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Program introduces students to health care careers

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From left are Jennifer Irvin, BJC school-community health education partner; Alita Williams, Memorial Care Center (MCC) assistant nurse manager; Jeanene Walker, BJC talent acquisition specialist-nursing; Cassidy Hoelscher, MCC administrator; Stephanie Tate-Patterson, East Saint Louis Senior High School CNA coordinator/instructor; Reginald Farrar, Memorial Hospital human resources manager; and Carrie Christ, MCC nursing director. | Courtesy photo

BJC | As the 2018-2019 school year came to a close, graduating high school seniors were busy preparing for the next stage of their life.

For a number of local graduates, that meant embarking on a career in health care. Thanks to BJC School Outreach and Youth Development, BJC human resources and BJC talent acquisition — in partnership with professionals across BJC — 39 graduates were uniquely prepared to do just that.

Through the BJC HealthCare and BJC School Outreach Pipeline Program, BJC partners with St. Louis Public Schools (SLPS), and more recently East St. Louis Senior High School, to help guide the schools' certified nurse assistant (CNA) students into careers at BJC.

The program started in 2017 as a pilot with 20 SLPS high school seniors enrolled in the district's CNA program. Several of the students who completed the pipeline program are now BJC employees, says Jennifer Irvin, BJC School Outreach and Youth Development school-community health education partner, who oversees the program.

Students who participate in the program receive a development plan that outlines the steps they must take to become stronger candidates for positions at BJC hospitals. Over several weeks, the students take part in activities and workshops geared toward improving their job readiness skills, including resume work, nurse shadowing, nurse mentoring, career coaching, a professional presence workshop and mock interviews.

"The nursing assistant students at East St. Louis Senior High School are well on their way to a successful career in health care," says district teacher Stephanie Tate-Patterson. "These young ladies have been a part of the nursing assistant program for two to three years. As seniors, they have gained the knowledge and skills required of nursing assistants.

"They've worked with residents at a local nursing and rehab facility to satisfy their 40 clinical hours for the nursing assistant program. They all have completed the requirements to sit for the nursing assistant exam," Tate-Patterson adds. "We are expecting great results."

From mock interviews to the real thing

Mock interviews took place earlier this spring, where BJC professionals helped the students sharpen their skills, before they participated in actual job interviews with talent acquisition professionals and clinical nurse managers for open positions within BJC.

Memorial Hospital Belleville and Memorial Care Center supported the program, and Memorial human resources, talent acquisition and nursing team members spent May 9 interviewing students from the CNA class at East St. Louis Senior High School.

"This was a phenomenal experience for the students," Tate-Patterson says. "The students were able to participate in real-world interviews. They were professionally dressed, with resumes in hand and knowledge of the facility and specialties in which they desired to work, and they had the opportunity to sit at a table with five different interviewers."

Memorial Hospital human resources manager Reggie Farrar participated in the interviews. "I was truly impressed with the work being done at the East St. Louis High School Career and Technical Education Center," he says. "It's clear they're doing a great job preparing the students for entry into the workforce. I especially appreciated being able to spend time with some of the students in the CNA program. Their passion, interest and commitment came through in the brief conversations I had with them."

Carrie Christ, BSN, ACM-RN, RN-BC, Memorial Care Center nursing director, couldn't agree more. "It was an honor to meet the graduating students from East St. Louis High School. They appeared eager to get started in the health care field," Christ says. "What stood out to me the most was their eagerness to learn more about how their certification could open endless doors of opportunity within BJC, as they continued their education in

pursuit of their nursing career.

"The state-of-the-art technical school is an amazing opportunity, with obvious dedicated instructors," Christ adds. "We're grateful that Memorial Care Center was a part of this experience, and we look forward to future fellowship."

Leading by example

The interviewing and hiring efforts at both East Saint Louis High School and SLPS are supported and structured by BJC workforce diversity manager Terrie Hart. Hart recruits the support staff who go to the schools and coordinates with BJC human resources and talent acquisition to schedule the mock and the actual interviews.

"BJC continues to acknowledge ways to increase our pipeline with diverse talent for future nursing roles," Hart says. "As a result, we have developed this partnership with St. Louis Public Schools to identify current CNA students who are interested in nursing careers. We are looking forward to partnering with even more school districts with CNA programs, including the expanded efforts at East Saint Louis Senior High School."

Teacher Tate-Patterson says she and the students are grateful for the experience. "The students possess the professional skills and work ethic necessary for a career in health care and are anxiously awaiting BJC's hiring decision," she says. "We appreciate the dedication of Jennifer Irvin and the work that is put in throughout the year, coordinating visits to BJC hospitals, guest speakers and other opportunities that help to prepare our students for potential career opportunities within BJC HealthCare."

"I'm so happy to see that the students who participate in the BJC School Outreach and Youth Development career explorations programs have an opportunity to apply for employment," Irvin says. "This particular program is off to a great start. Often the students are looking to enter BJC as certified nurse assistants and are already planning to take advantage of tuition reimbursement to pursue careers in nursing."

"BJC leads by example and offers this opportunity and many others for future generations to rule in or rule out careers. We are looking forward to expanding into more schools and career pathways with the full support of the BJC human resources team. After 22 years of working on this and more than 200 hours of meetings, I'm glad to say we have completed the process map and have a solid plan in place."

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