

Meeting the Need for More Caregivers

GateWay Community College / Arizona

Barry Blevins was semi-retired with two careers already under his belt—first as an expert in workplace health and safety practices and more recently as a clinical counselor. Looking for something new, Blevins came across a leaflet at an AARP job fair describing GateWay Community College’s Careers of Compassion program for boomers like himself, and signed up. Just plain bored with her cashier’s job and part-time work as a hospital tour guide, Shirley Walker signed up, too.

Walker and Blevins are among the Phoenix area’s 900,000 boomers who are, oddly enough, both raising the need for caregivers in Maricopa County and providing the human capital to fill it. Both launched new careers after attending GateWay Community College’s program.

GateWay’s Caregiver Career Development and Placement Program, along with the Workforce Transit Center and local health care employers, gave Walker, Blevins and 42 others the basic training that is a steppingstone to numerous health care jobs in need of people to do them—from nurses to respiratory therapists, radiation technicians to caregivers.

Each student received a career-prospects assessment, developed a career plan and attended an orientation session before the 40-hour training course. Meeting eight hours a day for five days on the GateWay campus and at a local hospital, the sessions covered such topics as ethical and legal issues, grief and end-of-life care, time management, observing and documenting infection control, fire safety and emergencies, serving people with developmental disabilities, responding to dementia-related behavior, and socialization and support for families of patients with Alzheimer’s disease.



Caregiver program instructor Susan Kilby (in flowered blouse) shows students Maggie Fernandez (white sweater) and Shirley Walker how to safely work with elderly patients, as part of their course requirements.

Photos by Bruce Peterson

at a glance

Location

GateWay Community College,
Phoenix, Arizona

Mission

To prepare boomers for health care careers with self-knowledge, knowledge of the field, and networking opportunities with employers.

Curriculum

Each boomer enrolled assesses his/her interests, develops a career plan and attends a 40-hour

training, which covers caregiving fundamentals, aging and physical disabilities, development disabilities and dementia and Alzheimer's disease. Upon completion, students attend workshops and lunch-and-learn sessions with potential employers to network and find jobs.

Number of students

44 boomers completed caregiver classes and 42 were placed in paid health care positions, most in caregiving.

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"I took the caregiver course and noticed a need that sent me on an unexpected course," says Blevins. As a former employee of the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), Blevins understands that caregivers need training in safety procedures to protect them from injury and protect their employers from high turnover and vacancy rates. For Blevins, his new career offers a chance to combine years of expertise in safety and patient care.

"I had expertise in safety issues like ergonomics and safe patient lifting," he explains. "I saw too many trained caregivers and RNs being driven to administrative jobs because of injury." As a result of the GateWay program, Blevins became certified in OSHA training and now teaches seven GateWay classes on workplace safety for caregivers. "By helping employees and employers do things the right way," he says, "it helps the consumer."

Nearly 40 employers are active on the program's advisory board and as many posted caregiver positions with GateWay's Center for Workforce Transition.

"Involve the employer community immediately," advises Jan Davie, GateWay's director of Career and Employment Services. "Allow employers to participate in all aspects of the career pathway—curriculum development, instruction, internships, and sustainability."

Davie says another key to launching a new program for boomers is to involve many college departments in supporting and developing the program. "Successfully targeting a new market niche needs everyone's shoulder to the wheel."

Thanks to the tight relationships with local employers and the tremendous shortage of health workers, the GateWay program matched 42 of its first 44 graduates with employer partners, who provide opportunities for further skills development in paid health care positions, most in caregiving.

Walker doubled her salary with a new job at the Foundation for Senior Living and is taking classes in GateWay's Respiratory Therapist program.

Blevins says he feels that he is making a real contribution to his community. "I want to make sure I have the best possible care when it's my turn," Blevins says. "I want to be part of training those providing a high standard of care." ■

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