

“Raise the Floor, Build the Ladder: Good Jobs for New Mexico’s Workforce”

Progress Report 2014-2015

New Mexico Direct Caregivers Coalition

Background

Early in 2015, New Mexico Direct Caregivers Coalition (NMDCC) embarked on a three-year effort to raise awareness of the value of frontline healthcare workers. These workers include professionals such as Personal Care Assistants, Home Health Aides, Nursing Attendants and Orderlies and related occupations. Results of this project in one year have already expanded the target beneficiaries to include Community Health Workers and a variety of related healthcare occupations.

The Federal Reserve Bank of Kansas City sought to be part of this effort in New Mexico. Early funders included Con Alma Health Foundation and McCune Charitable Foundation.

Stakeholders Task Force and Working Groups

Activities included convening a task force of community-based organizations, educators, state officials and business leaders in June 2015 in which 50 attended and agreed to a process that would:

- Develop common understanding of direct caregivers (Personal Care Assistants; Home Health Aides; Orderlies and Nursing Attendants working for agencies or independently),
- Develop common understanding of the employer perspectives on demand for caregivers,
- Identify realistic career pathways for caregivers based on employer need and job opportunities,
- Identify and deliver strategies for targeted, foundational training to prepare individuals for entry-level positions in direct care,
- Contribute to care recipient safety in community-based and in-home care settings.

Between June and September 2015, two groups were formed and met at least once to further define:

- Career Pathways for New Mexico caregivers – This Group will diagram/document realistic career pathways for entry-level caregivers who seek to continue their education, training and skills development within the field based on employer need and job opportunities in New Mexico. This Group will identify and recommend additional educational opportunities and supports so caregivers can progress within those career pathways, gaining higher wages and benefits.
- Foundational instruction for New Mexico caregivers – This Group will identify and deliver strategies for targeted, foundational training to prepare individuals for entry-level positions in direct care. These strategies may include cross-walking current curricula of community colleges and universities. It may also include identification of skills and competencies common to caregivers working in any setting (in-home, nursing home, group home) that are similar to different care recipient populations served (those who are elderly and those with disabilities).

In September 2014, task force members came together to present their Working Group discussions and recommend next steps:

Career Pathways for New Mexico Caregivers Working Group

Objective: Identify realistic career pathways for caregivers based on employer need and job opportunities, including:

- The sequence of education and training;
- Multiple entry points to accommodate participants entering at differing skill levels (including adults and out-of-school youth with very low basic skills);
- Multiple exit points at successively higher levels of education and employment aligned with marketable, stackable, “creditable” credentials;
- Supportive services and navigation assistance for participants in the pathways

Discussion:

1. As a Human Resource professional, most important determinant of success on the job is *longevity at last job*.
2. Within our agency of care for those with developmental disabilities, a career pathway is follows. We encourage staff to develop expertise within a strand (e.g., Service Coordinator to Program Specialist) and across strands (e.g., House Manager: Job Developer):

Independent Living

Direct Support Staff
Lead Direct Support Staff
House Manager
Service Coordinator
Program Specialist
Director, Residential Living

Supported Employment

Job Coach
Job Developer
Director of Supported Empl

3. Employee Assistance Program support that could be offered include:
 - Individual and group counseling
 - Team-building and celebration within the workplace
 - Paid personal time off
 - Reimbursement for mileage, holiday and vacation, disability, health and dental insurance
 - Work-related training
 - Continuing education
 - Public benefits assistance (screening for food stamps, Medicaid eligibility)
 - Employee education programs that inform of public benefits and community resources/referrals

Recommendation to Full Task Force: Develop public awareness campaign for NM’s frontline healthcare workforce and includes employers, advocates, educators and care recipients.

Foundational Instruction for Caregivers Working Group

Objective: Identify strategies for targeted, foundational training to prepare individuals for entry-level positions in direct care:

- Start from what is known and required by State of New Mexico and in use by NM organizations
- Outline standards of quality assurance to the public and other stakeholders
- Outline incentives for employers
- Outline metrics for assuring completion and articulation

Discussion:

1. Foundational skills should emphasize:
 - Listening skills
 - Recognition of one’s boundaries
 - Fraud, abuse, neglect and exploitation and that caregivers need to have a greater sense of responsibility and ethic than the average person
 - Dealing with one’s stress
 - Communications skills and dealing with challenging behaviors
 - Foundational training should give participants an overall sense of what caregivers are likely to see more of so they can determine if they want to stay in the field
2. Caregivers in rural areas will need access to training so methods of delivery may be variable.
3. Training for caregivers of those who are elderly vs. those who care for elderly need not be distinguished/separated. In other words, caregivers of each population have more in common than they have differences. Caregivers need to understand they have transferable skills and are able to serve both populations, depending on client needs and/or work opportunities.
4. One HR professional of this Working Group notes that an individual’s *character* is the most important determinant of success on the job. He said their employees can be trained once properly screened and hired.

Recommendation to Full Task Force: Build out foundational training program for frontline healthcare workers with support from employers and educators. Develop communications tools and strategies that advances a foundational program with credentialing for frontline healthcare workforce that includes employers, advocates, educators and care recipients.

At the September convening, NMDCC sought input as to whether there would be support and the will to host a national/state conference that would bring attention to issues of frontline healthcare workers the following spring. Task Force members were enthusiastically supportive.

Need for Multi-Sector Stakeholders’ Summit

As momentum grew, it became clear that involving and highlighting other industry sectors at a Spring national/state convening around frontline workers would be very beneficial in a number of ways:

- Community-based organization advocates supporting frontline workers from all sectors could share in conversations;

- Corporations and foundations would be more interested in supporting a convening to support frontline workers from all sectors more than one dedicated solely to the fastest-growing set occupations in New Mexico.
- There was greater possibility of cross-sectors learnings for government officials, community-based advocates, educators, business leaders and funders.

NMDCC proposed to name the Summit, “Raise the Floor, Build the Ladder,” after an Aspen Institute/PHINational, a national healthcare workforce advocate briefing paper that advocated for a multi-sector, multi-stakeholder approach required for bringing systemic change to frontline, low-wage workers.

In preparation for that Spring Summit, NMDCC and the Federal Reserve Bank of KC enlisted Maureen Conway of the Aspen Institute on the planning team. Maureen’s work with PHINational and other leaders across the country across all sectors, and has spawned initiatives in states and cities throughout the U.S. that bring multiple stakeholders together to improve conditions for frontline, typically low-wage workers.

The small Summit planning group designed a program for April 2015 designed to answer the following two questions:

1. “Is there will in New Mexico to form a statewide funders’ collaborative that supports frontline, low-wage workers?”
2. “If there is will to form a funders’ collaborative, what actions or programs would best support New Mexico’s frontline, low-wage workers?”

The “Build the Floor, Raise the Ladder” summit well-received as indicated by overall and individual evaluations (see xxx). Approximately 135 people were in attendance from New Mexico, Dallas, Kansas City, Denver, Washington, D.C., Chicago and New York.

A summary of the discussion group recommendations from this state/national meeting can be found [HERE](#). Those recommendations centered on: training and skills development, changing public awareness through organizing, and increasing/expanding workplace benefits for frontline workers.

NMDCC has posted the results of those discussion group conversations on our website and agreed to involve attendees in future convenings, conversations and calls to action. Since the Summit, NMDCC has begun meetings with large employers, including trade association representatives. We have also held a formal meeting of stakeholders to present an eight-hour curriculum that prepares frontline entry-level direct workers with the skills needed to be a caregiver an advance to postsecondary education and/or higher-wage jobs.

What was Missing from the Summit?

Small business leaders attended the Spring Summit, even staying an entire day. And, while industry trade association representatives attended and stayed all day, business leaders employing large numbers of employees were absent. Some of these larger companies were involved in or attended 2015 Task Force or Working Group meetings. On the whole, employers of 50 or more

workers were absent. To some degree, NMDCC has the problem of having a connection with a community representative or a Medical Director rather than the CEO.

Next Steps

Follow-up meetings and calls of the Summit planning committee resulted in observations of the absence of large employers and a recommendation to 1) cultivate these relationships and 2) ask for input from business leaders on their needs with regard to frontline workforce needs. NMDCC will focus on employers within the healthcare sector because of our organizational focus and capacity constraints. We do seek to open larger events or convenings to all sectors at the appropriate time(s) because of what we can all learn from cross-sector initiatives.