

Penn State Abington and District 1199C Training Fund Offering New Addiction Counselor Apprenticeship

In the face of the opioid crisis in Philadelphia, city healthcare organizations are looking for ways to better equip their employees on the frontlines helping those in need. Philadelphia Mental Health Care Corporation (PMHCC), in conversation with Penn State Abington Professor Dr. Kathy Fadigan, proposed an Addiction Counselor Apprenticeship to the District 1199C Training Fund. Dr. Fadigan said, "I firmly believe that as a state university, Penn State Abington should do its part in helping to solve the opioid crisis, and one way for us to be involved is to assist in training the next generation of addiction counselors. "

The new Addiction Counselor Apprenticeship was approved on March 14 by the Pennsylvania Apprenticeship and Training Council. The PMHCC and Jewish Employment Vocational Services (JEVS), although not affiliated with the 1199C union, have signed on to have 11 of their personnel receive this extra training and support. They are joined by six union employees from Temple University Health System Episcopal Hospital. The training is a pathway to certification for all.

The Training Fund has been running apprenticeship opportunities since 2014. The organization currently educates over 100 apprentices in programs such as: Advanced Home Health Aide/ Nurse Aide Pathway; Behavioral Health/ Direct Support Professional; Community Health Worker; Early Childhood Education; and Medical Assistant. The goals of these programs are: to enhance workers' skills, increase staff retention, and improve patient/ client care. Executive Director of the District 1199C Training Fund Cheryl Feldman sees these opportunities as a "win-win on three levels for: employees, employers, and the City of Philadelphia."

The apprenticeships use an "earn and learn" model. Participants are currently working in the field, and through an agreement signed by their employer, see wage increases as they progress through the apprenticeship that match their increasing competency on the job. And since employees are learning as they work, they are able to contribute their perspective in class and apply their newly acquired knowledge on the job. Essentially, there is a constant transfer between the classroom and the workplace.

Addiction Counselor Apprentices receive 300 hours of instruction delivered on-site at the Training Fund facility by Penn State Abington. The curriculum is aligned with competencies set forth by the Pennsylvania Certification Board for certification. As part the program, apprentices are also required to meet weekly with a mentor at their worksite. Cheryl Feldman calls this a "seamless connection between instruction and on-the-job training."

Feldman appreciates the Penn State Abington's partnership in this effort. She hopes to add another direct support professional apprenticeship to the Training Fund repertoire that could serve as a pathway to more Addiction Counselor apprenticeships. "It is always wonderful," she said, "when a workforce apprenticeship model is paired with a social need."

To participate in an apprenticeship program, employers can contact Cheryl Feldman at cfeldman@1199training.org. Interested employees can also contact Cheryl and she can connect with your employers.

About the 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund

The 1199C Training & Upgrading Fund is a labor management partnership of District 1199C of the National of Union of Hospital and Healthcare Employees (NUHHCE) and over 50 healthcare facilities and agencies in the Delaware Valley. The Training Fund works with colleges to offer training to over 4,000 students annually and also provides tuition assistance and scholarships to support their education.

About Penn State Abington Continuing Education

Penn State Abington Continuing Education offers customized training programs delivered on-site to business and industry across southeast Pennsylvania. Programs offer credentials for business and IT managers, accountants, attorneys, engineers, educators, and healthcare and human services workers, and provide pathways to high priority occupations.