ABOUT THE PROJECT
The Pioneer Employer Initiative is based on the idea that employers who do good, do well. It is an effort to discover and promote the next generation of best practices in workforce management, with a particular focus on health care and manufacturing. Pioneer Employers are companies that strategically invest in their own lower-wage workers to benefit their customers and/or shareholders. They go beyond typical ideas about “great places to work,” and demonstrate how organizations can deliberately align the interests of employees and management to create better results for companies and their employees.

PIioneer Employer Hospitals: Getting Ahead by Growing Your Own

CASE STUDY:

Northwestern Memorial Hospital

Northwestern Memorial Hospital (NMH) is an academic medical center that aspires to consistently high standards of quality, cost-effectiveness and patient satisfaction. NMH seeks to improve the health of the communities it serves by delivering a broad range of services with sensitivity to the individual needs of patients and their families. As one of the country’s premier academic medical center hospitals, Northwestern Memorial serves as the primary teaching hospital for Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine. The quality of NMH’s services is enhanced through the integration of education and research in an environment that encourages excellence of practice, critical inquiry, and learning. The staff of 6,645 FTEs, representing virtually every specialty, work together to advance the hospital’s mission to put Patients First.

PARTICIPATING HOSPITALS
Advocate Lutheran General Hospital
Park Ridge, Illinois

Bassett Medical Center
Cooperstown, New York

Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center
Boston, Massachusetts

Faxton-St. Luke’s Healthcare
Utica, New York

Good Samaritan Hospital Medical Center
West Islip, New York

Group Health Cooperative
Seattle, Washington

Northwestern Memorial Hospital
Chicago, Illinois

Providence St. Peter Hospital
Olympia, Washington

Thompson Health
Canandaigua, New York

UNC Health Care
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Virginia Mason Medical Center
Seattle, Washington

OUR PARTNERS
How It Began

Northwestern Memorial Hospital (NMH) strives to be the destination of choice for people seeking quality health care and for those who provide, support and advance that care. The hospital’s vision is to transform health care and to be among the nation’s top ten academic medical centers. The plan for realizing this vision is built upon three integrated goals: 1) deliver exceptional care; 2) advance medical science and knowledge; and 3) develop people, culture, and resources. The third goal of developing people, culture, and resources is focused on attracting, developing, and retaining top talent in a culture that values innovation, excellence, and the highest level of scholarship. NMH has a host of programs targeted at each segment of the workforce, ranging from programs for nurses, physicians, allied health professionals, front-line support staff, and students in high school, college, and graduate school. One unique program targeted at the front-line worker is a partnership with The Cara Program.

Northwestern Memorial Hospital was introduced to The Cara Program over 15 years ago. Executive leadership saw this as an opportunity to work with the community but also to bring qualified individuals into the workforce. At the time, the hospital was growing and needed to make sure they were filling open positions with qualified and engaged employees. The skills and training provided by The Cara Program seemed to be a good way of doing this; thus, NMH became an employment partner for The Cara Program.

How It Works

The Cara Program is a job readiness program targeting at-risk individuals affected by homelessness and poverty. The goals of the program are to provide the training, support, and networking necessary to get individuals successfully re-integrated into the workforce. Cara students take classes in professionalism, customer satisfaction, basic computer skills, and interviewing competency. They also receive wrap around
services related to securing stable housing and childcare. In addition to these core offerings, Cara students may also opt to participate in specialized trainings or internships offered by The Cara Program’s training partners. These specialized trainings and internships help students accumulate the specific skills that employer partners need.

Once students demonstrate that they have the skills and professionalism needed to be successful in the workforce, Cara staff find jobs for students with partnering employers such as NMH. These jobs are not just any jobs, but rather quality jobs that represent true stability. Cara staff screen jobs based on guaranteed hours worked, wage, availability of benefits, and permanency of position. Connecting Cara graduates to quality entry-level jobs increases the likelihood that graduates can break the cycle of poverty and homelessness.

Once hired, Cara participants continue to receive support from program staff. This ongoing support involves regular meetings and phone calls to check on how they are doing, communication with the participants’ supervisors regarding performance (troubleshooting problems if they arise) and continued support services related to life and career management (goal development, referrals for housing, childcare, and financial assistance, etc.). The Cara Program even has a matched savings program where employed students who deposit $20 per month into a savings account during their first year of employment will receive a payout of a 5:1 match ($1,200) at the end of that first year. Students are encouraged to use those funds to further their savings goals (e.g., children’s education, stabilized housing).

NMH has hired 114 Cara graduates over the last 15 years. Sixty-six percent of those hired stay on at the hospital for at least one year. Many Cara graduates have advanced in their careers after initial hiring by being promoted, receiving wage increases, and pursuing further education. This advancement is attributable to NMH’s continued focus on people development for incumbent workers. Cara graduates have access to tuition reimbursement (up to $5,250 per year for nursing and allied health professions and $3,000 per year for non-nursing or allied health programs). Several graduates have used these funds to further their education.

worker spotlight

Eddy Ervin entered The Cara Program in 2005. At the time, she had one child and was pregnant with her second child. Eddy decided that her best strategy was to find a job that could support her growing family. A family member told her about The Cara Program, and she enrolled right away. Eddy spent six months completing the standard job training offered by The Cara Program and also completed specialized training in financial services and administrative services. She was even able to intern in the imaging department of a local company.

The Cara Program brokered the interview between Eddy and Northwestern. Initially, Eddy interviewed for a financial representative position, but her scores were so high on the skills testing that they interviewed and subsequently hired her for a receptionist position instead. Over the five years Eddy has been at NMH, she has been promoted three times, each with wage increases attached. Eddy reports that she loves the variety and challenges in her work and feels thankful to work in such a supportive work environment. She plans to stay at Northwestern “forever” continuing to build her career.
Currently Employed Cara Graduates
LENGTH OF SERVICE

The Northwestern Memorial Academy also provides an avenue for further career growth by Cara graduates. The Academy is the centralized education and training hub for the hospital. It offers continuing education, skills workshops (e.g., Excel, PowerPoint) and seminars as well as four accredited certification programs (Diagnostic Medical Sonography, Nuclear Medicine Technology, Radiation Therapy, Radiography). All of the Academy’s services are provided to employees free of charge (including the certification programs). Many Cara graduates have taken advantage of these offerings to build their skills.
Critical Success Factors

NMH’s partnership with Cara has been successful at providing quality, stable jobs with growth potential to at-risk individuals. There are currently 37 active Cara graduates working at NMH. Fifty-four percent of these employees (19) have been at NMH over five years; six Cara graduates (17 percent) have worked at Northwestern for over ten years. Eleven percent of these employees have gone on to enroll in advanced education and 89 percent have received wage increases since initial hire (average wage increase = $5.97/hr).

AVERAGE HOURLY RAISE OF CARA GRADUATES CURRENTLY EMPLOYED AT NMH

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<td>Average starting hourly wage</td>
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<td>Average current hourly wage</td>
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The key factors facilitating these successes are support from senior management and long-term vision. Northwestern hires Cara graduates as positions become available and as The Cara Program has strong candidates. Sometimes this amounts to only a handful of hires in a year. Other times, such as when they were opening the Prentice Women’s Hospital, NMH will hire 15 graduates. It has taken many years to accumulate large numbers of Cara graduates. However, senior leadership understands that the outcomes of The Cara Program are best understood by looking over the long term. Long-term commitment has been key to actualizing the potential of The Program.

**Return on Investment**

In 2007, NMH brought together over 50 current employees who were graduates of The Cara Program for an alumni reception. Service awards were presented at the event to employees who had completed over five years of service including an individual with ten years of service to NMH. This was a memorable event as a support network was started between those newly hired and those who have been with the organization for many years. The event also served as a reminder of the hospital’s commitment to partner with The Cara Program.

The main benefits that Northwestern Memorial sees to partnering with The Cara Program are that it allows the hospital to meet its organizational mission and strategic goals related to attracting and retaining the “best people” and connecting with the Chicago community. Cara students undergo extensive training related to skill development and professionalism. This results in a well-prepared pool of individuals eager for employment. NMH has used The Cara Program as a resource for filling entry-level positions at the hospital with qualified and well-trained workers.

An added benefit of hiring Cara graduates is that providing quality jobs for at-risk community members makes Northwestern Memorial a good steward of the community. NMH prides itself on being an active member of the community. The hospital encourages employees to volunteer and has several programs that address community needs. For example, NMH partners with a local...
“The business case is really simple. This is about how to find qualified and engaged employees to serve our patients. And particularly when you’re growing, as we are, we are committed to serving the citizens of Chicago with the highest quality health care. And we need to find the best and brightest to do that. That’s why we invest so much in training and development, and all these programs.”

DEAN MANHEIMER, SENIOR VICE PRESIDENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES

public school to mentor inner city kids, is involved with the United Way and March of Dimes, and annually conducts a volunteer drive that secures over 600 volunteers to paint Chicago public schools. The Cara partnership represents another facet of NMH’s community outreach and demonstrates its corporate citizenship.

Next Steps

Northwestern will continue to partner with The Cara Program, hiring qualified graduates as positions are available and providing access to tuition assistance and continuing education and career advancement opportunities offered through the NM Academy. As the penetration of Cara graduates into the hospital increases via hiring and continued education and career advancement, the outcomes for the employees and the organization will continue to grow.