

Apprenticeship in Non-Traditional Occupations: A Case Study of the Hostos CEWD Community Health Worker (CHW) Registered Apprenticeship Program

Executive Summary

Apprenticeships continue to grow in popularity, as seen in New York State's 2019-2020 investments to increase the number of apprenticeship programs available in non-traditional apprenticeship fields like healthcare and information technology (IT).¹ This popularity is due to the benefits apprenticeships can offer to the employee, employer, and industry. Apprenticeships provide industries the opportunity to develop a pipeline of workers with the skills employers' value through real on-the-job experience (OJT). OJT programs increase worker retention and attendance, which leads to cost savings for employers and opportunities for advancement for workers.²

Continuing Education and Workforce Development (CEWD) at Hostos Community College, operates two New York State Department of Labor (NYSDOL) registered apprenticeship programs out of its campus in the Bronx, New York: Community Health Workers (CHW) and Computer Support Technicians. The apprenticeship programs at Hostos have proven to increase our effectiveness in engaging employers in meaningful partnerships that benefit them and their workers. Through the apprenticeship, administrative partners like Hostos work with employers to develop a training curriculum based on the core competencies that employers believe are of most value for them. Apprentices are trained to meet these competencies through classroom instruction at an educational institution and OJT at the employer partners' sites. Employers agree to compensate apprentices with higher wages or promotions when they meet these competencies. This structure enables the program to meet the needs of both entry-level workers and employers who are seeking skilled candidates for an increasingly competitive market. Funding for Hostos apprenticeship programs is a collaborative effort of direct and in-kind contributions from Capital One Foundation, Montefiore Hudson Valley Collaborative, and Hostos³

This case study reflects findings from a facilitated discussion conducted by Public Works Partners to identify the early successes and challenges of Hostos' CHW apprenticeship program before launching the program. Insights shared were compiled through a series of interviews with employer partners and Hostos program and administrative staff, as well as feedback gathered from program participants through an online survey. Findings are also included from the implementation of several apprenticeship cohorts. Hostos is actively designing, operating, and learning from these programs in real-time; in some cases, findings reflect ongoing shifts in the program structure.

¹ Sharp & Dvorkin, "The Promise of Apprenticeships in New York", Center for an Urban Future, 2018

² "Registered Apprenticeships" and "Empire State Apprenticeship Tax Credit (ESATC)," New York State Department of Labor. For a more detailed description of apprenticeship models, see <https://www.apprenticeship.gov/resource-hub>. The CHW Apprenticeship is a hybrid model which includes competency and time-based assessment and the Computer Support Technician Apprenticeship is a competency model where students can test out once they pass an industry exam.

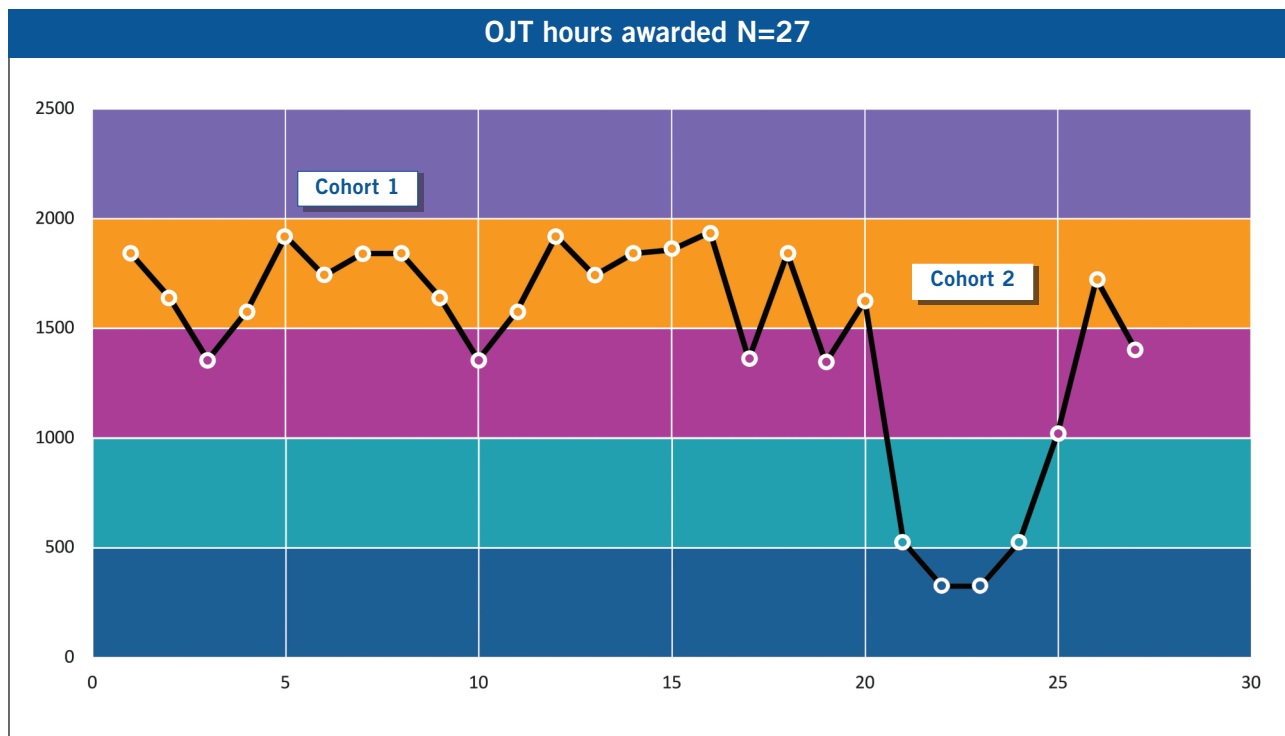
³ Capital One Foundation funds program tuition for CHW apprentices, while Montefiore Hudson Valley Collaborative covers the cost of books and supplies needed by apprentices for the related instruction. Hostos is the sponsor and the Executive Director of Workforce Development in the Division of Continuing Education and Workforce Development is an in-kind to the project.

⁴ A preliminary evaluation of the IT apprenticeship program will be completed at a later date.

Background

Hostos' CHW apprenticeship program has successfully engaged employers and apprentices since July 2018. The program staff worked closely with the Montefiore Hudson Valley Collaborative to design the curriculum and to identify employer partners. The first cohort of nine apprentices was employed by Access Supports for Living and the Human Development Services of Westchester, two community health service providers in the Hudson Valley community. The apprentices – all incumbent workers – were assessed based on their competencies and awarded varying levels of OJT hours at the start of the program (See chart on OJT hours awarded). They then worked to complete their 2,000 hours of OJT or the balance after being awarded credit for some hours. To complement the OJT hours, apprentices are required to complete 144 hours of classroom-related instruction during work hours.

The CHW instruction, which focuses on specific patient population needs and social determinants of health, was developed with employer input to include competencies needed for the job. Upon completion, apprentices will have developed core competencies including advocacy, communication, and interpersonal skills, planning and organizational skills, cultural competency and health literacy, and outreach methods and strategies. Apprentices who complete the program receive a certificate of completion and can apply up to nine credits earned in the program toward an associate degree at Hostos or the State University of New York's Orange Community College (SUNY Orange).



Key Findings

PROGRAM STRENGTHS

CURRICULUM:

The apprenticeship program has an effective curriculum that leverages the employer perspective to teach the competencies employers want.

The quality of the Hostos CHW apprenticeship program curriculum was affirmed by both employers and apprentices alike. Both agreed that the distance learning course is teaching the right skills. The focus on addressing worker competencies through the program has helped to establish employer buy-in, as it has assured them that the program is specifically designed to meet their staffing needs.

Employers indicated that they felt heard in the curriculum design process and cited improvements in the on-the-job performance of their apprentices. Apprentices also overwhelmingly felt positive about the program curriculum, with seven out of eight apprentices saying that the program has either been very helpful or helpful to their progress as professionals. One apprentice noted, “[This program is] Very informational; [it] allows Care Managers to be more informed about health disparities and its effect on the individuals they serve.”

A core strength of the curriculum is that it is provided entirely online via Zoom (this was pre-pandemic, thus distance learning was optimal). Though stakeholders cited initial technology and scheduling challenges regarding the related instruction, the ability of apprentices to access the course materials and lectures remotely received high praise, as apprentices, most of who are direct service providers, often must travel for work. Additionally, one employer proved their commitment to the program by providing their apprentices with tablets and a space to complete the related instruction.

In Fall 2020, the Community Health Worker certificate curriculum was updated through consultation with a Hostos faculty member who also has experience as a health practitioner in the field of public health. Teaching virtually, she provides students with the same classroom experience that matriculated students in her 200 level courses at Hostos receive. This will better prepare apprentices who wish to continue with their instruction and pursue an associate’s degree in the discipline.

Things to Think About

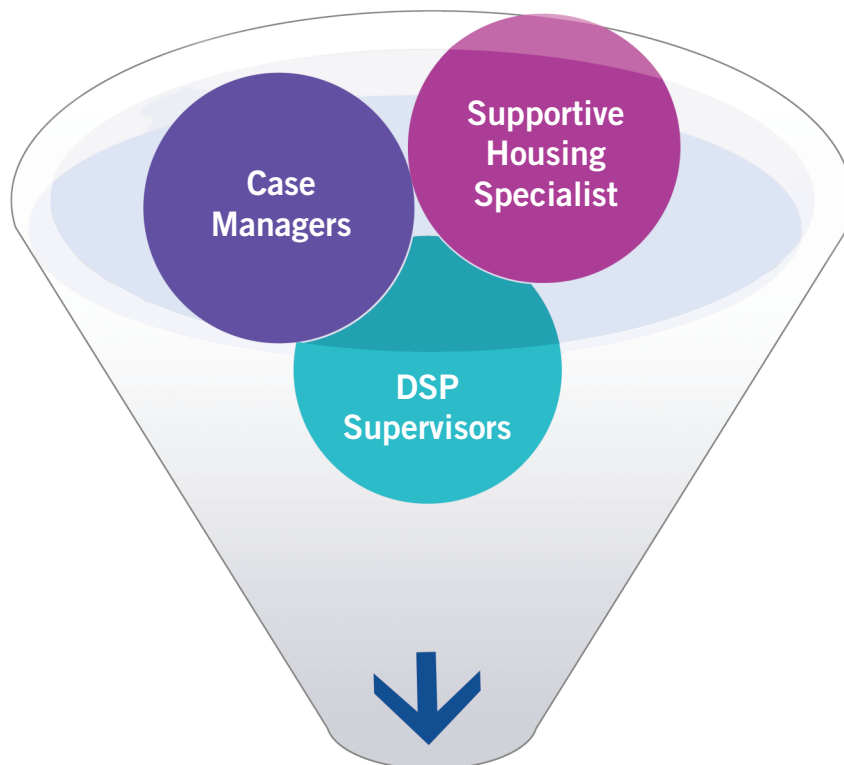
The following are the key conditions for a successful apprenticeship program based on lessons learned from the Hostos model.

- Committed employer partners that are excited about providing professional development opportunities, have a need for new employees, and have the capacity to provide mentorships and support to apprentices
- Apprentices who are passionate and genuinely interested in the industry and the capacity to take on classroom work while fulfilling personal responsibilities
- A coordinating organization that has staff with connections to employers in the industry, knowledge of the state requirements for apprenticeships, and the capacity to spread awareness of apprenticeships in non-traditional roles
- Strong, flexible curriculum that meets the needs of employers, while maintaining the rigor for college
- Ongoing support at each stage of the program for employers, mentors, and apprentices

EMPLOYER ENGAGEMENT:

The healthcare apprenticeship program attracted employers by developing a flexible approach that is responsive to industry needs.

While this apprenticeship was originally intended to be for new employees, employer feedback led the program to be geared towards incumbent workers working as Direct Service Professionals (DSP). By shifting the target population, Hostos and Montefiore were able to attract previously hesitant employers to become part of the apprenticeship program, creating an opportunity to prove the value of an apprenticeship in the healthcare field. For employers, the incumbent worker strategy helped control for the potential risks in job readiness and attrition that could emerge with newer employees. Employers also believed that it is more effective to target incumbent workers because they would be familiar with the human resource and operational processes at the employer site. This would require less investment in updating onboarding processes for new employees who would also enter the apprenticeship program. One employer mentioned that, beyond the additional operational cost that a program targeted at new employees would create, the stagnant recruiting timeline for the program would have been harder for employers to adhere to while recruiting new hires.



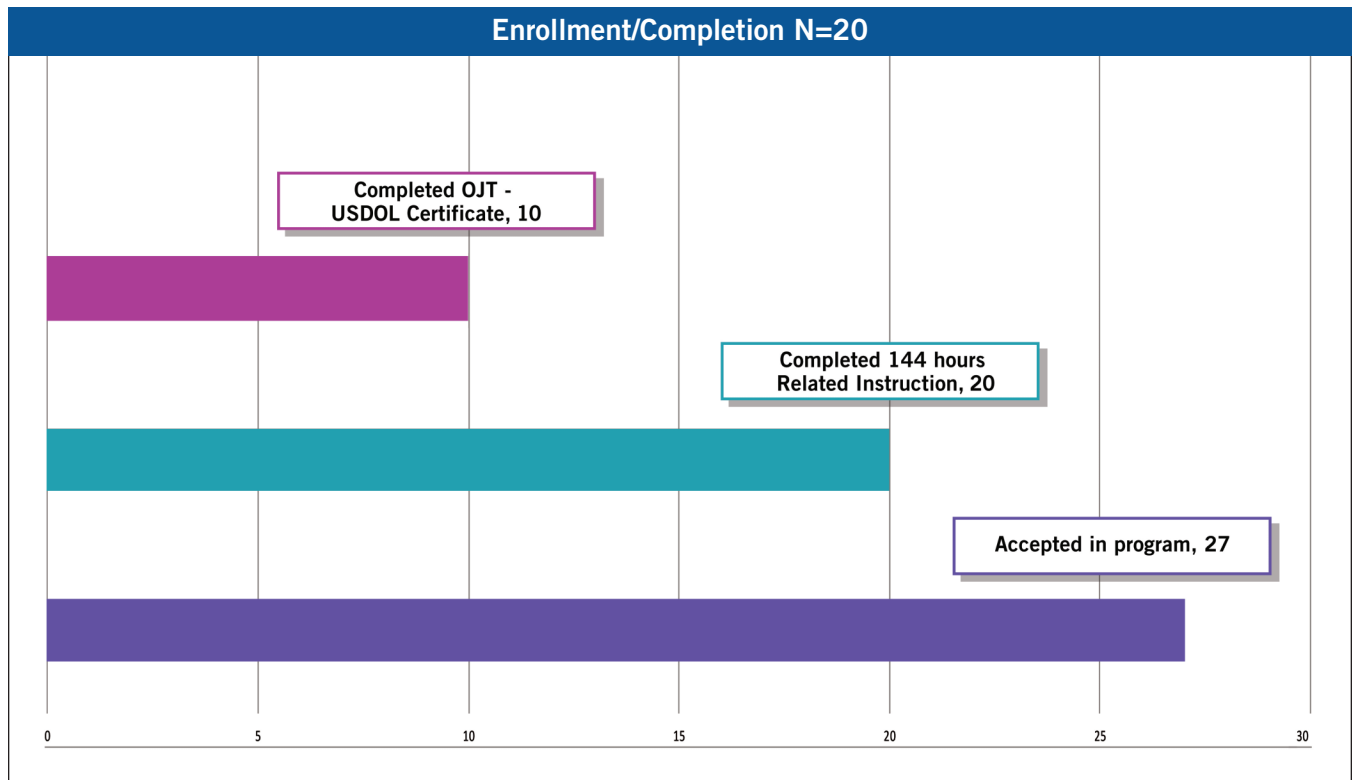
Community Health Worker

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT:

Healthcare employers are using the apprenticeship as a professional development tool for incumbent workers.

Employers were drawn to the apprenticeship because they see it as an excellent professional development opportunity that they could easily offer incumbent, entry-level staff. They hoped participation in the program would help workers build new skills and earn college credit while simultaneously improving worker retention. As Kelly Darrow, the Chief Programming Officer at Human Development Services of Westchester framed it, the apprenticeship is essentially “free in-depth training.”

Over time, the results of the program became evident. Four of the six survey participants indicated that they have either begun a new role at their employer or will begin a new role after completing all components of the apprenticeship program including related instruction and OJT hours.



Personal challenges and job-related demands inhibit apprentices' success within the program.





Stakeholder interviews point to the need to better support apprentices to attend related instruction consistently. Given that most apprentices worked as DSPs shifting work schedules and the need to travel and/or cover for other staff who call out can make it challenging for apprentices to attend class, particularly as they are also juggling personal demands. These issues posed real risks for the program; five out of the six apprentices who completed the survey indicated their biggest challenge was managing competing personal and work priorities along with the additional time commitment of the related instruction. Of the two former apprentices who exited the program, one left due to personal challenges and the other left for a new job.

One approach to improve attendance would be to offer related instruction on weekends or evenings, though this may not be an effective solution due to the variability of the apprentices' work hours.

In the future, Hostos will explore ways to better engage with the employers to:

- a) identify adjustments to scheduling that will ensure apprentices are free during class time and have the necessary support services to help them manage the additional work/course load, and
- b) emphasize that classroom time is considered work and apprentices are responsible for telling their supervisor and/or human resources departments if they were not able to attend.

By introducing this new program component, Hostos hopes to provide a tangible project through which apprentice and mentorship relationships can be deepened.

Two Year Timeline			
1. Apprentice Selection	2. Classroom Training	3. On The Job Training (OJT)	4. Completion of Program
			
<p>Employer selects full-time employee(s) for the apprenticeship program.</p>	<p>Apprentice receives 144 hours of classroom instruction.</p> <p>Classes are remotely hosted (online) with periodic in-person check-in events.</p>	<p>Apprentice works 2,000 hours of OJT, or the balance after being awarded credit for some hours, concurrently with classroom instruction.</p> <p>OJT is determined by the employer (job description).</p> <p>Hostos supports employer to evaluate apprentice performance and determine if additional steps are needed.</p>	<p>After one year in the program, apprentices receive a salary increase (to be determined by the employer).</p> <p>Hostos files with the DOL for apprentices who complete 144 didactic and OJT. Apprentices will obtain apprenticeship certificate of completion from NYS DOL.</p>

PROGRAM CHALLENGES

Many employers do not see the value in hosting apprentices.



Even with the support of Montefiore, only two employers volunteered to participate in the first iteration of the CHW apprenticeship. Only one additional employer joined with the second cohort. Employers who find it easy to recruit new employees or are not concerned with growing the skills of their workforce may not immediately see the value in apprenticeship program. For example, one employer mentioned that their organization already gets a high number of applicants to the relevant position and, as a result, did not see the need for additional hiring incentives, such as the

apprenticeship, to entice recruits. Many employers also fear that apprenticeships will be restrictive or require them to pay the wages of workers who may not contribute to their company long term. As noted above, Hostos assuaged these fears by shifting recruitment for apprentices to incumbent workers.

Inhibitors to the apprentices' success.

Five of the six apprentices who completed the survey mentioned feeling that their biggest challenge in the program is making time for the related instruction, due to either personal constraints or job-related demands. A similar sentiment was communicated by the CHW instructor, who identified inconsistent attendance from apprentices as a major risk to the participants' success in the instruction, and to the impact of the program itself. These challenges point to the need for the program to provide apprentices with support such as a connection with a more senior employee to help apprentices address or escalate these challenges as they emerge. As the program was originally designed, apprentice support and advocacy would have been led by assigned mentors at the employer who would assist the fellow in navigating job and instruction/apprenticeship-related demands. However, this role has not always been successfully executed; some employers have failed to understand what the mentor role entails. Distance between the employers and Hostos, as well as the nascent nature of the apprenticeship program, have further exacerbated this challenge as Hostos has not been able to give as much guidance or support to mentors as they would have wanted.

To increase mentor/supervisor engagement, Hostos added a project-based activity to the program model. This strategy aimed to improve the quality of engagements between mentors and apprentices. This activity proved to be mutually beneficial to apprentices and employers; when implemented with the second cohort, apprentices designed projects in conjunction with their employer and the program to address a specific need of the communities serviced by the employer. Recorded presentations of these projects are available for viewing on the Hostos CEWD website. By introducing the project-based component, Hostos hoped to provide a tangible project through which apprentice and mentorship relationships can be deepened and helped bridge the gap between theory and practice.

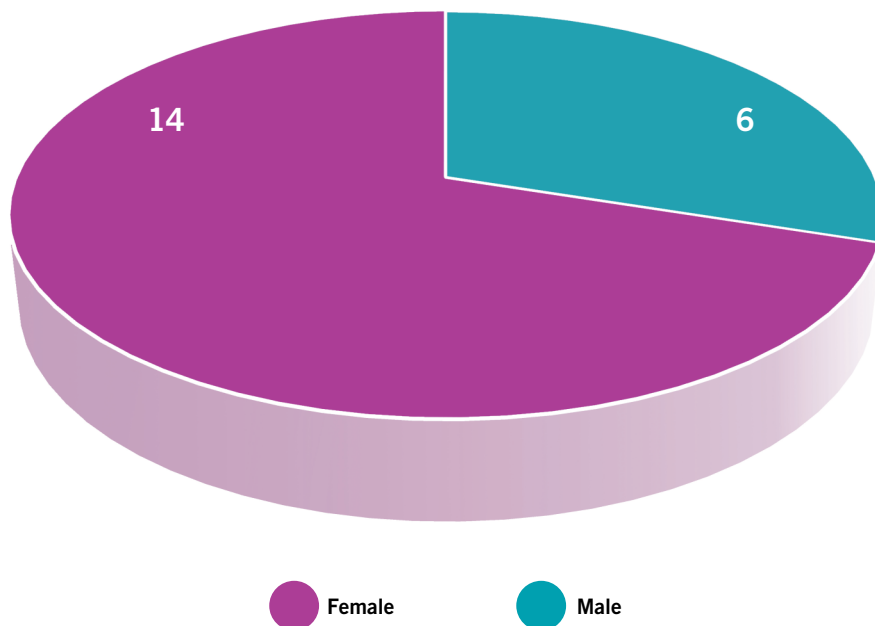
Conclusion



Hostos CEWD created NYSDOL registered apprenticeships in non-traditional fields like healthcare (Community Health Worker) and information technology (Computer Support Technician). Over time, we continue to learn and build the model with apprentices, faculty and employer input. In particular, the Community Health Worker Registered Apprenticeship program has demonstrated that having a high-quality curriculum can both raise the skills level of employees and satisfy employers' needs, while also providing a base for

apprentices to pursue a college degree through credit granted for their on-the-job learning. Employers have bought into the program because they see it as an effective professional development tool for incumbent workers, who have made up the majority of CHW apprentices thus far. The Hostos apprenticeship program also faces several challenges including convincing additional employers to see the value in hosting apprentices, solidifying the mentorship component of the training, and helping apprentices navigate personal challenges and job-related scheduling demands during the training period. Having completed two cohorts, Hostos has shown that these non-traditional apprenticeships have value for employers, employees, faculty in participating colleges, and the industry.

CHW Cohorts 1 & 2 N=20



References

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