



Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Compendium of Success Stories

May 2013



ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES





ADMINISTRATION FOR
CHILDREN & FAMILIES

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Many low-income Americans live without hope of ever finding a job that pays well enough for them to move off of public assistance, support their families, and accomplish their dreams. At the same time, many healthcare employers struggle to find qualified staff with the training and technical expertise required to provide the high quality of care their patients need. This difficulty occurs because many would-be employees lack the necessary skills to fill those positions.

The Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) was created as part of the Affordable Care Act to address these challenges. HPOG provides education and training to Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other low-income individuals for healthcare occupations that pay well and are in high demand. The program is responsive to community workforce needs and improves job prospects for adults in low-income families, matching careers in a growing field with people who are eager to fill them.

All of the HPOG funded projects have success stories of participants who have started and progressed along healthcare career pathways. This collection of 32 success stories from the past year--one from each grantee--introduces a group of people who are inspiring in their vision and persistence, often in the face of serious challenges. They are diverse in age, gender, native language, cultural background, and geographic location. Their challenges include unemployment, financial stress, personal medical issues, and caring for dependent family members.

Despite their barriers, with HPOG assistance, all of these individuals have taken their first steps on their chosen career paths in occupations such as nursing, health information, and laboratory technology. The healthcare field is enriched by the resilience and determination these new employees bring from their own experience.

You are bound to be uplifted as you read these stories. They show how HPOG is making a difference in the lives of individuals by offering hope and an opportunity for a better future.

Please join me in celebrating their progress and successes.

Sincerely,

/s/

Earl Johnson
Director
Office of Family Assistance

Introduction

Authorized by the Affordable Care Act, the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) is providing Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and other low-income individuals with education and training for healthcare occupations that pay well and are in high demand. The HPOG program is administered by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Administration for Children and Families, Office of Family Assistance.

Grants were first awarded in September 2010, and grantees are now well into the third year of a five-year program. HPOG awards were made to 32 entities located across 23 states, including four State government bodies, nine local Workforce Investment Boards (three of which operate American Job Centers, also known as one-stop career centers), 12 institutions of higher education (one university, nine community colleges, and two community college districts), and two community-based organizations. Five awards were given to tribal applicants, including one tribal council and four tribal colleges.

The HPOG program serves a diverse array of program participants from across the country. There have been particularly strong efforts to serve the most at-risk populations and to assist them in overcoming the barriers they face to obtaining meaningful employment.

This second *Compendium of Success Stories* captures some of the inspiring journeys of real program participants and shows the kind of transformation that is possible through HPOG. The stories included were identified by the grantees themselves, with full consent from the individual participants to use their names and stories. These accounts give a glimpse of what lies behind the numbers of participants “enrolled,” “completed,” and “employed.” They are real people who have overcome very real challenges.

The HPOG program is a demonstration project designed to build and share knowledge. There is a lot to learn from the success stories captured here, but this is just one component of a broad strategy to build and share knowledge. Also underway is a multi-pronged evaluation that will provide much more information on program implementation, systems change, outcomes, and impact. The evaluation will grow the evidence base for improving outcomes for TANF recipients and other low-income individuals.

These *Success Stories* were collected by the technical assistance provider for the Office of Family Assistance, JBS International, Inc. The compendium includes one success story for each of the 32 grantees, indexed by grantee, state, and occupation. To access this document and other supporting documents, examples, and related information electronically, please visit the HPOG Community Website at <https://www.acf.hhs.gov/ofa/programs/hpog>.

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Success Stories

Juan Villalobos at Alamo Community College District

Healthcare Professions Training Initiative

In a very challenging economy, Juan Villalobos, an unemployed single parent with two children, was desperately seeking employment through one of San Antonio's Workforce Solutions Centers. With a flyer and a case manager's referral, he caught word of a great career training opportunity through the Alamo Colleges' Healthcare Professions Training Initiative (HPTI), one of 32 Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance.

Following a quick call, he was set to meet with this region's HPTI intake specialist, Arlene Esparza, at the Alamo Colleges Westside Training and Education Center. As the lead career development specialist, Arlene questioned Juan about his interests, needs, and ability to make his way into the Environmental Services (EVS) program. He was motivated and had already begun to improve his skills through the completion of English as a Second Language (ESL) courses. Having met the eligibility requirements, two weeks later Juan found himself sitting in his first day of class.

Juan was a model student, and he became part of a classroom group which was a strong and supportive team. While participating in the EVS program classroom training, he obtained a perfect attendance record. When this segment of the program was done, he went on to complete his time-limited employment training at the University Healthcare System, where he again earned a perfect attendance record. During his employment training, Juan gained a reputation for reliability and competence. When he completed this final part of his training, Juan was told by one of his mentors that the hospital would like to have him as an employee and was advised to apply for an upcoming opening in EVS.

Following Juan's completion of his time-limited job training, he and Arlene met weekly to perform job searches, complete employment forms, practice interview skills, and ultimately work towards his next goal of employment. He was persistent and thorough, always following up with the places where he applied and adhering to the guidance of his case manager. He remained positive despite a few weeks of tedious job searching and closed doors.

Finally an opportunity arose at the University Healthcare hospital, and he got that chance for an interview. At that interview, Juan learned that he had to provide additional information to satisfy the background needs of this employer, but he worked to complete these requirements as well. A few more anxious days went by, and finally the news arrived: he was going to get a work offer to join the EVS team at this great employer. Juan was overwhelmed with joy. He had made his goal. Juan immediately notified the HPTI team office, even before he mentioned it to his family. For him this was a personal victory, in addition to a relief, since he was now able to plan for a better future for his family.

A few weeks after starting his job, Juan returned to the HPTI office with a cake. He told the team that he wanted to bring them a token of his gratitude. It was a rewarding day for all.

Success Stories

Priscilla at Bergen Community College

Northern New Jersey Health Professions Consortium

Pricilla always doubted herself in everything she did. Growing up in a small town in Bergen County with a mother and grandmother who frequently fought with and insulted her, she thought she could accomplish “nothing or very little.” As she got older, Priscilla started to avoid being home and frequently got into trouble. “I felt like I didn’t have family and decided to look elsewhere for it. Looking back now, I looked in the wrong places and hung out with the wrong people. I was not communicating with the family and believed all their lies: ‘You’re slow, you can’t do it, or it’s not enough.’” As a result, Priscilla left school at 15, expecting to work at a “little store and find a guy” that could take care of her. She joined a Christian-based program that helps troubled teens. “I had no interest of following rules or learning about this God that I’d never in my life heard of.” Before this, Priscilla had never even stepped into a church.

After six months of disobeying rules and staff and trying to run away, Priscilla decided that she wanted more in life than a job that paid seven dollars an hour: she wanted to be happy like the others in her program. “All the staff were always happy, even when things went wrong. And personally, I feel if I had never found Christ, I would have been dead or hurt! I look back, and the reason why I wasn’t [was] because he was there watching me [during] my troubled days.” Priscilla stayed in the program for a total of 17 months, getting the help she needed to graduate from high school and earn her diploma. During that time, however, her mother did not come to visit her, “so even while I was trying to change, she never supported me.”

Priscilla eventually returned home with her mother, and in 2010 she decided to go to Bergen Community College with the goal of obtaining a Physical Therapy degree. Unable to pass her math and biology classes, however, she became discouraged. Compounding this, her family continued to put her down and dissuade her from pursuing education instead of work. In an effort to be a “good daughter,” Priscilla took on three part-time jobs: one at the dental clinic at Bergen Community College, one at a hair salon, and one at a cleaning company, all while attending school full time.

This busy life took a toll, however: “I couldn’t keep up, plus, in the midst of all this, I never had a car, so I had to bus everywhere! My goal was to save my money and buy my own car to get around, but all of my money was taken or forced from me.” While working at one of her part-time jobs, Priscilla broke her foot. Facing the difficult task of trying to get health insurance to have her foot treated, she lost all three of her part-time jobs. Hopeless and discouraged, and still dealing with unsupportive family members, she left home once more in 2012.

Priscilla left Bergen Community College and stayed at friends’ houses when she could. Although she didn’t plan on returning to the college, she remembered hearing about Bergen’s Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families’ Office of Family Assistance, and how it could help provide training and a job. Interested in the program’s Patient Care Technician training, Priscilla called the college and set up an appointment with the HPOG staff. She applied and was accepted. Convincing herself that facing the challenge of difficult classes outweighed the challenge of dealing with no money, a broken foot, and living at friends’ houses, Priscilla decided to “go for it and accomplish this.”

Success Stories

Even with a broken foot, she attended class daily from September to January. “I was determined to finish and make the most of the opportunity I was given. It gave me the help I needed to refocus on my education and start a career helping people.” After passing the state board exam and finding four or five job opportunities, Priscilla accepted a position at Christian Health Care Center – Ramapo Ridge Psychiatric Hospital as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA).

Her goal is now to save money and look for her own place. She is also considering returning to school to pursue her Registered Nurse or Physical Therapy degree. Priscilla is confident that she will be able to succeed in that goal and is grateful for the opportunity given her by HPOG: “Thank you again for all the founders and people who are involved in the health professions program, especially, Vincent Cheng, who mentioned and guided me. You don’t know how appreciative I am and how you changed my life!”

Success Stories

Tyne Bearleggings at Blackfeet Community College Issksiniip Project

Tyne Bearleggings, a member of the Blackfeet Tribe, is a TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families) recipient who has gotten a start on her chosen career path with the help of Blackfeet Community College's Issksiniip Project, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. She is very dedicated to receiving her nursing degree, which has been a lifelong dream, and she calls her success story "a miracle."

Tyne is the mother of three beautiful children, 7-year-old Tegan, 13-year-old Trevor, and 15-year-old TeAyres. Before coming to the Issksiniip Project, she struggled with earning her GED (General Educational Development) diploma. She went to nursing school to become a State Tested Nursing Assistant (STNA) in Akron, Ohio. The difficulties of juggling home and school responsibilities were overwhelming. She had two jobs just to make ends meet. Eventually she decided to move back to Browning, Montana. She then applied for and was accepted into the HPOG program. It was determined that Tyne was still lacking her GED, a prerequisite to the nursing program she was trying to pursue.

The Issksiniip Project helped Tyne find the resources she needed to prepare for the GED test, and now she is "proud to be a GED graduate." Then the project helped her enroll in a two-year nursing degree program. A year later, she is well on her way to becoming a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). She is thankful to the project for providing the necessary supplies for school in addition to matching her with tutors to aid in her academic success.

Tyne says, "If you are willing to dedicate yourself to what you want to become and follow through with it, then you will be successful. If I can do it, you can too. Give it a try. You have a right to be a success story too, and foremost our children deserve to look at a bright future."

Success Stories

Matthew at the Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Development Consortium, Inc. Health Professions Collaborative

Matthew was in a horrible car accident, which left him dependent on Supplemental Security Income, Medicaid, and Food Stamps and unable to work for a long time. At 29 years old, he dreamed of an opportunity to do something meaningful with his life.

In the early spring of 2012, Matthew responded to a flyer for the Pharmacy Technician training program at Erie Community College. Erie Community College is a key partner of the Buffalo and Erie County Workforce Development Consortium, one of 32 Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. He did not know what to expect but was looking for opportunities. He was receiving public assistance and wanted his independence. He had always liked chemistry, and pharmacy was a respected field, so he gave the training program a try.

He was pleasantly surprised to find out that the training was a "real class." It was more like a condensed college course than other training courses he had attended in the past. Matt did well with the classroom instruction and was able to meet the expectations required in the course, but he really began to shine as a Pharmacy Technician intern at Ivylea Prescription and Home Health Care Center. His internship experience introduced him to positive role models who encouraged him to pursue an education in pharmacy.

Matthew was eager to please and impressed his supervising pharmacist with the skills he had learned in class. As a result of his positive attitude and capabilities, he was hired on a part-time basis at Ivylea, where he continued to build his knowledge of pharmacy and professional relationships.

Currently, he is still employed full time at Ivy Lea Pharmacy and attending Erie Community College at night, maintaining an outstanding grade point average. Matthew views Pharmacy Technician as the "first step on the career ladder," and he is excited about the future opportunities. His goal now is to get into University of Buffalo School of Pharmacy and become a Pharmacist. He feels that the HPOG program was a life-changing experience for him.

Success Stories

Chenille Condon at Cankdeska Cikana Community College

Next Steps Project

The Next Steps Project is the Cankdeska Cikana Community College's Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. The Next Steps Project directors were traveling during early months of the project, and when they arrived at the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe's office in Fort Yates, North Dakota, to ask for assistance with recruitment, they found an eager young woman patiently waiting in the office to meet them. That young woman was Chenille Condon. She had been notified about the new HPOG project and the date the Next Steps staff planned to visit, and she was waiting to find out how she could join the project, and how soon.

Chenille is an enrolled member of Standing Rock Sioux Tribe of Fort Yates, a married woman with four children. She always wanted to get a college diploma, and she acquired her General Educational Development (GED) certification in January 2011.

Chenille entered the Next Steps Project as a member of its initial cohort of Certified Nursing Assistant and Quality Service Provider trainees at the Standing Rock Sioux Tribe site in the spring of 2011. She worked hard throughout the program, juggling the training and being a full-time mom. Despite her current circumstances and despite being surrounded by poverty, Chenille knew she wanted more for her family. With the help of Next Steps, she realized the opportunity for a different life was there.

The opportunity to work in the field of nutrition became Chenille's goal. She realized that tribal communities are desperately in need of nutrition professionals due to high obesity and diabetes rates that surpass those of most other races in the United States. Chenille relocated and enrolled in the nutrition program at United Tribes Technical College in Bismarck, North Dakota. She has worked hard to earn good grades and stay in school in spite of traumatic life circumstances.

On May 29, 2012, Chenille gave birth to her fourth child. Just two days later, she went through a bronchoscopy, and then, on June 06, a biopsy that was supposed to take 20 minutes but turned into a nightmare. During the procedure the doctor cut her jugular vein, causing complications that led to a massive stroke which left Chenille paralyzed on her whole left side. She had to learn how to walk all over again and had no movement of her left arm at all. Chenille stayed in the hospital for almost 30 days, doing lots of therapy. Due to financial hardship, she and her family had to move back to Fort Yates from Bismarck.

Chenille was determined to get a college diploma, and her disability was not going to stop her. Though she was depressed, she had to keep positive and pray. Chenille believes that when you start something, you need to finish, and that is what she teaches her children and how she pushes herself. She requested and was granted permission to complete her nutrition degree online, and she completed the fall 2012 semester of online classes and got good grades even without the full use of her left arm and hand. Chenille is currently taking her spring 2013 online classes, and she plans on moving back to Bismarck in the summer to complete the rest of her

Success Stories

schooling on campus. She will graduate in the spring of 2014 with a degree in nutrition from United Tribes Technical College.

Chenille has had a roller coaster of a life for the past 10 months. Because she could not use her left arm, she could not care for her newborn son and had a family member taking care of him, seeing him only on weekend visits. Now she continues to be in a custody battle for her son as she carries on with her schooling. Chenille is very thankful for all the support the Next Steps Project has given her and all the mentors who have worked with her and become lifelong friends.

To know Chenille Condon as she has progressed through the Next Steps HPOG program is to know fortitude, wisdom, and courage personified. A person who knows her is humbled by the quiet and unrelenting heroism of this young Lakota woman. Chenille is one of a kind and deserves a lot of credit for not giving up. By overcoming the barriers in her way, not only does Chenille have a success story; she is a living miracle.

Success Stories

Olivier Musungay at Central Community College Health Education Laddering Program (Project HELP)

Olivier Musungay is a remarkable individual! When he started the Nurse Aide program, he was juggling a full-time job and classes not in his native language. His family was also living in a city 80 miles away. Olivier's training as a high school teacher and his college experience gave him the study skills he needed, but translating and studying the assigned reading slowed his progress in the six -week course.

As part of Project HELP, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, Olivier received assistance from a case manager. The case manager encouraged him and helped him locate local resources, as well as connect him to an online translation program. The Vocational English as a Second Language (VESL) specialist introduced him to text-to-speech software which also provided word translation and definition options in his first language of French. Olivier met with a tutor who helped him memorize and demonstrate Nurse Aide procedures. Through the HPOG program, Olivier was able to check out a laptop computer, medical dictionaries, and Rosetta Stone software. He also received guidance on and practice with job interviews.

The connection to Project HELP, combined with his own determination, intelligence, and hard work, resulted in successful completion of the course and a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) position several weeks later. Olivier was also featured in two local newspaper articles describing his setbacks, determination, and accomplishments. Since the success story and newspaper articles, Olivier has enrolled in the Medication Aide training with intent to continue on towards his Registered Nursing degree.

Success Stories

Rolando Calderón at Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit

Work Attributes Toward Careers in Health (WATCH)

Rolando Calderón moved to Montgomery with his wife and three daughters from Allentown, Pennsylvania, where he had been a truck driver for many years. Finding that the area had a higher unemployment rate than the national average and that many local companies hired part-time workers or temporary staff to save money, he was unable to secure a truck driver job that paid well enough to support his family. For two years he worked temporary jobs, as a dishwasher, warehouse worker, steel mill worker, construction clean-up crew member, and parts inspector. No job was too demeaning or small.

While hospitalized for a serious medical condition, Rolando was inspired by the skill and compassion of the nurses who cared for him and decided to pursue a career in nursing. It also seemed to him that half of the job openings in the area were for nurses.

It was a long process getting back into school after 20 years. He had to look up old records, take entrance exams, get a physical, and update immunizations. When Rolando started school as a 41-year-old freshman, he was both excited and scared. His first year he made the Dean's List, but his second year was extremely difficult. His marriage was disintegrating and he required surgery, but still he worked hard to maintain his grades. After completing all prerequisite courses, Rolando was accepted into the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) program at Pennsylvania College of Technology, scheduled to begin in August 2011, but, despite receiving Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, he struggled to find the additional funds to pay for nursing school.

At the suggestion of a friend, Rolando contacted the WATCH project, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, and found he qualified for the program. There he received financial help with tuition, books, and equipment and met a key supporter: career coordinator Gaye Jenkins, who became his confidante and counselor. He says, "During LPN training, when I was down, she was my cheering section. It is such a great feeling when someone sees things that you don't see in yourself and encourages you. Gaye always had sound advice and always strived to do the best for me, whatever my need."

Rolando graduated from the Pennsylvania College of Technology with an Associate's degree in Health Sciences (Practical Nursing) in August 2012. At first, he had difficulty finding a nursing job, but Gaye encouraged him and gave him several job leads. After he passed his state LPN exams and became a licensed LPN in October 2012, the very next week he was offered positions by four different employers. He accepted two jobs, a part-time position with a nursing home and a full-time position with a local hospital. The WATCH project provided uniforms and shoes for work, items he could not afford on his own.

Success Stories

Rolando says that without the help of the WATCH Project, “I really don’t think I would be where I am today. I am a college graduate as well as a Licensed Practical Nurse. I am in a career that is in high demand that also pays well. I now have a chance for a better quality of life for me and my children.” No longer dependent on TANF benefits, he is planning for the future. He wants to continue on the nursing career path to earn a Registered Nurse (RN) degree.

Success Stories

Danielle at College of Menominee Nation Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) Nursing Career Ladder Program

Danielle received her Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) credential with the help of the College of Menominee Nation's Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. She completed her CNA class on July 30, 2012, and passed her certification exam on the first attempt. Currently, she is a full-time student at the College of Menominee Nation, working on completing her biological sciences requirements so that she can enter the Associate Degree Program in Nursing. Her GPA is 3.58 on a 4.0 scale.

Shortly before the semester began, Danielle ran into some trouble with child care because her husband had switched jobs. She applied to a county agency for child care assistance but was denied. Then she met with a support services coordinator in the HPOG program to discuss this barrier and learned the program could assist her with child care so she could attend CNA class and additional classes this past summer and fall.

Danielle says, "Because of the grant, I am proudly able to say I am a full-time mom, student, and wife. My daughters now go to day care every day so I can attend classes. The HPOG grant has been life changing for me; without it I would not be where I am today. Education is very important to me, but unfortunately I have just been unable to fulfill my educational dreams on my own financially. Having three children and trying to make time to go back to school is tough, but in the end it will all be worth it because of HPOG."

Success Stories

Vanessa Mares at Community Action Project of Tulsa County, Inc.

CareerAdvance

Vanessa Mares came to CareerAdvance, part of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) funded by the Administration of Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, at age 19. She was the mother of two children and the wife of a young man who was working on completing work toward his high school diploma. Though she had her first baby while she was in high school, she managed to graduate a year early, with the help of daycare in the school and babysitting support from her family.

Her only previous employment had been shelving books in a library, but Vanessa knew she wanted to be a nurse after she experienced the kindness of nurses when she was a scared teenager delivering her first baby. She says, "My nurses were so nice to me and comforted me and just wanted to make sure that me and my baby were safe. That is what I hope to do for someone: I want them to know that I'm there to comfort them and not look down on them, make sure they are safe and comfortable along with their baby." When Vanessa saw a flyer for CareerAdvance, she "knew it was a sign; it was perfect."

Vanessa began her journey with CareerAdvance in January 2011 as a member of Cohort #3 following the nursing track. She has completed the CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) 1-3 and Patient Care Technician studies and is currently enrolled in Tulsa Community College, taking nursing prerequisite classes. She has earned her CNA certificate and the Geriatric Technician certificate, and she has been using her healthcare skills in a home health job while earning these certificates.

She says, "I'm so thankful for this program, such a huge blessing in my and my family's life. Everyone I have met here has been so encouraging. I have new friends that are going through the same struggles as I, and together we can help one another."

In the future, Vanessa says, "I desire to be an RN (Registered Nurse) and work my way to BSN (Bachelor of Science in Nursing). It'll take time, but it'll be so worth it!" She has started on a career path that promises to help her fulfill her goal of providing for her family.

Success Stories

Mackenzie Madison at Cook Inlet Tribal Council, Inc. CITC Healthcare Training

There are times when life seems held together by delicate strings; cut one, and everything falls apart. The one crucial string tying Mackenzie Madison to a stable life was her great-grandmother, and on the day her great-grandmother died unexpectedly, Mackenzie felt things begin to unravel. "I didn't have anyone else here," she recalls.

Mackenzie had moved to Anchorage from Spokane two years prior to take care of her great-grandmother. A single mother with one young daughter, she found herself balancing work and school with her role of family caretaker. Until her great-grandmother's death, this balance was a struggle, but she was determined to make things work.

Even though she had earned her certification as a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA), she wasn't working in healthcare, and things were very challenging. "I was only employed through taking care of my grandma," Mackenzie recalls. "When she passed, I had just moved into my apartment. How was I going to pay my bills? Pay my rent? I had so much on my plate."

Fearing eviction, Mackenzie turned to what she considered her last resort. Before her great-grandmother passed away, she had gone to Cook Inlet Tribal Council (CITC) for childcare support, but she had been unaware of its other services, such as healthcare training through its Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance.

"I was surprised at all the things they could help with," Mackenzie says of CITC. Through its Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program, she found help with her basic needs, including school clothes for her and her daughter, gas for the car, and assistance with paying rent. She says, "Before TANF, I struggled a lot. My priorities were rent and my daughter, but I couldn't keep up with anything else. With CITC, it's been a much smoother ride."

Through its Healthcare Training program and a partnership with the Alaska Vocational Technical Education Center (AVTEC), CITC offered tuition assistance and helped streamline Mackenzie's transition from earning her Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) license to becoming a Registered Nurse (RN). "CITC basically took care of everything," she says. "They set up testing and helped me get CPR-certified [in cardiopulmonary resuscitation]. I didn't have to go through two people at two different organizations, and that helped a lot with keeping my stress low while I entered a new program."

Not only was CITC's array of helpful programs a surprise, but the organization opened a door into a world Mackenzie had missed out on for most of her life. "At one point, CITC offered Native classes where I could learn how to make a kuspuk. I also took a beading class to make Native earrings," explains Mackenzie, who is part Inupiaq. "Growing up in Washington, I didn't feel part of my culture at all," she says. "I'm 27 years old, and I didn't know anything about my culture until recently. I didn't even know how to pronounce Inupiaq!"

Success Stories

Now, Mackenzie says, "I just want to give back to my community and be a good role model. It's hard to imagine my life without CITC." With her interest in natural medicine bolstered by CITC nutrition classes, she says, "I want to teach people how to take care of themselves, and how to prevent diseases just by basic good eating habits, hygiene, and exercise."

Her goal is to work for the Alaska Native Medical Center once she becomes an RN, though she's not sure in what capacity. In one breath, she lists three possibilities: working in the emergency room, becoming an operating room nurse, or continuing her focus on natural medicine. Thanks to the support she received from CITC's programs and staff, Mackenzie says, her future holds endless potential.

Success Stories

Valerie at District Board of Trustees of Pensacola State College

Health Profession Opportunity Grant

Valerie says that persistence and determination are the two words that describe her educational journey. Even those assets would not have seen her through, though, if she had not had help from a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance.

Valerie began the quest to earn her Registered Nursing degree in August 2007. In the second year of nursing school, she was notified that she had exhausted her Pell Grant funds. She appealed the decision and was granted one more opportunity to finish her education, with the stipulation that if she failed any class, it would end her Pell Grant support. She pressed on and tried even harder to get through school so that she could better care for her family.

Then Valerie's husband became extremely ill. He was in and out of the hospital and lost a lot of time from work. She was left with caring for their two children and trying to balance school, home, and finances. It seemed that the only answer was to apply for a loan because she could not work full time, go to school full time, take care of two children, study, and run back and forth to the hospital. Soon Valerie was drowning in the sea of personal debt and student loans, and the stress of handling school and family needs was almost too much for her. Her education suffered. With just one more term to complete before graduation, she failed the class by only two points.

Valerie says that at that point she should have taken some time to get her life together before trying to finish school, but instead she immediately re-enrolled, thinking she would be successful because failure was not an option. Sadly, conditions at home only became worse, and she missed the mark again by three points, causing her to lose her Pell Grant and her scholarships. The department head told her she would have to wait two years, reapply to the program, and repeat the entire two years of nursing school. Valerie was utterly devastated. She felt like a fool and a failure.

Two and a half years later, while working as a Health Support Technician in a local elementary school clinic, Valerie had an overwhelming desire to pursue her nursing degree again. She found the new director of the college's nursing department very willing to assist her. That director urged her to obtain her Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) license and then return to school via the LPN to RN (Registered Nurse) Career Mobility program. By taking this route and receiving credit for all of her previously completed courses, she could become an RN in three terms. Still, she had one enormous barrier: no financial aid.

Valerie had appealed for reinstatement of her Pell Grant but had been denied three times. She had a stack of student loans that she was unable to repay and no way to take out more loans. The department head advised her to get her LPN license and not worry about the rest. Valerie followed the advice, and within a couple of months she had her LPN license. She applied for the Career Mobility program and was accepted. Still, the big question was how she would pay for her classes. She had to resign from her job due to conflicts between class times and work.

Success Stories

By this time, her husband was also unemployed due to his medical condition, and he was being considered for disability benefits. In faith, she took the step, though leaving her job seemed ludicrous at the time.

Again Valerie met with the nursing department head and was told about a new grant program at the college called HPOG. She completed the required paperwork and was one of the first 50 students to be accepted into the program. She was overjoyed to learn that HPOG would do whatever it took to remove barriers that could prevent her from completing the RN program. HPOG paid her tuition and bought uniforms and supplies. Soon Valerie was informed that her husband had been approved for disability benefits. She was happy to know that income would be available for bills and food.

HPOG helped Valerie remove many roadblocks on her journey, providing food, utility, and gasoline assistance. However, she says the most important aspect of HPOG was the personal support she received from her case manager. At their regular meetings, the case manager would always ask how things were going at home and at school and ask if Valerie needed anything. Valerie felt like the case manager was not doing just her job but had a genuine interest in her success. She says that the entire HPOG staff always demonstrated a caring attitude, a willingness to accommodate, and a joyful spirit. She could see that they loved their jobs and were genuinely interested in student success.

In Valerie's opinion, the HPOG program was a godsend. It provided for her educational needs and her personal needs as well, and it enabled her to concentrate more on school and to ultimately achieve her goal. For her it was a life-changing program. Valerie is now a licensed RN who is gainfully employed at a local healthcare facility. She and her family are doing well.

Success Stories

Deb Maust at Eastern Gateway Community College Project HOPE

Deb Maust is a cheerful, laid-back student at the Hannah E. Mullins School of Practical Nursing who will graduate in February 2013. Her story began about 10 years ago, when she and her husband of 25 years divorced. She struggled with the fact that she had been deceived for so many years, and her children struggled as well. Deb spent the next several years trying to comfort her children as their father wanted nothing to do with them after the divorce. She found herself trying to get by with limited spousal support, and her home went into foreclosure.

After enduring so much heartbreak and spending so much time caring for others, she decided to do something for herself now that her children were grown. She enrolled in nursing school. It has been a tough road for her; since her spousal support ended in August, 2012, she has been living on student loan money and Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, but still she has kept her smile.

Upon entering the nursing program, Deb formed a very close bond with one of her classmates. They became good friends and study partners, helping each other with everything, and each benefited greatly from the friendship. Late in the program, Deb's friend had to drop out for health reasons, and this took a toll on Deb. She did not feel as though she had connected with any of the other students, and now her support was gone. She became very emotional, and her grades began to slip. However, she quickly realized that this was her one shot at doing what she wanted to do with her life. She began to focus on the positive and kept in mind how much better things would be for her upon completion of this program. Again, a smile returned to her face.

Then, in January 2013, Deb's furnace broke. Because she is on a weatherization program, she had to go through specific channels for the repair. She came to Project HOPE, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, for help with the costs as she just did not have the money to spare for the repair. Deb never once complained. She insisted that she was warm enough with her few space heaters and blankets, despite the fact that it had been brutally cold. By the time her furnace was repaired, she had gone nearly two weeks without heat. Still, she maintained a very positive attitude.

Deb Maust refuses to waste time and energy worrying about things she cannot change. She has persevered through many hardships, but she remains focused and, above all, happy. Her courage and positive attitude are nothing short of inspirational, and it was a pleasure to have her in Project HOPE.

Success Stories

Candace at Edmonds Community College

Creating Access to Careers in Healthcare (CATCH)

Like many students at CATCH, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, Candace became unemployed due to a layoff in late 2008. At the time, she was a receptionist with no real skill or trade who had not received her GED (General Education Development) credential and had no interest in going to school any longer than absolutely necessary.

A year later, Candace found herself pregnant and in a domestic violence situation. It was hard to leave someone who was abusive and also her source of income, but after a few tries she finally got away. She stayed with her son's grandmother for a few months while they looked for shelters, and living with her taught her a very important lesson: Don't take no for an answer. After Candace's housing application was denied, instead of taking no for an answer, they met with the housing supervisor who, after a close review, approved the application. Her road to success started that day. She went on to complete her GED and apply to CATCH.

On her first day in CATCH, Candace looked for an excuse to skip Penny's job development class, assuming that it was just another hoop students had to jump through to get their computers. Later she came to realize that this class prepared her for each class and assignment ahead of her. "Not only that, the class conditioned my mind for college and life. Penny's class left me feeling renewed and eager to be the best student I was capable of."

In the class Candace learned about and bonded with her classmates. Even though the class was exhausting, when she got home, she wouldn't rest, but stayed up, doing dishes and cleaning up while processing what she had learned that day and how it applied to her life. "Penny's class was the primer to my success at CATCH. Without taking her class and having an open mind, I wouldn't know the names of many of my cohorts today. I wouldn't have learned so much about myself, and I'd probably still be making excuses as to why my life was at a standstill."

Mid-program, Candace hit a rough patch. Phlebotomy was something she had always wanted to do, but despite loving the class, she failed her skill set. She was pretty upset, but hopeful about being able to retry the skill set. It was a surprise when CATCH announced in an email there would be no more retaking of the skill set since the new class was already filled to capacity with a new student cohort coming in. Up until that moment, Candace had felt CATCH was always there for her whenever she needed anything. Everyone had been such great help. Now this general email to those who had failed the skill exam made her feel like no one cared.

"I truly felt abandoned and hurt. I was so angry that I set myself to fail the entire program. I didn't reply to instructor emails or CATCH calls or emails." For weeks this went on until Candace's housing advocate from Housing Hope (a CATCH partner) reached out to her, telling her that Nora from CATCH had been trying to get in touch with her and the CATCH staff were worried because they hadn't heard from her. Eventually Candace agreed to meet with Nora, along with her housing advocate and the advocate's manager.

Success Stories

"In that meeting, I learned that no one had forgotten me at all. Because I accepted 'no' instead of taking that email and creating a chance for myself, I missed out on taking my CNA (Certified Nursing Assistant) exam with the rest of my class, even though I had passed the academic portion and completed my CNA externship. I—not CATCH—stood in the way of my own certification." Candace also had an opportunity to retake her phlebotomy skill set. She retook and passed her second-chance phlebotomy exam.

Right after that, Candace started an externship at Overlake Hospital Medical Center, where she and the staff connected immediately. She was so successful in her phlebotomy skills that she was encouraged to apply for a job at the hospital before the end of the externship. "A month later, I started as an employee! I love what I do, and I'm honored to be a part of such a well-educated and trained staff."

Candace thanks the CATCH Program for that. "If I didn't have Penny's class to condition me and the efforts to reach out to me, I'd still be holding that grudge, and I would have no job. This program single-handedly changed my life. The CATCH Program gave me a skill that, even in a tough economy, gave me an opportunity to finally be a provider to my son. I'm off state assistance now, and I really feel I have something to contribute. CATCH was a blessing to me. I hope that it can be the same for many others."

Success Stories

Elena Lindstedt at Full Employment Council 21st Century Healthcare Works Program

Elena Lindstedt is a 19-year-old female and a first-generation college student who came to the Full Employment Council in Independence, Missouri, seeking assistance with classroom training and full-time employment. The Full Employment Council offers a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance.

Elena had previously worked in a nursing assistant position but needed the Enhanced certification to advance in the industry. She had a strong desire to become a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) with additional certifications to further her career.

Elena worked with her counselor at the Full Employment Council to determine which classroom training program would be the best fit for her. Together, they found there was a CNA Enhanced (CNA+) class offered by MEDS (Medical Education Development & Support, Inc.) in Independence, Missouri. Elena successfully completed this program through MEDS in January 2013, receiving state certification as a Certified Nursing Assistant with additional certifications such as Level I Medication Aide and Insulin Medication. She also received CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) and AED (automated external defibrillators) certification and training in specialized behavioral needs and memory and dementia care.

With the assistance of her counselor, Elena began working to find employment in the CNA field. She attended the John Knox Village retirement community's hiring event, and the company had a strong desire to hire her. Elena began an eight-week on-the-job training working as a CNA+ in February 2013, making \$10.75 per hour. Currently she makes more money than she previously had before when she worked in healthcare as a Nurse's Aide.

To date, Elena has received assistance with tuition, transportation, career guidance, and job search activities to help her gain a credential and find employment in the field she desired. The HPOG program helped her advance in her career and move toward a sustainable wage.

Success Stories

Donna at Gateway Community and Technical College

Gateway Health Profession Opportunity Project

Donna is a 53-year-old woman who moved to Kentucky from Tennessee two months prior to her enrollment as a student in Gateway's Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. She worked as a Nurse Aid (NA) in Tennessee many years ago, but some life issues recently created a barrier that prevented her from working. Even though Donna was not working, she never let go of her passion to work with the elderly. Once she completed her move to Kentucky, she decided to enroll as a student at Gateway Community and Technical College to become an NA and pursue her dream. She had never attended college before and was nervous about how she would do in the class, but her confidence in herself and faith in God helped her overcome her fears.

Donna came to Gateway's Urban Center one day to talk to someone about how to enroll in the NA class. The Admissions Office sent her up to the HPOG suite for help with the NA class, and she met the case manager and learned more about the program. At the time, Donna was on a fixed income, unemployed, and living with a friend until she could find employment. After her conversation with the HPOG case manager, she saw HPOG as the extra support she needed to be successful.

Unfortunately, since Donna did not know how to use a computer, she was unable to complete the *Free Application for Federal Student Aid* (FAFSA) and the required background check to apply for the program. She felt very discouraged at that point, but with the HPOG case manager's assistance, she was able to complete these tasks online and apply for HPOG that day. She also learned that she would receive financial support from the HPOG program, which was essential for her to take the NA class.

Four weeks into the NA class, Donna became homeless. After discussing her options with the case manager, she temporarily moved in with another friend so she could complete her class and find a job. Later, once employed, Donna would be working with the community housing resources introduced to her by the HPOG case manager to find a permanent place to call her own.

With her positive personality, Donna gave many other students the encouragement and strength to get through the class. She shared with everyone her love of God and cooking, and she cooked full meals to bring in for her peers, instructor, and HPOG staff. Despite the challenges that she faced while in the class, she overcame them all through her perseverance. Donna even did her special praise dance in class to show her excitement when she passed her NA class. The nursing home where she did her clinical practice was so impressed with her work ethic and personality that they hope to hire her as a State Registered Nurse Aid as soon as Donna's Kentucky Nurse Aid Test (KNAT) test results are received.

On the last day of class, Donna talked about her experience with HPOG and Gateway's NA program: "I am so grateful for the help HPOG has given me. Without HPOG and my instructor, I don't know if I would have completed the program. I'm not going to stop here, though. I'm going to continue taking classes because I know I can do it."

Success Stories

Amanda Roberson at Gateway Technical College Health Profession Opportunity Project (HPOP)

Last fall Amanda Roberson was working at Wheaton Franciscan Medical Group (WFMG) as a Customer Service Associate when Wheaton Franciscan gave her the opportunity to pursue a Nursing Assistant certification. Through Gateway Technical College's (GTC) partnership with Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare (WFHC), a select group of WFHC employees participated in a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) class on the WFHC–All Saints Spring Street campus. The classes were taught by Gateway Technical College staff with case management and support services provided by the staff of the Health Profession Opportunity Project (HPOP), a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. The cohort of 12 students began classes on January 9, 2012, and completed the class on March 15, 2012. Amanda excelled in her CNA class and passed with an A. She passed her state certification exam on June 9, 2012.

After receiving her CNA certification, Amanda decided to continue her education with GTC as a student in HPOP. She had considered returning to college to complete her Nursing degree but had found lack of financial resources to be a major barrier. When Amanda enrolled in HPOP, she modified her career path to pursue a CNA certification and Health Unit Coordinator technical diploma with an eye toward job advancement. Through participation in personal strengths testing, student development activities, student advising, and case management, she is now pursuing a career as a Surgical Technician.

With her CNA certification, Amanda applied for a position with Midwest Orthopedic Specialty Hospital in Franklin, Wisconsin, which is actually part of Wheaton Franciscan Healthcare. Amanda felt working there would give her an opportunity to move into a Surgical Assistant position, which could be helpful as she continues her studies in Gateway's Surgical Technology degree program. On June 17, 2012, she was hired as a CNA at Midwest Orthopedic Specialty Hospital with an increase in pay and work hours that allow her to spend more time with her husband and daughter.

Success Stories

Timothy Seybert at Kansas Department of Commerce

Kansas Health Professions Opportunity Program (KHPOP)

Timothy Seybert is 30 years old and a resident of Great Bend, Kansas. After graduating from high school in 2000, he attended Barton County Community College, taking general education courses and eventually achieving an Associate's degree in Science in 2004. He entered the field of construction as a laboratory technician and then moved into the oil industry. After two years of employment moving drilling rigs, he was laid off in early 2009 due to the declining economy.

At that time Timothy decided to go back to school to prepare for an occupation that provided stability and brain stimulation. He decided to pursue a Radiologic Technology degree, toward becoming an X-ray Technologist, and he chose Fort Hays State University as it was the only college in the state that offered the opportunity to work toward a Bachelor's degree at the same time.

Once he had a game plan, Timothy realized he still needed a few more prerequisites to be eligible for acceptance into the program. He enrolled in some courses at Barton County Community College and stumbled upon information regarding the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). He then went to the Kansas Workforce Center and got into the WIA program, which helped with books, tuition, travel expenses, and school expenses. After two years in that program, he was able to transition into Kansas Health Professions Opportunity Program (KHPOP), a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, to help him complete his schooling.

Timothy graduated from Fort Hays State University with an Associate's degree in Radiologic Technology (RT) and a Bachelor's degree in Medical Diagnostic Imaging. He completed all required clinical hours in both x-ray and computed tomography (CT) at Salina Regional Health Center. In his last semester, he was asked to fill out an application at Salina Regional Health Center and got a temporary, as-needed job. He passed both the CT and RT boards and now has been offered full-time employment at Salina Regional Health Center.

Success Stories

David Goines at Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board, Inc.

CareerWorks Healthcare Training Institute

This is the story of David Goines, a formerly unemployed, African American, older adult male and a 2012 graduate of the Community Health Worker training program in Milwaukee, Wisconsin. This program, coordinated by the Milwaukee Area Health Education Center (MAHEC) in partnership with the CareerWorks Healthcare Training Institute (HTI), is an innovative workforce development program implemented to support the emerging profession of Community Health Worker (CHW). CareerWorks HTI is supported by the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG), funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance.

David graduated from Milwaukee High School of the Arts and entered the University of Wisconsin Milwaukee (UWM) to pursue a degree in Nursing. According to David, he started out as a strong student but then got sidetracked, hanging out with the "wrong people" and making "poor decisions." As a result, he dropped out of UWM, became unproductive, and even had a "brush" with the law. He soon realized that he had to change his life, "get focused and let go of the foolishness," or be homeless or incarcerated, neither of which was a path he wanted to take. David got a job as an Administrative Assistant at Quad Graphics, a local manufacturing company, where he worked for almost a decade.

In 2007, David became unemployed when the recession caused the company to downsize and eliminate his position. For the next year, he was unemployed and lived off his 401(k) and his savings, which soon dried up. David knew he now had to choose a positive direction for his life and find employment to survive. He explored options for returning to school, and his strong interest in healthcare led him to Sanford Brown to pursue a career as a Medical Assistant, combining his experience in administrative services with his interest in healthcare. David graduated from Sanford Brown with an Associate Degree in Applied Medical Science.

While at Sanford Brown, David participated in an externship with Columbia St. Mary's (CSM) Hospital in its Chronic Disease Clinic. He was once again inspired and motivated by the healthcare environment and the opportunity to serve patients. David was referred to HTI and AHEC by another CHW at the hospital, Christy, who had also graduated from the CHW training program. He says, "Christy told me that she recognized my positive engagement with patients and suggested that I might be a good CHW."

David enrolled in the CHW training program and was a star trainee. He had a perfect attendance record for the eight-week program, and he achieved a score of 96% on his final exam, a significant increase from a score of 22% on his pre-exam. While in training, David completed volunteer hours well above the requirement. He was the program's resident Medical Assistant, often coming to class with his blood pressure cuff and stethoscope, taking the blood pressure of his classmates and offering self-management strategies to those with elevated levels, the true mark of a CHW.

Success Stories

Asked to speak at the CHW graduation, David said, “When I signed up for the program I saw it as a supplement to my clinical experience and offered reinforcement methods for providing good patient care. With my first exam results, I was uncertain about my success probability in the program. As the course proceeded, I found myself surrounded by positive peers, very engaging speakers, and interesting discussions on a variety of subjects. I found myself absorbing interesting information, increasing my vocabulary, and developing skills to make me an effective Community Health Worker. I’m glad I decided to stick with the program and can’t wait to use my skills to assist those who need help.”

David’s past brush with the law would have barred him from an opportunity to work in healthcare in most circumstances. However, the partnership and common goals of Milwaukee AHEC, CSM, and HTI, along with the flexibility of the HPOG options and David’s externship performance, provided a lens through which David was viewed as an ideal candidate for the CHW position that CSM was seeking to fill. David was hired by CSM in a nontraditional position, Community Health Worker/Medical Assistant, a community/clinical employment role. He says he is happy and fulfilled by the work he does and is grateful for the opportunity. CSM is to be commended on its innovative workforce strategy and the opportunity it provided for David.

Success Stories

Jessica Hodgdon at New Hampshire Office of Minority Health and Refugee Affairs Health Profession Opportunity Project (HPOP)

Jessica Hodgdon was at a low time in her life, with no job and no direction, when she was introduced by New Hampshire Employment Security to the Health Profession Opportunity Project (HPOP), a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. HPOP gave her the second chance she needed, providing opportunities she feels she would not have had elsewhere. She says, "At first the tests, interviews, and paperwork seemed endless, but I knew it would be all worth it if I could get accepted into the program. I knew back then what a great program this was, and I wanted to be a part of it. I wanted to change my career and life by letting someone guide me down the right path and provide for me where I couldn't."

Once accepted in HPOP, Jessica was introduced to "supportive, informative, caring people" who, she says, "became my mentors in a way." She enrolled in a Licensed Nursing Assistant (LNA) program, graduated, and now has an LNA license for nursing as well as her CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation) certification. "I was assisted with uniforms, shoes, a watch, mileage reimbursement, and the confidence that I can change my career at my age and be successful doing it." She then enrolled at Great Bay Community College for the Registered Nurse (RN) program, where she is currently taking classes to obtain that lifelong goal.

Jessica is very grateful to the HPOG program: "Without HPOP providing not only the funding for all of this, but also helping me build up my self-esteem, I would not be where I am today. The program staff have taken the time to meet with me or email me or call me and provide the best guidance and counseling I can ask for. They truly care about my success and root me on like a cheering squad. Without that support, I fear I would still be unemployed or working in the same career as I was before and just as miserable, with no passion for my work."

Now she is working in the healthcare field in a hospital and says, "I feel I am on top of the world! I am currently a patient transporter and getting my foot in the door at the hospital will be a big advantage when I look for a nursing position. Because of HPOP and my dedication, we as a team have succeeded in pointing me in the right direction, and I have fulfilled my dreams of going back to school, feeling self-worth, and becoming a successful part of society."

Success Stories

Mariesa Partinico at Pima Community College District

Pathways to Healthcare Program

Mariesa Partinico, mother of three, was unemployed for about six months before learning about the Pathways to Healthcare Program of Pima Community College District, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. Unemployment Insurance was only temporary and was not nearly enough income to pay the family's bills. Referred to Pathways after seeking assistance from the local One-Stop Career Center, Mariesa was excited about the opportunity to embark on a career in the high-demand medical office field.

With assistance and guidance from Pathways advisors and case managers, Mariesa successfully completed her Medical Records Technician/Professional Medical Coding Specialist training. HPOG funding and a Pell grant covered her tuition and textbook costs and helped with monthly bills and her mortgage.

Prior to completing her training, Mariesa accepted a job offer as a Billing Authorization Clerk. "With the flexibility and support of the instructors, I was able to work my school time around my family needs without the stress of missing a class," Mariesa says. "I actually had four job offers in the field after I accepted the job. Without the HPOG schooling, I wouldn't be in the medical industry, and now that I am, I see a lot of opportunity for growth."

After graduating, Mariesa received a promotion and encouragement to further her education. She has now sought the assistance of HPOG staff in preparing to continue along the career pathway by entering the Health Information Technology Program.

Success Stories

Marian Sena at Research Foundation of the City University of New York–Hostos Community College

Allied Health Career Pipeline Program

Marian Sena, a single mother of two young children, was facing eviction when she entered Hostos Community College's Allied Health Career Pipeline Program, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. After coming to the United States from the Dominican Republic in 2003, she worked in a fast food restaurant. By 2011, she was employed as an administrative assistant, even though English is not her native language.

Seeking a way to improve her circumstances, Marian enrolled in and successfully completed Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training with the Allied Health Career Pipeline Program. Finding herself in a tough financial situation, she was given a referral to one of the Pipeline Program's partners, Start Small Think Big, for financial counseling and advisement.

At the end of the training, Marian told the case manager that her housing was in jeopardy. With rent in arrears, she was required to pay the entire sum in 30 days or face eviction. She applied for assistance; however, the amount awarded her was not sufficient to cover the rental arrears. As a result, the career services team began to work diligently to secure employment for Marian. She interviewed at Lincoln Hospital, one of the program's employer partners, for a sitter's position and was hired.

After only one month in the sitter's position, Marian was promoted to Patient Care Technician (PCT), which increased her salary by more than 60 percent. Her housing situation has since stabilized, and she has set a long-term goal of becoming a Registered Nurse.

Success Stories

Angelica at the San Diego Workforce Partnership, Inc.

Bridge to Employment in the Healthcare Industry Program

During the summer of 2010, Angelica was almost a year into her unemployment benefits. She had lost her job in property management due to misinterpretation of the California Labor Code regarding breastfeeding while working. Productivity was always the name of her game, and during her unemployment she found herself slipping further and further into a depression that left her sitting on the couch doing absolutely nothing. Her husband's grandmother called her and told her about a grant she had heard about that would pay for studies in the medical field, but she did not know any specifics.

Angelica began looking online for this grant and somehow stumbled across a phone number for information. After a few phone transfers, she was connected with Cindy Perry, the director of the San Diego Workforce Partnership's Bridge to Employment in the Healthcare Industry Program, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance.

Angelica was excited to have something to look forward to, but it turned out that the grant was still in the works and nowhere near ready for disbursement. Angelica asked what she could do in the meantime and was told to think about what she would like to do. She called back a month later with her list and was advised to go on tours of schools and choose the one she liked (the grantee didn't even know the dollar amount of the grant yet), so Angelica went on some tours. A month later she called with her list of favorites and was told that the grant was not ready yet.

Her persistence opened the door for her to be the first one to complete an application and a personal assessment with Cindy. Her scores were great, and she left with paperwork in hand. Her next stop was UEI College, where, when she told them she had qualified for the HPOG program, her enrollment began.

Angelica had always been a great student and had worked since she was 15. Unemployment had placed her in an emotional/mental state she had never experienced before, one where dreams, goals, and aspirations fell by the wayside. Angelica was unrecognizable to herself, and she had two little ones who needed her. She could not afford to just roll into a little ball and disappear. This grant gave her a reason to get up and get dressed. Her experience at UEI ended with an externship at a company where she was ultimately hired after 30 days. She has been employed for a little over a year now and is thankful for the grandmother who thought to share her knowledge of this grant.

Angelica's first paycheck at this new job came one week after her last unemployment check. Talk about a blessing! One fringe benefit of having worked with this HPOG program is that it lit the fire that had once burned regarding her education. Angelica will continue her education and strive for excellence!

Success Stories

Charles Smoot at Schenectady County Community College

Health Profession Opportunity Grant

Charles Smoot thinks about his education as an asset. He is quick to point out that it is not a tangible asset (like a house, a car, or even a job); rather it is a measure of worth that, regardless of life's hiccups and setbacks, can never be taken from him. He has had other assets—jobs, relationships, his own business—that have been lost. Even his health has been threatened, so much so that he began accepting that he would lose his life in a battle with cancer. But through it all, Charles has come to realize that his education (a Bachelor's degree in Psychology, an Associate's degree in Mortuary Science, and a newly earned New York State Certified Nurse Aide licensure) can never be taken from him, and therefore it is the most reliable asset he has.

A recent graduate from Schenectady County Community College's Certified Nurse Aide program, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, Charles is working for The Altamont Program, Inc. as a substance abuse rehabilitation counselor. His experience with the college's HPOG program brought Charles back to a place he has always felt revitalizes the best in him—the classroom. In the program's first IBEST (Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training) class, he took advantage of a great opportunity to get back to what makes him thrive—the life of a student required to demonstrate discipline, dedication, consistency, and hard work. Charles now had expectations placed upon him by his instructors, his fellow students, his employment specialist, and his wife. "I was spending my time watching TV, sitting around all day doing nothing. That lifestyle can make you lose your sense of self-worth," he says.

A former business owner and professional undertaker, Charles spent most of his professional life working in funeral homes. But a long battle with drugs, the opening and closing of a business he hoped would make a cultural shift in his community, and a debilitating battle with cancer left him extremely discouraged. "I don't do well at failing; I'm a terrible quitter. I was sitting in my living room, and I could look out the window and see where I wanted to go, but I wasn't there." An accidental walk past Albany Community Action Partnership (ACAP) helped Charles connect with an employment specialist and a training program that would ultimately lead him where he wanted to go. "I was haphazard before this class started. If you give me wiggle room, I'm going to wiggle. I had to wait before I could get into class, but my employment specialist at ACAP, Sonya, kept my head in it. She helped me hang on and stay focused on what I wanted, and I got in."

Soon, Charles began his Certified Nurse Aide class and met his instructors and students, learning quickly that he was the oldest person in the class. "It didn't matter. I learned a lot from them, and I hope they learned a lot from me. I don't know if I would've made it through if my classmates and instructors weren't there to push me. I hate math, I've always struggled with math, but I was actually learning math!"

The hard work and support paid off, and Charles can now call himself a Certified Nurse Aide, among many other things. "The things I learned in class I use every day at my job and in my personal life. The healthcare field is all about working with people, and that's where I belong. I'm grateful that this program helped me get there."

Success Stories

Now Charles is very busy working full time, taking care of his dog, and keeping his wife happy. He has bigger dreams of once again owning his own business and continuing his education. "I will never be too old to want to learn. Sonya gave me a poster one day that said, 'If it's something you want, you'll make a way; if it's something you don't want, you'll make an excuse.' I'm done making excuses, and I'm glad I'm finding my way."

Success Stories

Crystal Green at South Carolina Department of Social Services

Health Occupations Preparation for Employment (Project HOPE)

Crystal Green moved from Washington, DC, to Beaufort County, South Carolina, along with her military husband and two-year-old son in 2009 and later gave birth to a baby girl. Throughout her marriage, she had to endure abuse on many occasions. Crystal felt that she was helpless and would not be able to make it on her own with two babies and no job, far from her family.

As time went by, Crystal decided that she could no longer subject her children or herself to this type of abuse, no matter how far she was from home or how helpless she felt. She decided that she was worth much more and took a stand to better her future for the sake of her children. One day, when her abusive husband went to work, Crystal moved all her belongings into storage, took her two children, and left the house which they had called home. Crystal moved back to Washington, DC, with her family until she got a call in 2010 stating that her husband had been seriously injured in Iraq. At that time she felt that it was her duty as his wife to return to Beaufort to care for her husband.

Once he got better, the abuse started again. Crystal left her husband's home once again with her two children, never to return. She shared that she had lost her mother at the age of 16 to murder, due to an abusive relationship, and later had to move to Charleston, South Carolina with an abusive grandmother from whom she ran away and moved to Washington, DC, to live with her aunt and father. Despite all of the challenges that Crystal has faced during her life, she continues to stay strong and remain positive.

Today Crystal is a single mother who has been living in Beaufort County for the last two years. Through her choir instructor, she heard about Project HOPE, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, and she decided to give it a try. She says, "I've learned that I need to be more confident in myself and always strive to reach my goals no matter what obstacles come my way."

During Project HOPE Boot Camp, Crystal faced many obstacles, but she did not allow them to cause her to miss any days during Boot Camp. The biggest obstacle was being served an eviction notice the last couple of weeks of Boot Camp, when she had just agreed to take custody of her three-year-old twin sisters. She now had to face possibly being evicted with four young children. After searching for assistance through many different local agencies and being denied, a door finally opened for Crystal and her family. Three days before she graduated from Boot Camp, she was scheduled to appear in court for the eviction hearing, but due to a favor, she was able to get the money that she needed to stay in her home and attend class that morning.

Success Stories

Crystal graduated from Project HOPE Boot Camp on February 22, 2013, with an average grade of 94. She began her Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training at the Technical College of the Low Country in Beaufort three days later and currently cares for her two children, ages six and four, and her two twin sisters, age three. While Crystal has not yet completed any certifications, she has already proven to be successful by ending an abusive relationship and taking charge of her life. She is taking her education one step at a time and will decide what her next steps will be upon completion of her CNA certification.

Success Stories

Lisa Waldroup at Southland Health Care Forum, Inc. Pathways to Health Care Occupations

Lisa Waldroup was a student in the Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN) pilot program at Southland Health Care Forum, part of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. This initial cohort of students began on June 6, 2011, and blazed a trail in their program which future Southland students could follow.

Some of the first things that stood out about Lisa were her attention to detail, professionalism, and winning attitude. She is a natural-born leader whose organizational skills showed very quickly. Lisa was as responsible as anyone was for helping to stabilize her cohort. She did so by organizing study sessions and even opening up her home to host the sessions for students who wished to attend.

Nursing, like most medical professions, has a very rigorous curriculum, and how well a student masters it is measured in three ways. One, is the student able to handle the academics? Two, can the student replicate academic understanding through practical application in the clinical setting? Three, does the student have the necessary mental toughness and resiliency? This last factor is often vastly unappreciated and may be overlooked when people consider what makes a successful student and nurse. Not only are the understanding and practical application necessary, but also the resiliency of spirit to push through when those days get rough.

Students will have ups and downs, and there will be some rough days in nursing. Those who have the spirit of a Lisa Waldroup push through, excel, and achieve. It takes much more than the passing of a competency exam to be a nurse. It truly is a life calling. Lisa exemplifies and embodies the meaning of this term.

The staff at Southland are extremely proud to call her Nurse Lisa Waldroup, LPN. Lisa is excited about her future as a Nurse and looking forward to giving back to her community.

Success Stories

Wayne Martin at Suffolk County Department of Labor

Suffolk County Healthcare Occupational Opportunity for Learning (SCHOOL)

Wayne Martin was 23 years old when he first came to Suffolk Works Employment Program (SWEP), the local Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program in Suffolk County, New York. He had been working hard in a local pizzeria to provide for his wife and newborn child. Unfortunately, his life turned upside down when his wife became involved with drugs, abandoning her family and leaving him in sole custody of his son. Court dates and lack of child care caused him to lose his job and forced him to seek temporary assistance.

Wayne met with his SWEP assessment counselor, Larry Meneses, and together they developed an employability plan which addressed his barriers to employment and included a plan for vocational training. Thanks in large part to the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program, funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance, Wayne was able to enroll in a local Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) class which provided him a healthcare career pathway to regaining his self-sufficiency.

By the time he graduated, Wayne had removed several barriers and, with the help of SWEP-provided supportive services, had been able to obtain a car and get it insured. He confidently entered job search knowing he had the skills and ability to obtain and maintain employment.

Recently, Wayne called his counselor and reported that he had obtained full-time employment of 35 hours per week at a local skilled nursing facility, earning \$12.50 per hour. "I never could have done this without the help of my family and am very grateful to HPOG for making this success possible," he said.

Wayne has been encouraged to return to school and obtain additional skills in electrocardiogram (EKG) and phlebotomy. He will also begin exploring whether he is suitable for the Surgical Technician program beginning in September 2013.

Success Stories

Sadia Riasat at Temple University of the Commonwealth System of Higher Education

Health Information Professions (HIP) Career Pathways Program

In 2004, Sadia Riasat came to the U.S. from Pakistan to begin her married life in a new country. Her English was limited as Urdu was her first language. With time, she had two sons and wanted to pursue a career. She started her studies at home with a study book and compact disc on property and casualty insurance. As a result of her studies, she got a job in the field and felt acclimated to life in the U.S. once she was employed. Unfortunately, the office in which she was employed closed, and, with her young family, Sadia could not go to school full time nor did she know the direction she wanted to take for the future. She did take a few classes in health information technology at her local community college but was limited by time and finances.

In August 2011, Sadia attended a major job fair at Citizens Park in Philadelphia as she was unemployed. She was not happy with the jobs that were offered. All of the health jobs were clinical, and she did not have the certifications that employers wanted. As she was leaving the elevator, she decided to stop on the second floor to see what was taking place and noticed two presentations. One was on nursing and the other on health careers was led by Susan Thomas of District 1199C Training and Upgrading Fund, the HIP program's educational partner. Sadia wanted to know more about health information and followed up with Ms. Thomas. She attended HIP's September orientation and subsequently got accepted and enrolled into HIP's next Tier 1 class. The HIP program is one of 32 Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG), funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. When she enrolled, Ms. Riasat was 31 years of age.

Sadia completed her certifications in Tier 1 and did exceptionally well with her course material, but she still was not certain that this was the career path for her. When a presentation was made on Tier 2 and the career benefits of obtaining the American Health Information Management Association (AHIMA) Certified Coding Associate (CCA) certification, she knew that she wanted to be part of that class. She felt excited about being on a true career path, though she was also fearful that she would not get a job as others in the program had more experience than she did.

Sadia has a lot of determination and tenacity, however. Once accepted into the eight-month training which prepares students to test for the AHIMA CCA certificate, she worked diligently. Upon completion of the program, she passed the AHIMA exam and began an internship at Central Billing, Temple University. Sadia did so well that a job was created for her at this site, and she began full-time employment with benefits on January 7, 2013. One of her benefits is tuition reimbursement. Sadia states that she is the first person in her family to have a career and be on a career path, and she is excited about what the future brings. She credits the "great staff at HIP" for helping her with supportive services like transportation, and she felt that the instructor, Dr. Wilbur Lo, was a "great teacher" and very easy to ask for help. Her other plans for the future include moving forward with the educational opportunities available through HIP, combining credits earned from other colleges, and eventually accessing the HIP Tier 4 program, Temple University's Bachelor of Science in Health Information Management.

Success Stories

LaRae Schindler at Turtle Mountain Community College

Choosing Health Opportunities for Indian Career Enhancement (Project CHOICE)

LaRae Schindler is a full-time nursing student at Turtle Mountain Community College. She is also a first-time mother. She finds it can be difficult being a full-time college student on top of being a first-time mother but says, "I am managing to juggle it all. I am making it work with the help of Project CHOICE," a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance.

LaRae has significant challenges in pursuing her education while managing so many other responsibilities. As a 28-year-old adult, she lives with her baby and her husband, and the family has bills, such as rent, car payments, insurance payments, day care, etc.

Project CHOICE has assisted her in many ways. The project pays LaRae's tuition and book fees, so "that is one less worry I have," she says. The project also pays for her uniform, required for clinicals, and for her mileage, which she calls "a blessing."

In addition, Project CHOICE pays a set amount per month toward her child care expenses. It will also pay the fees when she goes to take her national board examination.

LaRae says, "The Project CHOICE staff are there for us any time we need them, answering questions, encouraging us, and offering us advice. If I were not a Project CHOICE student, I am unsure if I would still be able to be a full-time college student. Sometimes all the juggling can be stressful. However, I know the payoff in the end will become even greater. This is a temporary situation which points towards a better and brighter future. I have always believed that the things you work for in life are the things you value the most (such as my education). I would like to thank Project CHOICE for giving me a chance to succeed in my own story."

Success Stories

Jamilya Rudd at Will County on behalf of The Workforce Boards of Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Careers—Skilled Workers, Strong Earnings

Jamilya Rudd was referred to Central States SER's Healthcare Careers, part of the Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. The day she heard about the program, she attended the information session. With prior knowledge of health information management, Jamilya was in need of a job but had not been provided with a chance. Therefore, she took full advantage of the opportunity that was presented to her and completed SER's Healthcare Bridge program.

Soon after, Jamilya was successfully able to enroll in Triton College's Certified Nursing Assistant training. By April 2012, she had passed the Illinois Certified Nursing Assistant State Board Exam. Her rapid educational advancement was followed by a job offer as a Certified Nursing Assistant.

Jamilya then started reconnecting with people she had previously met in the medical field. She described her skills to them and showed her new credential. She was able to develop a relationship with someone who offered her the position she currently holds as a Medical Records Director.

The day Jamilya was hired by her current employer, her life drastically changed. Not only does she hold an important position within the company, but she is now earning a sustainable salary, which is having positive effects in her personal life. Additionally, her employer is providing her with healthcare benefits and tuition reimbursement up to \$2,500 if she chooses to continue attending college.

Within the next three years, Jamilya would like to obtain her Associates degree in Health Information Technology. She says, "I want to be a Registered Health Education Tech for the State of Illinois." With all of her success, Jamilya has not forgotten to assist those in her community. She has developed an employer relationship with Central States SER and even helped employ other participants. She now sits on the Healthcare Bridge program's advisory board.

Jamilya is a prime example of excellence. The training program SER introduced her to opened the doors of success for not only her, but also many more to follow.

Success Stories

Getahun at Workforce Development Council of Seattle–King County

Health Careers for All (HCA)

Getahun came to the U.S. in the diversity lottery program from Ethiopia on June 13, 2011, with his wife and three children. In Ethiopia, Getahun had worked as a general secretary. Upon his arrival to the U.S., he and his family struggled a lot in adjusting to the new lifestyle and faced serious housing challenges. They were homeless and living with friends at first, then moved to a shelter in downtown Seattle for five months, and were receiving TANF cash assistance.

Getahun was determined to get any skill training to find employment. He was motivated to join the healthcare field as he saw opportunities for employment and career advancement. With the career counseling and guidance of an HCA healthcare navigator, Getahun chose to become a Nursing Assistant–Certified (NA-C) to start his career in healthcare. In August 2011 he enrolled in HCA, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families’ Office of Family Assistance, and he completed NA-C training in October 2011.

In February 2012, Getahun obtained his state license and started full-time employment as an NA-C at a long-term care facility. In March 2012, the family secured housing with Wellspring Family Services and was able to move off of TANF. Getahun says that he is grateful for the opportunity to get the NA-C training, to find employment, and to be able to provide for his family.

Success Stories

Misty Gatson at Workforce Investment Board SDA-83, Inc.

Northeast Louisiana Professional Healthcare Opportunities—Careers and Support Project (The NELA PHOCAS Project)

Misty Gatson says a simple scripture, 2 Corinthians 12:9, has enabled her to endure the last few years of her life: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my strength is made perfect in weakness.” The “perfect life” she thought she had came crumbling down when suddenly she found herself divorced, with four young children and a fifth on the way. She moved back to Louisiana with no job, no income, and no help from her children’s father, and she had to sign up for state assistance through the Family Independence Temporary Assistance Program (FITAP). Soon she found out that FITAP had a program called STEP (Strategies to Empower People) that would allow her to further her education. Determined not to become reliant on state assistance, she decided to return to college and attain the education she would need to become self-sufficient. Her goal was to become a Licensed Practical Nurse (LPN). She had been to college before, but had never been a college student and single mother at the same time. This experience was about to show her just how strong she was as well as how strong her faith in God was.

Misty began her prerequisite classes in January 2010 at Louisiana Technical College, Farmerville campus. Since the Nursing Program would not officially begin until August, she was able to participate in the Work Experience Program to keep her FITAP support. She worked as a receptionist at the Family Support Office in Farmerville throughout the summer. During the summer months, she was told that the Nursing Program would no longer be offered on the Farmerville campus. Not about to let anything stop her, Misty then transferred to a new campus (about 30 miles away) and began the Practical Nursing program that fall.

She did well until her third semester, but then “everything that could possibly go wrong did! Child sicknesses, flat tires, car repairs, ex-husband problems—you name it, and it happened.” These challenges took a toll on Misty’s school work, and she failed to attain the required 80% in Advanced Pharmacology. “I honestly wanted to die,” she says. “I cried all the way home after taking finals that day. I begin to recite that scripture; yet this time, I made it personal for me. Then I knew I couldn’t give up. The very next day, I inquired about when the next Pharmacology class would begin. I was told, NEXT year! That definitely was not going to work, so I transferred to a third campus, West Monroe, an additional 30 miles from my home.”

While waiting for the re-entry period, Misty took a part-time job as a student worker in the Financial Aid office. Between this income and her FITAP resources, she was able to pay off the student loans from her previous college experience. However, then came then bad news: because of her part-time job, her FITAP was reduced. That made it almost impossible to remain in school.

Misty heard about a program called PHOCAS (Professional Healthcare Opportunities—Careers and Support Project), one of 32 Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) funded by the Administration for Children and Families’ Office of Family Assistance. She applied for a

Success Stories

sponsorship and then got good news: she could be co-enrolled in STEP and PHOCAS! Since there could be no duplication of services, the two agencies would work together to ensure her completion. She completed two semesters at the West Monroe campus and then learned that, because schedule constraints, she would not be able to take the last three classes that she needed to graduate, which would set back her graduation date a whole semester. "That simply was not an option," she says. She called her second campus, Ruston, and found out they were offering all three of the classes she needed to graduate, so she got all her paperwork in order and made what she was hoping would be her last transfer.

Misty says, "Today, I am so very happy to announce that on December 15, dressed in all white, I walked across the stage at First Baptist Church of Ruston and received my nursing pin, and just two days later, adorned in my black cap and gown, I walked across the Monroe Civic Center stage and received my college diploma in Practical Nursing!"

In February 2013, Misty passed her Nursing Board exam. When she passed, "every emotion possible went through my body." Now she is an LPN with Affinity Health Group, working in its Family Practice Clinics as well as its specialty clinics. She says, "I absolutely love my job and, even more so, I love what I do. I adore the many different people that I come in contact with and take pride in knowing that nursing is truly my calling. I know in my own heart that I am truly a success story. Single mom of five beats the odds!"

Success Stories

Roselene Raymond at The WorkPlace, Inc.

Health CareRx Academy

Roselene Raymond had experience as a Home Health Aide when she first came to the Health CareRx Academy, a Health Profession Opportunity Grants (HPOG) program funded by the Administration for Children and Families' Office of Family Assistance. She began her training at Norwalk Community College to become a Certified Nurse Aide (CNA), then furthered her training by enrolling in EKG (electrocardiogram), CPR (cardiopulmonary resuscitation), customer service, and phlebotomy courses. In January of 2013, Roselene was hired to work full time as a Clinical Assistant at Stamford Hospital. However, she still is not ready to stop learning.

Born in Haiti, Roselene has always wanted to improve her English. She is currently taking English as a second language (ESL) courses at Norwalk Community College in order to achieve this goal.

Roselene says she approached the HPOG program "with little anticipation," but "now I am amazed with great things that I have accomplished thus far." She adds, "I am thankful for the great staff and the necessary resources made available to me as a student. I feel equipped more than ever to face the challenges of the real world."

