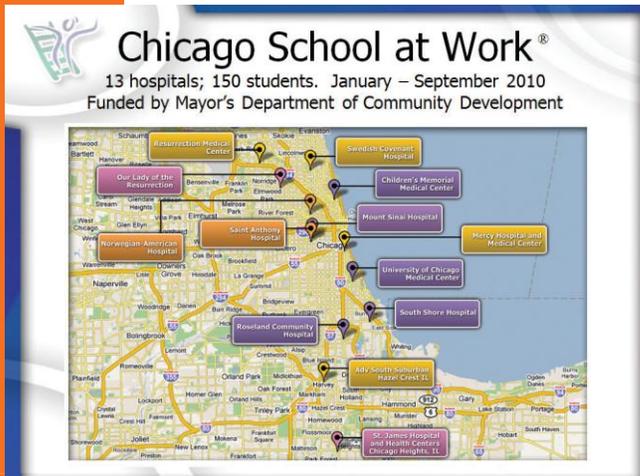


### Narrowing the Skills Gap through Community Engagement



Participating hospitals were: Advocate South Suburban, Mercy Hospital and Medical Center, Children's Memorial Medical Center, Sinai Health System, Norwegian-American Hospital, Our Lady of Resurrection, Resurrection Medical Center, Roseland Community Hospital, South Shore Hospital, Saint Anthony Hospital, St. James Hospital and Health Centers, Swedish Covenant Hospital, and University of Chicago Medical Center.

Hospitals willing to engage community-based organizations have a tremendous opportunity to maximize the impact of workforce development goals. It's a concept that has strong and active collaborative stakeholders in Chicago united around a common goal: helping entry-level health care employees gain the skills and education needed to advance. The result is a win-win situation: engaged employees are funneled into high-demand careers, letting the employer fortify pipelines while attracting the best new entry-level talent to fill newly vacated positions.

The project's roots took hold at a community hospital in the city's near Southwest Side. In 2009, Saint Anthony Hospital introduced the innovative School at Work® (SAW) program, and successfully graduated its first class of 18 students last August.

SAW is a technology-based system created by Catalyst Learning Company, based in Louisville, KY. It combines coach-based mentoring with online health care-specific coursework, DVDs, and career development activities. SAW is unique in how it addresses the needs of entry-level adult-learners. Employees attended classes during the workday and received coaching on life/time management and career planning while completing the health care-specific curriculum.

Pamela Jones, director of Workforce Development at Saint Anthony Hospital was the hospital's lead individual for implementing SAW. Jones, who has 15 years of experience developing and managing employment training programs throughout Chicago, decided to take the life management content to a new level and identified community partners to help students address barriers. Additional services were provided at the worksite, either during or immediately after SAW classes. With full support by Saint Anthony Hospital's leadership, Guy A. Medaglia, president and chief executive officer, Jones created and executed a plan to bring educational opportunities to Saint Anthony Hospital's employees; furthermore, she expanded the model to create a "one-stop shop" within Saint Anthony that would give workers greatly expanded education and services to pursue post-SAW studies.

"We believe in investing in our community and our employees. By providing them with no-cost educational opportunities through SAW, we are helping them to broaden their skill sets. Also, their quality of life will be improved because they'll be better able to support their families, enhancing the well-being of the community overall. Ultimately, we plan to offer this program to many more of our employees and open it for the entire community," said Medaglia.

The support and engagement showed in the astonishing results. All of Saint Anthony's original participants enrolled in community college after completing the program. "All of my graduates worked really hard to achieve their goal," said Jones. "Their commitment and motivation fueled by the support of their managers and supervisors here at work is impressive. I can see they are already on the right path as they celebrate and make plans to continue with their studies."

The success caught the attention of city officials, which led to an evaluation to determine whether or not the model could be expanded throughout the city. "The model appealed to the Metropolitan Chicago Healthcare Council (MCHC) and (Chicago's) Department of Family and Support Services (DFSS). Once they saw the outcomes and understood how the program was designed to provide a holistic solution, it provided an opportunity for our local association and the city to be part of something big," said Jones.

As a result, Saint Anthony and 12 other hospitals were awarded funds from the DFSS. In addition to the MCHC, community partners included the Eleanor and Steans Family Foundations (two organizations that provided funding to Saint Anthony for the 2009 SAW pilot), Heartland Human Care Services, Instituto Del Progreso, Central States SER, City Colleges of Chicago, Chicago Low-Income Housing Trust Fund, and the Chicago Economic Development Law Project.

The city's top brass also took an interest. To address the need for an increasingly skilled workforce in Chicago's health care industry, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley announced the launch of the project and designated Saint Anthony Hospital as the mentor organization.

One participating organization was Mercy Hospital and Medical Center. Nancy Hill-Davis, vice president of Human Resources/Risk Management was familiar with SAW, having first learned of it while attending the ASHHRA Conference in 2006. Mercy had



*Celebrating the success of SAW at Saint Anthony Hospital in Chicago and announcing the citywide launch, Chicago Mayor Richard M. Daley is flanked by (left) Guy A. Medaglia, president and CEO of Saint Anthony Hospital; Jill Stemmerman, Vice President of Nursing; (right) Jazette Moffet, SAW graduate; Aileen Brooks, Vice President and General Counsel.*

long provided a range of opportunities for professional and clinical staff, but other than general customer service training, the organization lacked a systematic approach to helping frontline workers strengthen basic skills and enter workforce pipelines.

Though Hill-Davis was initially excited at the prospect of filling the gap, a lack of resources prevented her from doing so. Finally, in late 2009, the organization was in a position to launch SAW. Coincidentally, it was during the planning phase that she learned about the funding opportunity. Mercy moved quickly to join the growing collaborative of Chicago hospitals; in February 2010, 18 Mercy employees joined the citywide cohort.

Like at Saint Anthony, Mercy's participants are achieving their goals. An example is Registrar Monica Caldera, who is enrolled in the nursing program at Malcolm X Community College. Caldera credits the support of her supervisors and Mercy leadership for her success. Genella Harper, supervisor of Sterile Processing, had two employees participate, which motivated her to attend the October graduation ceremony.

"The speech (my employee) Gerald gave inspired another one of my techs to enroll in the next session. I support this decision! This experience has changed my employees; they now pay more attention to the detail on their trays, which impacts the patients, doctors, and nurses."

Hill-Davis echoes that the supervisors, along with Mercy's executive leadership, gave strong support to the students. "First off, I was surprised at how willing the supervisors were to let employees do this during the work time; there were absolutely no complaints. Upper-level management also got involved and has made recommendations for future participants. This investment pays off. We are committed to having the best and brightest here, and the effect trickles down to impact high-quality patient care and service."

At Resurrection Medical Center on Chicago's North Side, 10 of the 11 participants enrolled in continuing education immediately after completion.

Lizette Wheeler is one such employee. Wheeler, a security officer who has been employed at Resurrection for four years, is also working toward a nursing degree at Malcolm X Community College. Like Caldera at Mercy, Wheeler credits the support of hospital leadership with helping her stay focused.

"I now have nurse mentors who are helping me with homework, and one doctor who saw my books has also taken an interest in encouraging me," she said.

For the second year in a row, all Saint Anthony's participants have enrolled in community college. Jazette L. Moffitt is a graduate of the 2009 pilot who has since gone on to enroll in the business program at Wright College. Moffitt addressed graduates at neighboring hospital Sinai Health System in October. The medical claims analyst told the audience that, "This experience caused me to think on a larger scale about what I want to do for my children and my employer. It helped me know that I can achieve a goal if I plan and prepare."

A recent MCHC survey of 2010 SAW graduates indicated that 96 percent of participants have more motivation at work and 92 percent have increased interest in enrolling in continuing education.

"Results of the survey not only make the case for offering SAW to hospital frontline employees, but also to build on the momentum created by the program to promote career and educational advancement opportunities," said Mary Pat Olson, director of MCHC's Health Care Workforce Institute.

MCHC is now working with its member hospitals and stakeholders at DFSS, Saint Anthony Hospital, Catalyst Learning Company, Wilbur Wright College, and Central States SER to develop a strategy to transition all interested SAW graduates into the community college system. In addition, MCHC is promoting resources and services from community partners that would give SAW completers and other eligible employees the opportunity to receive financial counseling and attend community college classes at the worksite.

The model shows sustainability; planning for year two of the Chicago SAW project is underway. MCHC plans to incorporate key components of the further academic success action plan. Amy Santacaterina, deputy commissioner of Workforce Services for DFSS, says that, "We are very pleased with the success of Chicago School at Work and think this is a quality curriculum. We are excited about continuing it in 2011-- if we can get more people to advance, that will really help our hospital partners grow their own and help fulfill a need with employees who have proven themselves to be dedicated and hardworking. Plus, it gets people on a career path to sustain their families and earn good wages."

At Saint Anthony Hospital, where it all originated, employees continue their path to educational success and career advancement as a result of the SAW program. "Our objective is to ensure that our employees grow in every way possible. Our mission as a community hospital is to care for all, which includes providing opportunities for our associates so they can reach their full potential for themselves and their families within our community. Thanks to our strong partnership with Catalyst Learning, we are helping them achieve their goals," concluded president and CEO Medaglia.