



## SPCLC members pilot new means to help students meet goals

Adult learners pursue targeted certification for healthcare careers through cross-sector collaboration

### Program helps students prepare for entry-level healthcare jobs

Developing **stackable career track programs** to help adult learners more rapidly obtain post-secondary credentials leading to living wage jobs is an ABE priority. ABE consortias, workforce centers, and community colleges around Minnesota are collaboratively creating **'blended instruction'** programs enabling ABE students to master basic and job-specific skills at the same time.

SPCLC began working last fall with the Ramsey County Workforce Investment Board (RCWIB), St. Paul Workforce Center, St. Paul College, and healthcare employers to develop a program helping low-skilled, low-wage adults obtain certification as Medical Coders and

Billers. **This high demand entry-level occupation was chosen based on data predicting a dramatic shortage in healthcare workers.**

Medical Coders and Billers work in various settings including clinics, hospitals, and insurance companies.



The instructional program has several main components:

- ◆ **The core Medical Billing and Coding class** meets two days per week for two hours, with one hour each day co-taught by the ABE and St. Paul College instructors.
- ◆ An additional two hours daily, taught by the ABE instructor only, **builds computer skills and reinforces work covered in the core class.**
- ◆ Once students successfully complete the course, they will immediately take the American Academy of Professional Coders Medical Coding Certification exam. **Passage of this test provides the crucial credential for employment.**

The first 17 participants were referred from workforce partners, community based organizations, employers, and Saint Paul College. This has led to varied backgrounds among students. "It has proven to be a challenge getting everyone on firm ground for the actual billing and coding portion to begin," said Dave Manthey, Continuing Education Director at St Paul College. "There is much material to be covered in the course and a lot of it involves code memorization. Many of our traditional students struggle with that, and the homework involved."

**Despite barriers and challenges, all 17 students passed the required Medical Terminology exam in December.**

"Computer proficiency is an essential outcome of the course," said ABE teacher Nancy Bjorn Nordeen. "For some learners, this simply means updating their knowledge of word processing software, and perhaps mastering spreadsheets and presentation software. For others, a lack of foundational computer literacy skills

has been a barrier to achieving the most basic computer skills outcomes.”

Students whose skills are not yet at the level needed to successfully complete the eight-month class participate in an ABE preparatory course to master needed foundational skills in areas such as Business Writing and Applied Math.

**Many adult learners face critical and unpredictable problems in areas including child care and transportation.** “Studies and experience in the field have demonstrated the crucial role of wrap-around services in supporting the success of low-skilled adult learners,” said RCWIB Executive Director Mary Jo Gardner. A strong case management model, with ongoing communication between instructional staff, job counselors, and other relevant professionals, helps insure that student needs are met quickly. Further development of the Learner Web software will provide an online tool to exchange relevant information about students among partners and insure that wrap-around services are effectively coordinated.

The program is funded by FastTRAC and Department of Employment and Economic Development grants, as well as training funds from various sources.

### **Strategies for Success help ABE learners improve outcomes**

**Many ABE sites struggle to effectively serve intermediate level students** – those who do not need ESL instruction, but lack the needed skills to begin working on their GEDs. The Hubbs Center, a member of SPCLC, has created a **Strategies for Success** program that has proven highly effective in helping these learners be successful.

“We didn’t think we were serving our intermediate learners the way we should, in terms of encountering attendance, behavior, and other problems,” said ABE assistant supervisor Kristine Halling. “We decided to pilot **Strategies for Success**,” a two-week introductory class required for all intermediate learners. **The class teaches students “how to be adult learners,” including conflict management, study, and planning skills.**

Kristine explained the class, designed by staff, helps students think through why they are attending ABE classes in terms of the goals they hope to achieve.

They learn how to deal with barriers through creative planning and problem-solving. They master conflict resolution skills, which can help resolve tensions that can arise between different cultural groups. A series of student-produced videos, available at <http://hubbs.spps.org/> under *Watch Videos*, reinforces class content.

In order to enroll in regular classes, students must first successfully master the needed skills. This is verified through group self-evaluation. They then phase into regular classes, beginning with Reading and Writing activities. Based on regular attendance and engagement, they then enroll in pre-GED or GED preparation classes.

**“We have seen NRS goal achievement more than double, compared to the previous year,”** noted Kristine. There have also been dramatic improvements in terms of attendance, and greatly diminished behavior problems. The program **builds strong cohorts** among participants, so that students take the lead in holding one another accountable. “When we did student focus groups, students were clear that they did not like chaos,” and responded well to reasonable and clear expectations, she added.

Due to the success of the pilot program, Hubbs implemented managed enrollment for all learners in January 2010. Most new learners will only be able to start once each month. All levels will not be in **Strategies for Success**

classes, but all will be expected to attend and participate in their classes regularly. Hubbs is developing a set of written expectations for teachers, so they can utilize the new system components effectively.



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