



## **Workforce Shortage Drives Innovation**

Lee Health leveraged the FutureMakers Coalition to help solve a critical workforce shortage of certified nursing assistants (CNA) in the region. Lee Health, CareerSource Southwest Florida, Southwest Florida Community Foundation, Cape Coral Technical College and Fort Myers Technical College seized the opportunity to create a career path for residents who were struggling to move up the economic ladder while strengthening the economic development of the region.

## **A Community-Based Solution**

Each organization was doing great work on their own to support students, but the CNA shortage gave them an opportunity to solve a chronic problem by taking a system approach. The collaborative effort was challenging, requiring each partner to change something about how they operated in order to make the partnership work.

### **The Results**

Over 18 months, the collaborative effort resulted in 60 unemployed/underemployed residents earning their CNA credential and a job while beginning to address the community's healthcare talent pipeline needs. Having worked through the procedure changes required for these organizations to work together, they built a model that can be used to address other workforce shortages in healthcare and beyond.

*"All partners were in it for the right reasons."*

**Tessa Lesage**

Director of Social Innovation & Sustainability  
Southwest Florida Community Foundation

## **Taking a Whole Student Approach**

Partners found that some students started certification programs and even completed the coursework, but never got certified because they didn't have enough money to cover final exam costs or drug testing fees. Partners also recognized that low-income students were more apt to have needs beyond tuition costs.

Each partner had funds to contribute, but no partner on their own could cover the entire cost of tuition, books, exam costs, and other fees. The Southwest Florida Community Foundation identified a scholarship fund that had never paid out because the fund had only reached \$16,000 of the required \$25,000 level. So they redeployed the funds.

Starting with CareerSource helped local scholarship dollars go further by attracting other sources of funds and provided support for non-education related barriers like housing insecurity, transportation, and food scarcity.

# Collective Impact at Work

The FutureMakers Coalition was formed to build a community-wide approach to postsecondary access and success. Relationships among key partners made it possible to address a local workforce need while promoting a viable career path for residents in a way that wasn't possible when each organization operated on their own.

## Bringing Opportunity to Areas of Need

The coalition focused their marketing outreach to lower income areas where unemployment was higher and many residents were underemployed, attracting over 60 people to turn out for the information session.

They offered CNA scholarships, and promoted the opportunity to get on a path in the high-demand healthcare field with opportunities for career growth and earning higher levels of education.

## Direct Billing

The partners worked together to directly pay the higher education institutions that offered the required courses to eliminate the chance that funds would be depleted before the credential was earned.

## Soft Skills Needed

When the students completed their program, the Coalition encountered another hurdle. While the students now had the technical skills to do the job for which they were applying, they lacked the soft skills to make it through the interview process.

The Coalition worked with partners to provide career services (e.g. resume writing, filling out applications, interview preparation) so that students were truly "employment ready."



## Combating Stigmas

Some certificate programs, particularly in construction and healthcare fields, are in high demand and can move people into a job that earns a competitive wage, which helps residents become employable sooner while building stackable credentials. Communities can work together to better promote these opportunities.

## Embracing Adaptability

While it took effort to change business as usual, all partners agreed the effort in changing some of each organization's process was worth it.

Leveraging the relationships built through the FutureMakers Coalition, the partners recognized that by working together they could help more people move out of poverty and close the gap on Lee Health's workforce shortage.

## Want to Learn More?

You can find more resources about how communities across Florida are increasing postsecondary attainment at [www.FloridaCollegeAccess.org](http://www.FloridaCollegeAccess.org)

If you'd like to learn more about the CNA program and the collaborative work of the FutureMakers Coalition, contact:

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Or go to: [www.FutureMakersCoalition.com](http://www.FutureMakersCoalition.com)