

BC3's free certificate program to provide training for entry-level health care jobs

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(Butler, PA) Butler County Community College's free basic health care employment skills certificate program will train participants for entry-level positions to meet a demand for qualified applicants in the largest industry in five area counties, according to regional workforce agency administrators.

BC3's four separate 82-hour programs in Butler, Lawrence and Mercer counties will educate participants about health-related issues, and provide an opportunity to earn certifications and gain an edge for entry-level positions, according to Kelly McKissick, BC3's coordinator of professional education and certificate programs.

The programs are free to qualified participants as a result of a \$252,000 state Department of Labor & Industry Strategic Innovation Grant awarded in April to the Tri-County Workforce Investment Board, Butler, and shared with the West Central Job Partnership, Sharon.

"The health care industry is desperately looking for employees at all levels of employment," said Mary Salony, assistant director of the Tri-County Workforce Investment Board, which serves Armstrong, Butler and Indiana counties. "This program is addressing the beginning of the career pathway."

Employers have told administrators at West Central Job Partnership, which serves Lawrence and Mercer counties, that they have difficulty finding skilled workers, according to Rebecca Moder, the agency's operations and special projects division coordinator.

"Many of the people they do find," Moder said, "do not have the requisite skills to enter or succeed in the industry."

Job shadowing to provide "real-world view"

Prior to the first class in any of the four scheduled programs, participants must pass a drug screen and background check, which are funded by the grant. They must also attend a two-hour orientation about Blackboard, an online educational software program used for instruction, and complete an online health care interest and compatibility screening.

Students at orientation will also receive contact information to schedule and attend a mandatory four hours of job shadowing in a hospital and four hours in a long-term care facility that must be completed before the first class.

“Participants will find out the main purpose of the company where they are job shadowing, the work and responsibilities, and the salary range,” Moder said. “Job shadowing will give them a real-world view of that occupation or that specific employer before they pursue further education or employment.”

Orientations for all sites will be held from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m., McKissick said, adding that the first will be Nov. 27 for the program on BC3’s main campus in Butler Township. The second orientation will be Jan. 8 at a site to be determined for the Lawrence County program; the third, March 19, at BC3 @ LindenPointe in Hermitage; and the fourth, April 30, at a site to be determined for the program to be held in Lawrence County or Mercer County, according to Moder.

The monthlong programs will feature 42 hours of classroom instruction from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Tuesdays and Thursdays, 24 hours of online instruction, six hours of lab, and employability training that addresses customer service, interviewing and resume-building, McKissick said.

“It is a well-rounded package”

The first program, to be held in the Science and Technology building on BC3’s main campus, is scheduled from Jan. 3 through Jan. 29. Students will complete 16 hours of only online studies the week of Jan. 7-11.

The second program, in Lawrence County, will be held from Feb. 12 to March 12; the third, at BC3 @ LindenPointe, from April 23 to May 21; and the fourth, in Lawrence County or Mercer County, according to Moder, from June 4 to July 2.

Participants in BC3’s program will learn about basic medical terminology, basic medical law and ethics, dementia, mental illness, lifting and moving techniques, vital signs, medication, first aid, cardio-pulmonary resuscitation, automated external defibrillators, diversity and family-focused care, McKissick said.

“It is a well-rounded package,” McKissick said.

And one that health care employers helped to design, Moder said.

“They said they would look more favorably upon graduates of this program who have some of these basic skills, and a familiarity with the industry, when it comes to employment,” Moder said.

Added Salony: “There will be a confidence level with employers that (the program’s certificate holders) will want to be in health care and stay in health care.”

“An important industry”

Students will also have the opportunity to earn certifications in CPR, AED, first aid, Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act compliance and have “a leg up with their resume to get into an entry-level position,” McKissick said.

“This program could appeal to recent graduates, those who may be unemployed who are looking to gain new skills, or who are underemployed and want to enhance skills if they are interested in the health care path,” McKissick said.

Entry-level positions could include direct care staff, caregivers and home-health aides for a health care industry that as of October employed 37,447 workers in Armstrong, Butler, Indiana, Lawrence and Mercer counties, according to the state Department of Labor & Industry’s Center for Workforce Information and Analysis.

The health care and social assistance industry also employed the highest percentage of workers in those counties as of October, representing 21.1 percent of the workforce in both Lawrence County and Mercer County, 20.3 percent in Armstrong County, 16 percent in Butler County and 15.9 percent in Indiana County, according to the state agency.

The number of health care and social assistance companies in Armstrong, Butler, Indiana, Lawrence and Mercer counties as of October also exceeded that of any other type of industry, according to North American Industry Classification System data compiled by the state Department of Labor and Industry’s Center for Workforce Information and Analysis.

Butler County had 659 health care and social assistance companies; Mercer had 541, Lawrence 345, Indiana 325 and Armstrong 302.

“Health care is an important industry that people often overlook in the economy,” Salony said. “Most people consider health care as a social service or a nonprofit, but many of the health care companies are certainly run as businesses and many of them are private, for-profit companies now.”

A fifth basic health care employment skills certificate program will be held at BC3 at a date to be determined, said McKissick, adding that enrollment in each class will be capped at 12.

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