certify students who have completed the coursework.

NAPHE offers its services primarily through North Arkansas College. Students interested in

pursuing health care education and training register through North Arkansas College and take most of their classes there.

The NAPHE program is strengthened by its strong affiliations with the Arkansas Nurses Association (which provides accreditation), the Arkansas Health Education Consortium, the University of Arkansas Medical School, the Boone County Health Unit, and the Arkansas Hometown Health Improvement Project.

Outcomes

To date, NAPHE has trained more than 100 Certified Nurse’s Aides. It has also provided CPR and first aid training and certification to area health care professionals, day care workers, and interested members of the community. In addition, it has provided services to a wide area outside of Boone County: 15 surrounding counties have benefited from this training partnership, with trainees ranging from health care professionals to volunteers.

Strengths, Challenges, and Replicability

The greatest strength of this program is its founders: two of the largest institutions in north Arkansas. These organizations have provided a stable foundation for the emergence and growth of community partnerships, by encouragement and example. The partnership also extends the use of resources at each institution, resources that may have had only limited use prior to NAPHE. Expanding the capabilities of state-funded organizations in this way is truly a good return on public investment.

Another strength lies in NAPHE’s responsiveness to the needs present within their community. As local nursing homes began to lose their licenses to train Nursing Assistants, NAPHE stepped in and created the CNA program; over 100 students have been trained to date. Additionally, the partnerships facilitated by the program have created a series of networks throughout the community, which by their nature are stronger than many individual organizations acting alone.

The initial challenge present in creating this alliance was that very thing: alliance. Communication and the development of a shared

definition of partnership allowed the administration of both the community college and the regional hospital to see this program as a win-win situation. On a daily basis, the program faces a lack of capacity. With an operating staff of just three full time employees, the organization is spread so thin that effectiveness is compromised. As the program enjoys continued success, the lack of staff and insufficiency of facilities will become a greater issue. Resources must be found that allow the program to continue providing quality education to the region.

Long-term prospects for NAPHE look good, provided the need for health care professionals continues to rise. Funding for the program, of which 80 percent comes from the two partners and 20 percent from program fees, remains stable. At present, there is no indication that either source of funding or demand for health care professionals will diminish. The NAPHE model can be adapted easily to other communities wanting to provide affordable training in a growing sector.

For more information, contact:

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