PACE CAREER PATHWAYS PROGRAM PROFILE:

San Diego Workforce Partnership's Bridge to Employment in the Healthcare Industry Program

August 2013

OPRE

PACE
Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education

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Introduction

There is a substantial skills gap between the education and training of the labor force and the needs of employers in many high growth industries, including healthcare and manufacturing. This gap results in unemployment while good-paying jobs go unfilled. At the same time, many low-skilled adults persist in low-wage work with little opportunity for advancement.[1] Career pathways programs are an approach to fill a vital need for skilled workers in the economy and offer low-wage workers the opportunity to obtain occupational and other skills and advance into the middle class.

The goal of career pathways programs is to improve the education and earnings of low-skilled adults by providing well-articulated training and employment steps, combined with promising instructional approaches and supportive services, which are targeted to jobs that are in demand locally. There is great interest in career pathways programs among policy makers and practitioners in part because such programs provide a framework for guiding the development of improved education and training approaches for low-skilled individuals. Along these lines, the *Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE)* study is using an experimental design to assess the effectiveness of nine career pathway programs across the country. Additional information about PACE is provided in Box 1 at the conclusion of this profile.

An experimental evaluation design assigns individuals eligible for a program via lottery to a treatment group that can receive the program or a control group that cannot -- but can access other services in the community. Because the assignment process is random, there are no systematic differences between the treatment and control groups at the time they enter the study. Thus, any differences detected during the follow-up period can be attributed to the program. Random assignment is considered the gold standard of program evaluation.

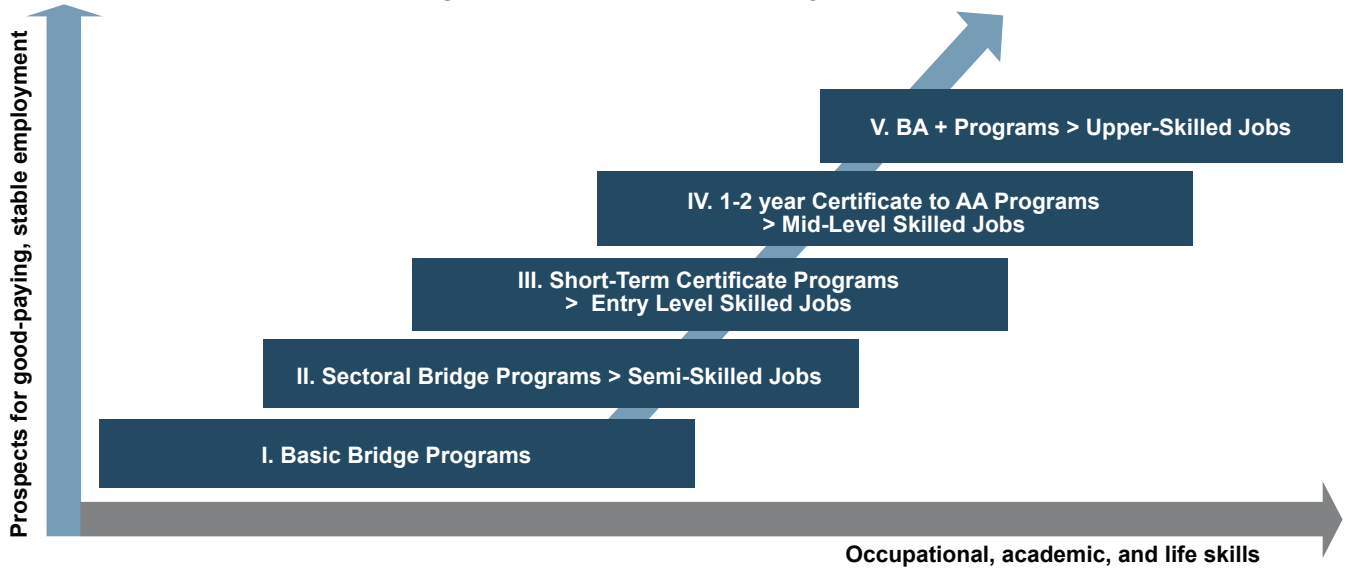
This profile provides an overview of one career pathways program, *Bridge to Employment in the Healthcare Industry (BTE)*, designed and operated by the San Diego Workforce Partnership (SDWP) in San Diego, California.[2] BTE uses an individual training account (ITA) model to help participants pay for training programs in San Diego County, combined with extensive case management, supportive services, and employment services provided by community-based partners (navigator organizations) with whom SDWP has contracted for these services.

This profile first describes the career pathway framework used in the PACE evaluation, a framework that provides a common metric for describing and assessing career pathways programs, and then discusses SDWP's BTE model and how it fits within the career pathway framework.[3]

The Career Framework

The career pathways thesis is that post-secondary education and training should be organized as a series of manageable steps leading to successively higher credentials and employment opportunities in growing occupations. Each step is designed to prepare students for the next level of employment and education and also provide a credential with labor market value. To effectively engage, retain, and facilitate learning, programs integrate four core elements: (1) assessment, (2) promising instructional strategies, (3) supports, and (4) employer connections. Individual programs vary in terms of emphasis placed on each core component, although all are comprehensive in nature in order to address the learning and life challenges facing adult students. Mobilizing these components typically requires a partnership between multiple providers, including community-based organizations, community and technical colleges, human services and workforce agencies, and employers and their representatives.

Figure 1: The Career Pathways Steps



Although steps in career pathways programs vary with their target populations, focal occupations, and service strategies, the broad training and employment levels shown in **Figure 1** provide a basis for classifying programs.

The first two steps (I and II) represent "on ramp" programs designed to prepare low-skilled participants for college-level training and lower-skilled jobs with a career focus. The next two steps (III and IV) provide college-level training for "middle skills" employment—jobs requiring some college but less than a bachelor's degree (e.g., an associate's degree or shorter certificate). The final step (V) includes interventions promoting completion of a bachelor's degree and more advanced credentials. Career pathways are designed to allow entries, exits, and re-entries at each stage—depending on skill levels and prior training, employment prospects, and changing personal situations. Programs vary in terms of entry and exit points as well as steps incorporated.

SDWP's Bridge to Employment in the Healthcare Industry Program

BTE brings together several key components of the career pathways framework. **Formal and informal assessment** is conducted during the eligibility phase so that staff can both enroll individuals who would most benefit from the program's services and gather information that will help the "navigators"—the staff members who work with individuals throughout the program—provide guidance post-enrollment. **Guidance and other navigation services** help participants select a healthcare training program. **Financial assistance** supports training and other services. Finally, navigators provide **help obtaining post-training employment,** including job readiness training, resume development and interview preparation assistance, and outreach to employers.

Program Goals, Target Population and Structure

SDWP developed Bridge to Employment to address two concerns: labor force shortages in the healthcare field and employment needs of lower-income adults. Funded by an Administration for Children and Families (ACF) Health Profession Opportunity Grant, BTE helps participants access and complete short-term training programs, gain certifications, and find employment in the healthcare field in which they were trained.

The program serves adults with incomes below twice the federal poverty line, including Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) recipients and refugees. Participants are required to have a GED or high school diploma to enter the program, in order to be employable in the fields for which they are training. Applicants without a GED or high school diploma are not enrolled; they are referred to adult basic education and can return to apply again for the BTE program after obtaining a GED.

SDWP subcontracts with four community-based organizations to enroll participants and provide services to them. Three of these organizations are participating in the PACE study: MAAC Project (MAAC), Comprehensive Training Services (CTS), and North County Lifeline (Lifeline). Each organization is responsible for serving a different geographic area of San Diego County. These organizations administer ITAs that provide financial assistance to participants who attend a healthcare training program. In addition, the organizations employ navigators, who provide participants with case management, advice, and counseling. This includes guidance on identifying a career goal, thinking through the steps they need to take towards it, and selecting an appropriate training program.

The program uses a "consumer choice" model. Participants receive financial support through an ITA for any accredited healthcare training program they choose. However, SDWP sees the navigation services as a key component of the program that will help many participants unfamiliar with the process of going through training courses enter a new occupation and succeed.

The key components of the program are individual training accounts (ITAs) that provide up to $7,000 ($10,000 for selected "higher demand" occupations) to help participants pay for training programs in healthcare occupations, combined with the guidance, case management, supportive services, and employment services provided by the navigators, including work readiness training, job search assistance, and in some cases workplace experience.

Comments from SDWP Staff on the Role of Navigation:

- *Navigation services provide a road map and guide clients to each milestone so that these new steps are not scary and foreign to them.*
- *The training itself might not happen without the navigation services.*
- *While the training programs are not changing their curricula due to Bridge to Employment, the difference with Bridge to Employment is the navigation.*

Career Pathway Components

Assessment

The navigator organizations conduct formal assessments of reading and math proficiency as part of the eligibility determination process, using either the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) or the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS). While BTE generally does not accept individuals who score below specific grade levels (between 6th and 8th grade) navigators can make case-by-case exceptions if they judge an individual with lower scores likely to benefit from and succeed in the program. In addition, navigators conduct informal assessments (usually through an interview) to gauge fit or "suitability" for the program, such as level of motivation, likelihood of following through with the program´s activities, and interest in healthcare. The assessments conducted during the eligibility determination process also provide information that helps the navigators work with participants once they are enrolled in the program. Additionally, MAAC conducts formal assessments of motivation level, computer skills, financial stability, and potential barriers related to transportation, child care, legal issues, housing, and substance abuse. These assessments help navigators better target their services.

Curriculum

With the exception of work readiness training provided by navigator organizations, SDWP and the navigator organizations are not involved in curriculum development. Consistent with its

consumer choice model, BTE does not prescribe specific curricula or classes for occupational training; participants can enroll in a healthcare training program of their choice at any accredited local proprietary school or community college. BTE funding supports training courses in one of three healthcare career paths: patient care positions (e.g., nursing occupations), technical positions (e.g., pharmacy technicians), and administrative positions (e.g., medical billing and insurance coding). Navigators provide participants with guidance on choosing a training program and provider, and each participant is required to research at least two schools before being eligible for an ITA. These steps aim to help participants make well-informed decisions about which healthcare program to select, given their own career goals and circumstances.

BTE makes more financial assistance available for training in certain fields identified by SDWP as high demand. These include Nursing (including Registered Nurse, Licensed Vocational Nurse, and Licensed Practical Nurse), Pharmacists, Pharmacy Technicians, Dental Assistants, and Dental Hygienists; however, the list is subject to change based on current labor market data.

In addition to their healthcare training programs, participants take part in work readiness training developed and provided by the navigator organizations. The specifics differ by organization, but cover some combination of the following topics: resume and cover letter writing; interview practice; job search skills; labor market research; soft skills (such as professionalism, appropriate dress, workplace culture, and expectations); and job retention.

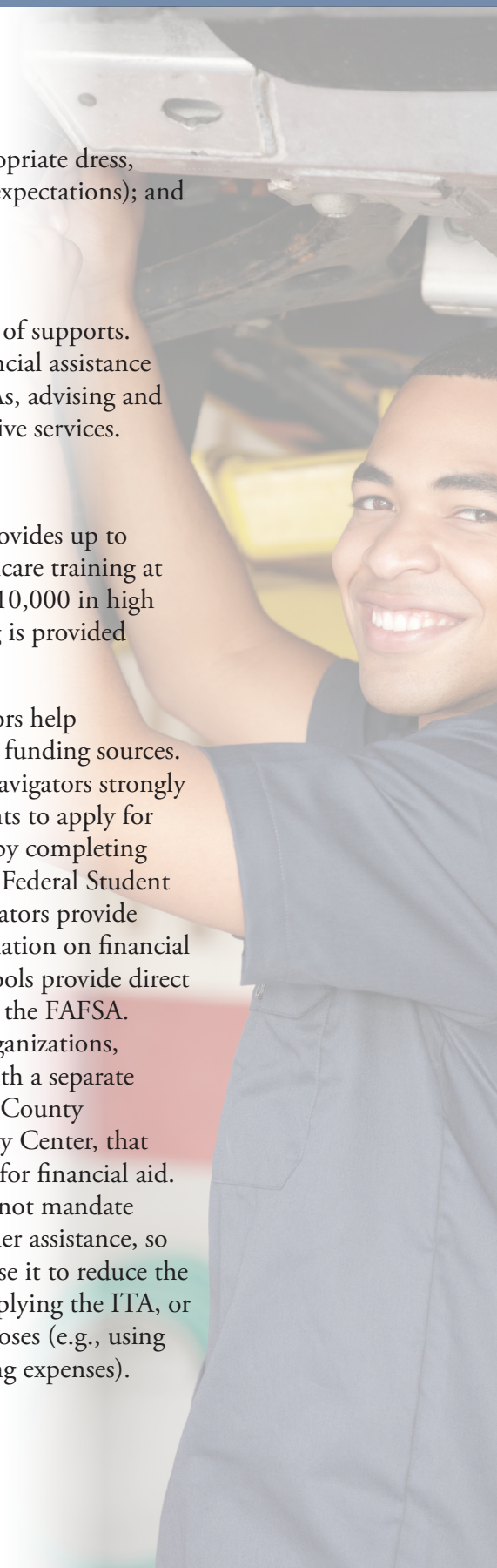
Supports

BTE provides a number of supports. Participants receive financial assistance for training through ITAs, advising and counseling, and supportive services.

Financial Assistance

As noted above, BTE provides up to $7,000 to finance healthcare training at local schools, or up to $10,000 in high demand fields.[4] Funding is provided through ITAs.

In addition, the navigators help participants access other funding sources. Before receiving ITAs, navigators strongly encourage the participants to apply for other available funding by completing the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA). The navigators provide participants with information on financial aid sources, and the schools provide direct assistance in completing the FAFSA. One of the navigator organizations, Lifeline, also partners with a separate organization, the North County Educational Opportunity Center, that helps participants apply for financial aid. The BTE program does not mandate how participants use other assistance, so participants can either use it to reduce the cost of tuition before applying the ITA, or for other allowable purposes (e.g., using Pell Grants to cover living expenses).



Advising and counseling

Navigators provide case management, advice, and counseling to participants during and following their time in BTE. Advising starts early, when the navigators help participants identify a career path and choose a training program. Navigators develop an Individual Education Plan (IEP) with the participant that describes employment and education goals, and skills and barriers that may enhance or detract from the participant's ability to reach their goals. Each participant is required to research at least two training providers and report findings to their navigator. This includes research on the local labor market, expected salary and employment for the training program of interest, and conversations with the admissions departments. The navigators direct participants to online tools that provide labor market information on health occupations (e.g., ONET and VCN Health).

Additional Supports from "Mentors"

One navigator organization, CTS, has created a position for "mentors" who do not have the same responsibilities as the navigators in administering ITAs and supportive services, and therefore have more flexibility in their schedules to work with particular participants if specific needs arise. They reach out to participants who have become disengaged with the program and offer assistance with specific needs (ranging from providing emotional support to helping a participant access a food bank).

The navigators remain in contact with participants after they enroll in a training program and check in with them monthly. During these discussions, they identify any needed supports that can alleviate barriers to academic success (e.g., child care). Navigators also track academic progress. They either contact schools for monthly or bi-monthly updates on the participants, or raise academic issues during monthly participant check-ins. When navigators learn of an academic problem, they communicate directly with the schools to determine options available to help the participant succeed.

The navigators also provide support in searching for and retaining a job (see "Employment Connection" below).

Supportive Services

Navigators can provide up to $1,000 per participant in supportive services to cover training-related needs such as uniforms, certification fees, textbooks, transportation, or child care.

Supportive services must address a barrier specified in the participant's IEP. If a participant is a TANF recipient, the navigator communicates directly with the TANF case managers to arrange supportive services and ensure that there is no duplication. The navigators have flexibility to distribute supportive services payments on a case-by-case basis.

Employment Connection

BTE helps participants find and retain jobs in a number of ways. First, each navigator organization provides work readiness training, either in workshops or one-on-one, before or after the participant's training program. As mentioned above, this training covers a combination of topics such as resume and cover letter writing, interview practice, job search skills, labor market research, soft skills, and job retention.

BTE also helps participants find work experience opportunities. Many participants are required to complete an externship as part of their healthcare program, and those externships are generally arranged by the training providers. The navigators sometimes arrange alternative opportunities for participants who either did not do an externship

Partnership with University of California at San Diego Free Clinic

UCSD partners with SDWP to help prepare BTE participants for employment. The partnership primarily involves the UCSD Student-Run Free Clinic Project, which operates four medical clinics at different locations in San Diego County. The clinics offer volunteer positions to BTE participants who have completed a training program, where they can gain experience applying their skills in a worksite, with hands-on supervision. The Project's staff also conduct work readiness refresher workshops for each of the navigator organizations, where they meet with participants, review their clinical skills, talk about workplace scenarios, and conduct mock interviews and resume review.

during their training, or whose externships were insufficient preparation for the jobs in which they are interested. SDWP contracted with the University of California at San Diego (UCSD) to provide work experience for participants (see text box). Lifeline also has a partnership with Palomar College, which provides some volunteer opportunities.

Additionally, the navigator organizations have program staff that focus on helping participants find employment after training. They help with resume preparation, interview skills, applications, and obtaining certification and licensing. Each navigator organization does job development. In addition, SDWP hired a former manager of one of San Diego's One-Stop Career Centers to coordinate job development efforts across the navigator organizations, gather labor market information from employers, and otherwise support employer engagement. Finally, the navigators maintain contact with participants for several months after they get a job in order to support employment retention. Supportive services and other navigation services remain available to BTE participants post-employment until they have completed planned services in the IEP, attained and retained unsubsidized employment, and are no longer in need of BTE program services. The length of time that the navigators stay in touch with participants and during which participants can still receive supportive services differs from case to case.

Comparison of BTE to Other Offerings

SDWP's BTE program incorporates the core career pathways components. The package of services available to BTE participants is more comprehensive than what is available through other programs in the area. As noted above, BTE is being evaluated as part of PACE. Under the evaluation's experimental design, individuals who are interested in and eligible for BTE are assigned randomly either to a group that can access BTE program services or to a group that cannot. Those with access to the program services can receive financial assistance through ITAs, guidance and counseling from BTE's navigators, and employment support, all in one program.

Those not selected to receive BTE services can receive other services available in the community for which they are eligible. The two most likely alternate programs are TANF (known as CalWORKs in California) and the Workforce Investment Act (WIA). TANF serves a similarly low-income population, and the navigator organizations target TANF participants in their recruitment efforts. WIA provides similar financial assistance for occupational training, and referral sources that direct individuals interested in training to BTE are also likely to make referrals to WIA's One-Stop Career Centers. However, neither program is likely to provide the same bundle of tuition assistance, guidance focused on education and employment in healthcare fields, supportive services, and employment supports. **Figure 2** below illustrates the different career pathways services available to BTE participants, as compared to participants in TANF and Workforce Investment Act (WIA).

Figure 2: Comparison of Career Pathway Components Available to BTE Participants and Those Available to Non-Participants

Career Pathway Component	Bridge to Employment in the Healthcare Industry	Other Services Available Through Related Programs (TANF, WIA)
Assessment	• CASAS or TABE assessment of reading and math • Formal and informal assessment of skills, barriers, and needs	• No similar assessment is standard in either program
Curriculum	• Training program chosen by the participant • Work readiness training	• Training program chosen by the participant, pending availability of financial assistance from WIA • Limited vocational training for CalWORKs (TANF) participants
Supports	• Financial support provided through ITAs • Guidance on available financial resources • Career guidance and advising provided by navigators • Supportive services	• ITAs from WIA, but availability to population served by BTE is very limited • Case management from CalWORKs • Supportive services from CalWORKs
Employment Connections	• Externships and other volunteer opportunities • Work readiness training conducted by navigator organizations • Job development • Availability of navigators post-employment	• Externships • One-Stop resource room-related services • CalWORKs job club

Summary

SDWP's Bridge to Employment program, because it brings together several critical components of the career pathway program framework, provides an important learning opportunity in the PACE evaluation.

- The program provides **financial assistance** to support training in healthcare programs, primarily through ITAs.
- **Guidance and other navigation services** provided by the navigators help participants make decisions about courses to pursue that will help lead them to a career in health professions.
- **Supportive services** help participants overcome barriers that can deter their success in education and obtaining or retaining employment.
- The navigators provide **help obtaining post-training employment,** including job readiness training, assistance in putting together resumes and preparing for interviews, and outreach to employers.

Through this approach, BTE aims to increase participants' self-sufficiency by helping them access and complete low-cost training programs, gain certifications, and find good jobs with quality wages in healthcare fields.

For more information about BTE, go to http://workforce.org/grants/2010/09/30/health-professional-opportunity-grant.

Box 1: Overview of the PACE Evaluation

The Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) evaluation, a ten-year effort funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF) and led by Abt Associates Inc., is a random assignment evaluation of nine promising career pathways programs that aim to improve employment and self-sufficiency outcomes for low-income, low-skilled individuals. The goal is to produce methodologically rigorous evidence on the effectiveness of career pathways approaches that will address issues of interest to federal, state, and local policymakers and practitioners and have significant influence on policy and practice. PACE will include implementation, impact, and cost-benefit studies. Key study questions include

- What is the impact of each program on higher levels and quicker achievement of certificates and degrees? On earnings?
- What are the impacts of each program on individual and family well-being?
- Do impacts vary by subgroups, and, if so, which characteristics are associated with larger or smaller effects?

PACE was launched in late 2007 and began with intensive outreach to solicit the views of policymakers, program operators, researchers and advocates on promising program areas to test, resulting in a focus on the career pathways approach. The evaluation team then recruited strong career pathways programs into the study. Random assignment began in November 2011 and will conclude in September 2014.

The nine PACE Partner Sites are: Instituto del Progreso Latino, Des Moines Area Community College, Madison Area Technical College, Pima Community College, San Diego Workforce Partnership, Valley Initiative for Development and Advancement, the Washington I-BEST program in Bellingham Technical College, Everett Community College and Whatcom Community College, Workforce Development Council of Seattle-King County, and Year Up. An important partner in the study is the Open Society Foundations (OSF), which provided resources for many of the programs in the PACE evaluation to expand their scale to meet the requirements of the evaluation, to enhance services in specific areas, or both. Support was also provided to specific sites by The Joyce Foundation and Kresge Foundation.

Data collection activities include two rounds of implementation research visits, two follow-up surveys with individuals in the study, and acquisition of site-specific and national administrative records on education and employment-related outcomes. The evaluation team will produce a series of reports including: program profiles for each of the PACE partner sites, site-specific implementation reports documenting the operation of the program, and site-specific impact reports examining the effect of the program on education, employment, and other related outcomes, including a cost-benefit analysis.

The PACE team includes:

Primary Evaluation Sponsor

The Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation (OPRE), Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services

http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/opre/research/project/pathways-for-advancing-careers-and-education

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The Joyce Foundation www.joycefdn.org

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Health Professions Opportunity Grants, Administration for Children and Families http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/ofa/programs/hpog

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For More Information

www.career-pathways.org

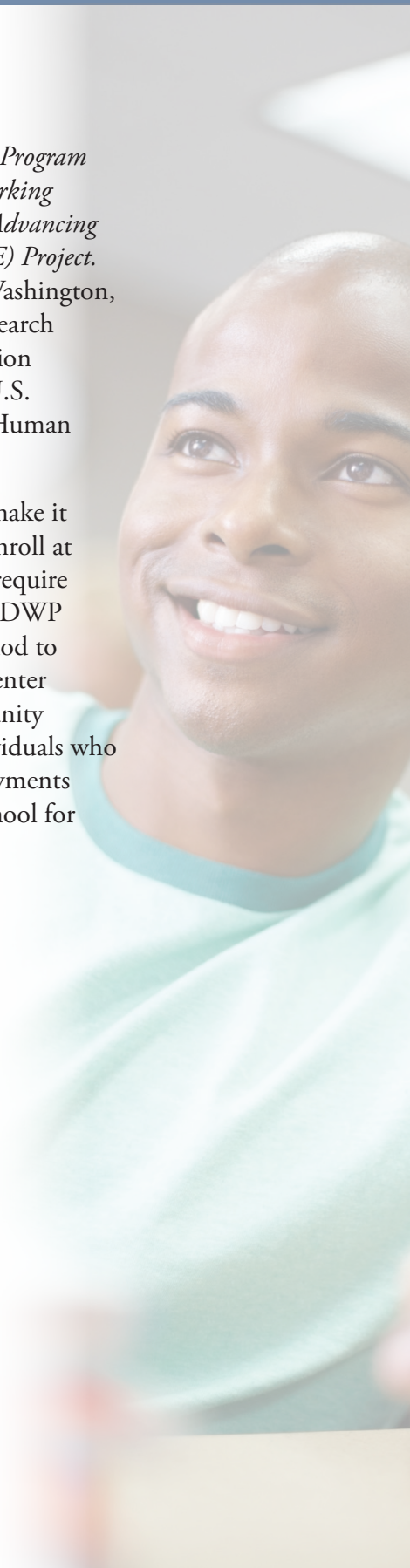
Endnotes

1. Carnevale, A., Smith, N., & Strohl, J. (2010). *Help Wanted: Projections of jobs and education requirements through 2018*. Georgetown Public Policy Institute, Retrieved from https://cew.georgetown.edu/report/help-wanted/.

2. SDWP operates the BTE program under a "Health Profession Opportunity Grant" (HPOG) from the Office of Family Assistance in the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Administration for Children and Families (ACF). The evaluation of BTE through PACE is funded by the Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation in ACF.

3. For more information on the PACE framework, see www.career-pathways.org: Fein, David J. (2012). *Career Pathways as a Framework for Program Design and Evaluation: A Working Paper from the Pathways for Advancing Careers and Education (PACE) Project.* OPRE Report # 2012-30, Washington, DC: Office of Planning, Research and Evaluation, Administration for Children and Families, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

4. The program's ITA policies make it difficult for participants to enroll at community colleges, which require tuition payments up front. SDWP has designed a separate method to reimburse participants who enter training programs at community colleges. In some cases, individuals who cannot make the upfront payments may choose a proprietary school for this reason.



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