

In-Home Learning System:

Technology for delivery of education and training to low-income individuals pursuing health careers in Snohomish County, Washington

Introduction

While most other career fields have been declining over the last several years, the healthcare field has continued to grow. According to The Atlantic, “Since 2003, the U.S. healthcare sector has grown more than ten-times faster than the rest of the economy.” This is to say that the medical industry has proven to be the only true recession-proof field of the economy, and as baby boomers age and generation X have children, demands for phlebotomists, certified nursing assistants, and other health careers will be higher than they have ever been.

In 2010, with funding from the Department of Health and Human Services “Health Profession Opportunity Grants” (HPOG), a program that seeks to provide education and training in the healthcare field to TANF recipients and other low-income individuals, CATCH was launched. CATCH stands for Creating Access To Careers in Healthcare and is a partnership between Edmonds and Everett Community Colleges, Business Access, regional healthcare employers, Snohomish County, and Washington State.

The CATCH program combines online learning with intensive hands-on skills labs and clinical work experience at partner healthcare facilities. This program allows low-income students to get the training they need to move into better paying jobs on a flexible schedule while they continue to work and support their families. The overall purpose of the CATCH program is certification as a Nursing Assistant, Monitor Technician, Phlebotomist, EKG and Cardiographic Technician, Emergency Medical Technician, or as a Medical Spanish Interpreter. Some individuals in the program also elect to continue their education to pursue even higher levels in the medical field. For the online learning component, CATCH utilizes Business Access’ In-Home Learning System (IHLS) to prepare participants for their healthcare certifications.

The Program

The Business Access In-Home Learning System is a self-sufficiency development program. Individuals, or

“Achievers” as they are called, are guided every step of the way so that they can reach the end goal of increased employment and long-term self-sufficiency. Achievers are given laptop computers preloaded with learning modules and Internet access for 12 months so that they can complete their curriculums from anywhere. Achievers use their laptops to complete online training in digital literacy, life skills, adult basic education, and vocational training while they continue medical training at Edmonds and Everett Community Colleges. They also take courses created by the colleges that match their in-school curriculums and complete assignments. A Business Access Community Navigator follows the Achievers’ progress through the online community and makes sure they are on schedule to complete the program.

Goals

In order to graduate from the IHLS portion of CATCH, the goal for an Achiever is to:

- Complete the core curriculum which includes
 - o Core Digital Literacy
 - o Core Computer Skills Pre-Test
 - o Core Computer Skills - Laptop Computers
 - o Core Computer Skills - The Mouse and Keyboard
 - o Core Computer Skills - Using Software
 - o Core Computer Skills - Intro to Microsoft Word
 - o Core Computer Skills Post-Test

Eligibility

In order to enroll in this program, individuals are required to be at or below 175% of the federal poverty line.

Results

To date, 268 individuals have been admitted into the program and a whopping 168 have graduated from the program! 13,980 classes and 910 curriculums have been completed and participation hours are over 94,000.



A Closer Look: Achiever Successes

Achievers have made great strides in their personal and professional development thanks to the BA IHLS and CATCH. Simply having access to a laptop at home was such an impactful thing for so many of them. Because Achievers come from low-income backgrounds, many had never even hoped to one day own a laptop. Perla Guterrez, an Achiever from Edmonds Cohort 6, explains: "I was extremely happy because having a laptop meant that I was able to have access to the Internet. Right now I'm not able to afford to purchase a laptop, so when I received it, I was really excited and honored. Once I was given the laptop, I told myself that as long as I stayed committed and continue to work hard, I would be able to overcome any obstacles I faced."

Having access to a laptop and the convenience of being able to take courses and learn from home was very important to Nathan Borchardt, an Achiever from Edmonds Community College Cohort 4, who said: "There was no way I could have made it through the program if I did not have a computer and Internet access. Getting to a computer is difficult without a car, and with the computer, I could do my homework and study wherever I wanted! If I ever encountered a problem, tech support or the BA Community Navigator [was] just a call away, which made me feel a lot better."

Not only were Achievers able to take courses in the specific area of healthcare they were interested in, they were also able to develop general tech skills that will take them far in any career. Rosemary Holm, Edmonds Community College Cohort 4 Achiever, says: "I am so comfortable using computers because of CATCH....The technical skills that Business Access helped me gain will carry me through my professional career. Before, I went on a computer every once in a while, now I use my computer every day and do not know what I would ever do without it!"

While Stephanie Hopper from Everett Community College Cohort 4 certainly appreciates the laptop she was given, she also sees the value of the Business Access courses she took: "The laptops are great, but I have found the training to be the most helpful. I was so surprised to find out there are hundreds of courses to choose from and I get to pick which ones I want! I really like the courses on Business, as I hope to manage my own health facility some day."

Upon completion of the program, Adelaide, a refugee from The Democratic Republic of the Congo, was able to quickly and easily find employment. She used BA's IHLS to complete certifications as not only a Nursing Assistant but also a Phlebotomist! In the span of a single week in March 2013, Adelaide was offered three different nursing assistant positions! Talk about an in-demand career and a great choice for the future!

