



## SAW program bridges health care needs

Curriculum designed to help employees get better-paying jobs

Premium content from Orlando Business Journal - by Carlos Galarza, Staff Writer

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Luisa Vera is an entry-level patient care technician with aspirations of becoming a registered nurse at Central Florida Regional Hospital in Sanford.

After completing the School at Work program at the hospital, Vera, a 36-year-old mother of two, is well on the way toward achieving her goal.

School at Work (SAW) is a bridge program operated by Kentucky-based [Catalyst Learning](#), a distance learning private company founded in 1993 that prepares employees for better-paying jobs and entrance into community colleges.

Vera, a full-time student now at Seminole Community College, hopes to be a registered nurse in three years.

Two years ago, Workforce Central Florida brought SAW to the region as part of its efforts to meet the needs of the health care industry.

### Tapping talent

Carol Proenza, a registered dietitian at Central Florida Regional, coaches employees such as Vera, who entered the SAW program with the desire of getting a better job.

Proenza says the program provides a win-win scenario for the hospital, as well as the employee.

"We try to tap into that talent of people who may not have gone to school and are capable of going into health care careers," says Proenza.

Proenza says she works with students over an eight-month period. The SAW program is divided into two 32-hour semesters. The program is free to the employees, who also are paid for their time in the program as an incentive to sign up.

During the first semester, the students/employees are reacquainted with basic academic skills, such as reading and grammar, and then they are immersed in other health care topics.

"Most students have the ability to do well," says Proenza. "What they lack is confidence. With this program, they see they can do this work."

Lynn Fischer, founder and CEO of Catalyst Learning, says she is grateful to Workforce Central Florida for giving SAW exposure in the region.

"They launched us in Central Florida," says Fischer. "Since then, we've been working directly with the employers."

### Expanding SAW

Earlier this year, [HCA Inc.](#) (NYSE: HCA), a corporate operator of hospitals and health systems across the country, signed a SAW contract to expand the program to 50 hospitals in 2006. HCA owns Central Florida Regional Hospital and Osceola Regional Medical Center, which implemented SAW in May.

In all, SAW has been implemented by 250 hospitals in 33 states. During that time, 5,000 students have graduated and gone into health care careers.

Fischer says SAW is used strictly in the health care industry, although in the future Catalyst Learning may try to apply it to other industries.

She says the program is popular with employers because it is much less expensive to train people from within, and the program helps cut turnover costs.

Vera, meanwhile, says the program has been a "very good, positive experience."

"It's a very friendly environment. The hospital wants you to improve."

### Catalyst Learning

Core business: Distance learning provider and developer of School at Work program

Financials: Estimated \$3 million in sales (2005)

Headquarters: Louisville, Ky.

Contact: (502) 584-7337, [www.catalystlearning.com](http://www.catalystlearning.com)