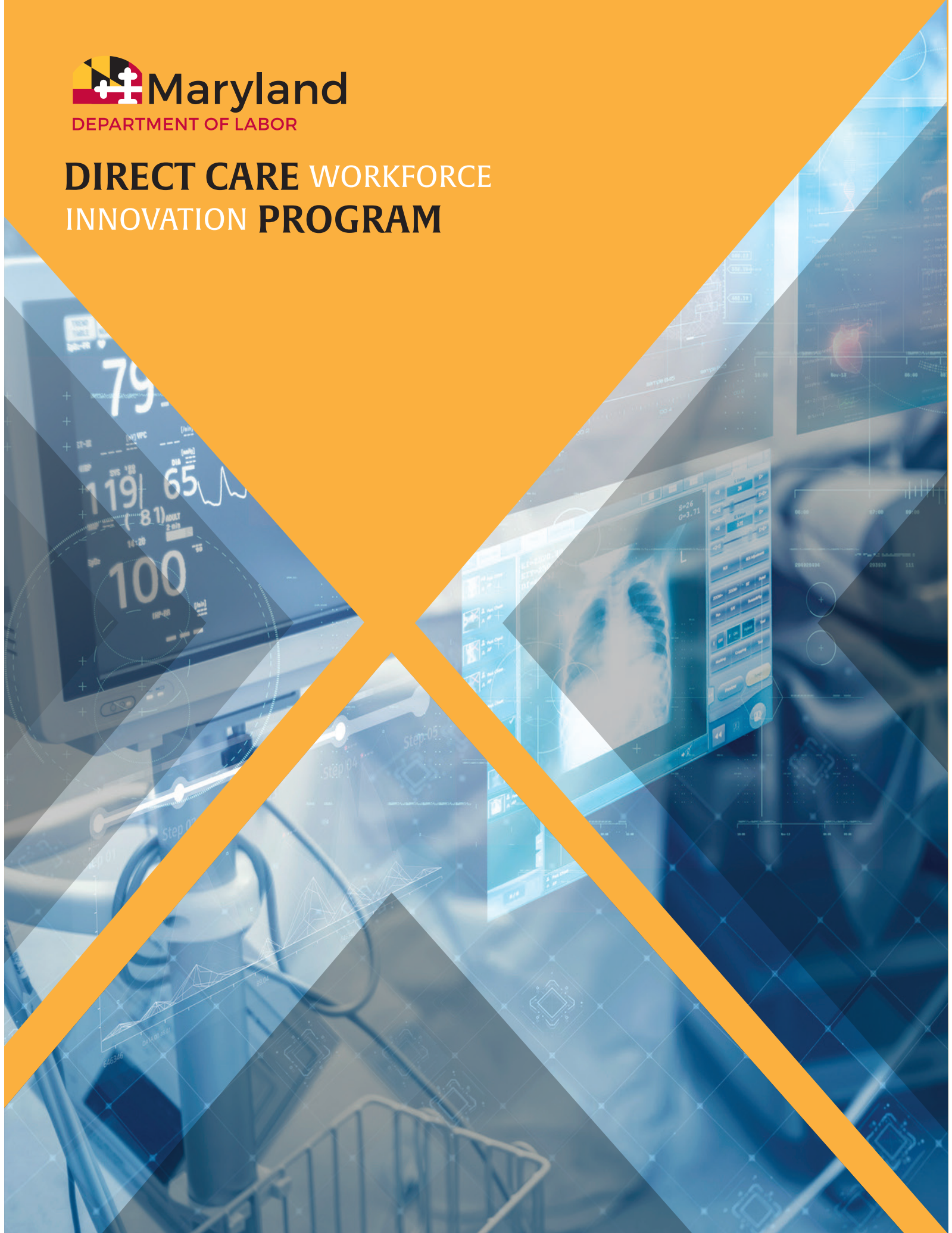




DIRECT CARE WORKFORCE INNOVATION PROGRAM



The Honorable Wes Moore, Governor
The Honorable Pamela Beidle, Chair, Senate Finance Committee
The Honorable Joseline Pena-Melnyk, Chair, House Health and Government Operations Committee

Re: [Maryland Senate Bill 307](#); MSAR 13034

Dear Governor Moore and Chairs Beidle and Pena-Melnyk:

The Maryland Department of Labor is pleased to provide the following update related to the implementation of the Direct Care Workforce Innovation Program. Passed during the 2021 Legislative Session, the program provides matching grants that create and expand upon successful recruitment and retention strategies that address the range of potential barriers to increasing the number and availability of direct care workers. Over the last year, grantees have utilized funds to test creative strategies, such as bolstering supportive service offerings, which has led to a stronger and more stable workforce. As the State continues to recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, the recruitment and retention of a highly-skilled direct care workforce is more important than ever.

Best Regards,



Portia Wu
Secretary

Jack and Nancy Dwyer Workforce Development Center Provide Hope and Success to Ashley to obtain her Healthcare Dreams.



Ashley, a single mom of three, was working as a nurse at Johns Hopkins Hospital when she and her children were in a tragic accident. Her three small children suffered injuries. Her son would need to learn to walk again. Appointments with doctors for therapy sessions, necessary to heal her two children, kept her out of work. She eventually lost her job and was unable to keep up her Registered Nurse (RN) certification.

That is when Ashley found out about the Jack and Nancy Dwyer Workforce Development Center's (Dwyer) training program. A case manager worked with Ashley to develop short- and long-term plans to get back on track. She received intensive client-centered case management that included guidance on demonstrating professionalism at work, financial assistance and resources, childcare resources, résumé writing assistance, job placement,

technology resources, tuition assistance (college/training), and career counseling. At every step along the way, the Dwyer team shared Ashley's journey, offering encouragement, hope, and direction when she needed it most.

Completing the Dwyer Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training program and earning her certification was Ashley's first step towards reaching her long-term personal and professional goals, which include resuming her career as an RN.

Ashley is now enrolled at Community College of Baltimore County (CCBC) through a Dwyer sponsorship. She completed her first college course during the summer and is currently in her second semester at CCBC, enrolled as a full-time student while simultaneously taking a class to become recertified as a Medical Technician. This additional certification will allow Ashley to grow her earning potential so that she can better provide for her family of four. Ashley purchased her first home this past year, which was a life-changing accomplishment.

"I've lost a lot, but I've gained so much more than I ever dreamed thanks to Dwyer."

-Ashley

Background

Pursuant to §11–1402 of the Labor and Employment Article, the Maryland Department of Labor (MD Labor) Division of Workforce Development and Adult Learning (DWDAL) is to administer the Direct Care Workforce Innovation Program (DCWIP), which was passed into law by the Maryland General Assembly during the 2021 Legislative Session. The purpose of the program is to help create and expand upon successful recruitment and retention strategies that address the range of potential barriers to increasing the number and availability of direct care workers across Maryland.

The statute allocates at least \$250,000 of State funds annually for MD Labor to disburse as matching grants for the DCWIP. Grants may be awarded for a maximum of \$50,000 and matching contributions may be either monetary or in-kind.

Grant funding should be utilized to develop and implement creative strategies that bolster the recruitment and retention of direct care workers, while providing in-demand training and supports. For the purposes of the fund, the following chart defines “Direct Care Worker.”

OCCUPATION	JOB DESCRIPTION	REQUIRED CERTIFICATION	CERTIFYING AGENCY ¹
Geriatric Nursing Assistant (GNA)	GNA's are Certified Nursing Assistants who have passed the GNA National Nurse Aide Assessment Program (NNAAP) exam, which allows individuals to work in long-term care facilities, as well as other acute care facilities.	Geriatric Nursing Assistant and Certified Nursing Assistant certification	Maryland Board of Nursing
Home Health Aide	Home Health Aides monitor the health status of an individual with disabilities or illness, and address their health-related needs, such as changing bandages, dressing wounds, or administering medication. They work under the direction of offsite or intermittent onsite licensed nursing staff. Aides provide assistance with routine healthcare tasks or activities of daily living, such as feeding, bathing, toileting, or ambulation. Aides may also help with tasks such as preparing meals, light housekeeping, and laundry depending on the patient's abilities.	Certified Nursing Assistant certification	Maryland Board of Nursing
Nursing Assistant	Nursing Assistants provide or assist with basic care or support under the direction of onsite licensed nursing staff. They perform duties such as monitoring the health status, feeding, bathing, dressing, grooming, toileting, or ambulation of patients in a health or nursing facility. Nursing Assistant duties may include medication administration and other health-related tasks. This category includes nursing aides.	Certified Nursing Assistant certification	Maryland Board of Nursing

¹COMAR 10.37.01.01 – 10.37.01.07.

Personal Aide	Personal Aides provide personalized assistance to individuals with disabilities or illness who require help with personal care and activities of daily living support (e.g., feeding, bathing, dressing, grooming, toileting, and ambulation). Personal Aides may also provide help with tasks such as preparing meals, light housekeeping, and laundry. They work in various settings depending on the needs of the care recipient and may include locations such as their home, place of work, out in the community, or at a daytime nonresidential facility.	N/A	N/A
Psychiatric Aide	Psychiatric Aides, which includes psychiatric orderlies, work under the direction of nursing and medical staff to assist mentally impaired or emotionally disturbed patients. They may assist with daily living activities, lead patients in educational and recreational activities, or accompany patients to and from examinations and treatments. They may also restrain violent patients.	Certified Nursing Assistant certification	Maryland Board of Nursing

Application Process

As described in the 2022 DCWIP Annual Report, MD Labor updated the program's [policy](#) after the first competitive solicitation resulted in just one grant award. Since that time, there have been two competitive solicitation opportunities released by MD Labor, in the fall of 2022 and spring of 2023, respectively. In addition to sharing each opportunity with several internal distribution lists, MD Labor also notified key stakeholder groups, including the [Maryland Regional Direct Care Services Collaborative](#) and [LeadingAge Maryland](#).

A three-person review team, comprised of DWDAL staff and a representative from the Maryland Board of Nursing, reviewed and scored each application. In addition, each application was thoroughly reviewed by staff from DWDAL's fiscal unit to ensure the budgetary requirements were met.

Fall 2022 Competitive Grant Solicitation

The Fall 2022 Competitive Grant Solicitation was released on October 11, 2022. MD Labor received eight applications. After review, MD Labor awarded funding to four applicants totaling \$200,000. The review team determined that the remaining four applicants did not meet the technical requirements of the program or did not provide sufficient detail in their application. More information on the four projects, which began in February of 2023, can be found below.

Spring 2023 Competitive Grant Solicitation

Labor released another solicitation on April 5, 2023. In response, three applications were received. Two grantees were awarded funding. The third applicant did not submit all of the required components of the application. Grants began on August 1, 2023 and more information on the projects is included below.

Grantees

Summer 2022 Competitive Grant Solicitation

Dr. Masica Jordan, LLC

Dr. Masica Jordan, LLC (Dr. MJ) seeks to make healthcare roles more accessible and relevant for underserved, underrepresented, and marginalized communities. To execute on this mission, Dr. MJ was awarded funding to train 50 individuals to become Personal Aides. Students have the opportunity to participate in a 40-hour core training, receive instruction on cultural and linguistic competence and blood borne pathogens, and complete CPR/First Aid training. In addition, students receive supportive services and a stipend for their participation in training. The project includes ten partners, including employers, higher education, and workforce organizations. Over the grant period, Dr. MJ has successfully trained and placed 40 individuals into employment, making an average starting salary of \$21 per hour.

Fall 2022 Competitive Grant Solicitation

Dwyer

Aligned with the goal of DCWIP to increase retention rates among direct care workers, Dwyer is utilizing funding to provide intensive supportive services to 35 individuals working as CNA and Geriatric Nursing Assistants (GNA). In response to the overwhelming need for reliable childcare, Dwyer has partnered closely with The Y to fill this gap. Dwyer is also providing transportation support to scholars. Finally, the organization is committed to providing on-going support to scholars once they are employed in addition to career laddering opportunities to any graduates who express interest. In 2023, Dwyer trained and placed 26 individuals into employment, all of whom benefited from the supportive services funded through the DCWIP. The grant is slated to end in December of 2023, and it is expected that Dwyer will meet or exceed all of the expected deliverables.

Health Tech Alley

Health Tech Alley (HTA) was awarded funding to train 25 individuals. In addition to occupational training in the five eligible occupations, participants have the opportunity to receive medication technician, Basic Life Support, and CPR certifications. To maximize success and mitigate any barriers participants may face while in training, participants also receive stipends. HTA is using a diverse network of training providers, including Howard Community College, Transformation Healthcare, and NurseLynx to deliver instruction. HTA has trained 12 students, to date. Four have been placed into employment earning an average of nearly \$19 an hour. HTA will continue to recruit, train, and place participants in the months to come.

Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare

The Baltimore Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (BACH) seeks to address unemployment, underemployment, and healthcare workforce shortages in the Baltimore region by identifying healthcare career pathways and connecting residents to skilled jobs. Through DCWIP funding, BACH is providing stipends and supportive services to 48 individuals who are being trained to become CNAs/GNAs. These supports include covering costs for barriers such as childcare, transportation, and uniforms. BACH partners with most of the major hospital systems in Baltimore, including MedStar Mercy, Johns Hopkins, and LifeBridge Health. To date, seven students have been trained. One individual has been placed into employment earning \$16 per hour. BACH will continue to train and place students into 2024.

Adventist Home Assistance

Adventist Home Assistance (AHA) is utilizing DCWIP funding to increase retention rates among their CNAs by providing stipends and supportive services to cover the cost of transportation. AHA reports the stipends have been an excellent mechanism for boosting employee morale. In 2023, Adventist was able to hire 36 CNAs who are making an average of \$20.50 an hour. AHA will continue to use DCWIP funds to support new hires in 2024.

Spring 2023 Competitive Grant Solicitation

Bon Secours Baltimore Community Works, Inc.

Bon Secours Baltimore Community Works, Inc. will train 10 individuals to become CNAs, GNAs, Home Health Aides, or Nursing Assistants. The grant will focus on recruitment, training, and placement of individuals who reside in West Baltimore. Graduates of the program will be placed into employment with partners such as Greater Baltimore Medical Center, Johns Hopkins, and University of Maryland Medical Center, and will receive supportive services for up to one-year post-graduation. Training began in October of 2023.

The Arc Montgomery County, Inc.

As one of the largest employers of Direct Support Professionals (DSP) supporting people with disabilities in Montgomery County and in Maryland, the Arc Montgomery County is using DCWIP funding to identify and evaluate retention strategies in an effort to combat the high turnover rate among their workforce. Over the life of the grant, staff will evaluate multiple pathways and credentialing strategies for the DSP workforce and develop a proposed career advancement/laddering framework coupled with an implementation plan. The grant will incorporate worker voice, as 10 current DSPs will participate in the evaluation and development of the implementation plan.

Future Plans

MD Labor will release the Winter 2023 Competitive Grant Solicitation in January of 2024. Applications will be due in April of 2024 and awards are expected to be made in summer 2024.

Required Data

Pursuant to the enabling statute, below are the metrics for the DCWIP through September 30, 2023.

The number of individuals served by each project or activity assisted by a matching grant under the program.	239
The number of individuals recruited to be employed as direct care workers.	168
The number of participants who completed training.	123
The number of participants to earn an industry-recognized certification or credential.	83
The number of participants placed into unsubsidized employment as a direct care worker.	74
The median earnings of participants who were placed into employment.	\$18.62
The number of participants assisted by direct care workers via the program.	618 ²
The percentage of employer satisfaction of whom hired the direct care workers.	95%

² This is estimated based upon feedback from participants.

Success Stories and Quotes from Participants

Dr. MJ

Before discovering Dr. MJ's Personal Aide Training program, Melody's life was filled with a series of challenges. In addition to bouncing between low-paying jobs that did not offer a family-sustaining wage, Melody had recently experienced personal loss and financial hardships that left her emotionally and financially drained. She wanted to further her education to find a job that would allow her to help others, but financial constraints made pursuing training feel impossible. As a participant in Dr. MJ's training program, Melody successfully completed her Personal Aide training, became certified in CPR, and now serves seniors in their homes, where she is earning \$22 per hour. Melody applies the skills and cultural understanding from her training every day and is making a tangible difference in the lives of people who rely on her care.

Dwyer

Lisa was introduced to Dwyer's program through Baltimore City Community College after she expressed interest in becoming a CNA. Despite her determination, Lisa was experiencing several barriers that made completing training difficult, including a lack of reliable transportation. The Dwyer team helped Lisa access supportive services that allowed her to have reliable transportation to and from training. After Lisa graduated, Dwyer helped her obtain her CNA license and connected her with employment. Lisa is successfully working as a CNA, and Dwyer is supporting her career advancement through continued training.

HTA

Angela has worked for some time as a personal caregiver supporting differently-abled patients. She had the desire to expand upon her skills, provide better care to her patients, and increase her earning potential to better provide for her family. She heard about the Certified Medication Technician training that HTA offered and decided to enroll. Once Angela completed the training and earned her certification, she was able to provide a higher level of care to her patients who needed medication monitoring, which also resulted in an increase in her hourly rate.

BACH

Ann was pregnant and working a minimum-wage job in healthcare when she was accepted and enrolled in BACH's CNA/GNA training course through CCBC. In addition to facing health challenges during her pregnancy, Ann also lacked reliable transportation from her home in Baltimore City to the training site in Baltimore County. Public transit options were very limited, forcing her to rely on expensive rideshare options to attend training. Balancing work, pregnancy, and studies was emotionally and physically taxing. Tragically, during this challenging journey, Ann experienced the heart-wrenching loss of one of her children after delivering twins. It was a devastating blow, but instead of giving up, she found the strength to persevere, "recovering from that one day at a time." Despite these mounting challenges, Ann successfully completed her training and has gained employment in the healthcare field.

Quotes from Employer Partners

As required by the enabling legislation, MD Labor should assess the satisfaction of employers who participate in the program. In 2023, 95% of employers surveyed expressed that they were satisfied with the program. Below is a sampling of qualitative feedback from employer partners.

“As an employer partner who was introduced to Dr. MJ a few years ago through their peer recovery training program, I am exceptionally pleased with the caliber of training provided to the participants in their Personal Aide training program. What sets Dr. MJ apart is their dedication to offering a complete, well-rounded educational experience for future direct care workers. Their curriculum is not only detailed but also culturally responsive. It ensures that each participant is fully equipped to handle the unique challenges they might face in their day-to-day roles. This sets a new standard in patient-centered care and sets our employees far ahead of those trained in more traditional programs. Since we began hiring graduates from Dr. MJ’s program, we have noticed an improvement in the quality of care our employees provide. They are more confident, skilled, and sensitive to the needs of our diverse patient population. We’ve seen a decline in staff turnover, an increase in patient satisfaction, and, importantly, our newly hired staff can quickly adapt to our work environment with minimal additional training, saving both time and resources.

Thank you, Dr. MJ! Five stars!

“During a meeting with Lorien Health, their CEO felt compelled to join the meeting to share his endorsement of the program. He said that, “the Dwyer model is working.” He feels there is “no other partner or program able to provide the same results.” He expressed his appreciation for the collaborative nature of the partnership.

Dwyer

“Working with Health Tech Alley and the Direct Care Workforce Innovation grant allowed NurseLynx to quickly recruit and upskill our developmentally disabled adult care team in Carroll County. The team was easy to work with and cared for my team.

HTA

Conclusion

The healthcare industry continues to experience a significant shortage of direct care workers. Over the last year, the DCWIP has allowed partners to test creative strategies to bolster the retention of this critical segment of the workforce. In 2023, the greatest success of the program has been the usage of supportive services to help workers to remain in their roles. MD Labor looks forward to its continued work related to the implementation of this initiative and sharing the many successes of the DCWIP in future reports.