

SYNERGY

a monthly newsletter for Trinity Health associates

With “School at Work” All is Possible

Time was passing. Sarah Skeeter knew it, but as a single mother with two children and a busy job, time was not on her side. A Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) at Sanctuary at St. Paul’s (South Bend), Skeeter hoped that “some day” she would be able to go back to school to create a better life for herself and her children.

But “some day” doesn’t exist on the calendar, and it often takes a significant spark to nudge a person to action. For Skeeter and nine other associates at the South Bend facilities of Trinity Senior Living Communities (TSLC), that spark came in the form of the School at Work program.

School at Work is a novel effort launched in 2008. It provides entry-level health care workers with the skills they need to boost their careers and confidence through 12 courses taken over six months. During the program, students learn about different health care careers, arrange for job-shadowing opportunities, prepare resumes, and create career learning plans. School at Work helps prepare the students to be considered for advanced job opportunities throughout the Unified Enterprise Ministry® (UEM®) and/or entrance into a local college.

Having dropped out of high school when her daughter was born, Skeeter applied to participate in School at Work, though she worried it would be difficult to handle with her already-full life. In the end, she surprised herself. Even with the challenges of being away from school for a decade — not to mention the math course — “I did fairly well!” she noted proudly.

Venturing Beyond Acute Care

This class of 10 marks the first time that School at Work has been offered beyond the hospital setting.

“Our front-line care associates are more often CNAs than RNs or LPNs,” said Sam Albanese, who is Vice President, Organization and Talent Effectiveness for TSLC, which operates 32 long-term care and senior housing communities across the UEM. “Because they are entry-level, many of our associates struggle to make ends meet and have limited resources that keep them from improving their career prospects.”



Valedictorian Joyce Nkosi, CNA, hugs a resident of Sanctuary at Holy Cross during the School at Work graduation celebration.

Eighteen associates took an assessment test to qualify for the 10 slots in the program.

“We knew the test was merely a guideline for selection and not the sole determining factor,” said Tracy Miller, administrator at TSLC’s Sanctuary at Trinity Tower, who served as the program’s instructor. “We also looked at their interviews when they applied for the program and their job performance.”

Joyce Nkosi, a CNA at TSLC’s Sanctuary at Holy Cross, earned one of the coveted spots and, by the end of the term, was named valedictorian. In her address to the graduating class, she said, “School at Work provided me with so many experiences and opportunities, and helped my self-esteem. It has contributed to my growth as a student, person and an individual. I have become aware of issues, realities and perspectives that I hardly ever gave a second thought.”

Nkosi praised the program for helping all the students discover and challenge their abilities, interests and identities.

“It gave us the tools we need for a better future and, for some, provided a new beginning,” she said. “What we received in return was more than we ever could have imagined.”

Skeeter agreed. Her next goal is to achieve certification as a Qualified Medical Assistant, which can prepare the way for her to become a nurse.

“School at Work made me realize it’s possible,” she said. “It showed me I can do it.”