

Faces of the Caregiving Frontline

Scholarship Program Participants:



"My decision to make a career change wasn't an easy one. In order to be able to return to school, I had to sell my home, find homes for my two cats, move into one room, rented out of a larger home, and quit one of my jobs. Participating in the scholarship program has allowed me to become an RN. Receiving my degree has impacted my life in two very important ways. The first and most obvious is the change in my income. The second and maybe even more significant impact is how being able to complete my RN degree changed how I feel about myself and my future. I always questioned if I was smart enough, but it turned out that the nursing courses were something I did very well in this year I graduated from Century College with a 4.0 GPA. This has been a boost to my self-esteem, which was pretty low for a couple of years."

– Jacki Smith of Stillwater has worked at Sholom Home East for 25 years as a TMA and NAR. She completed her degree to become a registered nurse in May 2004.



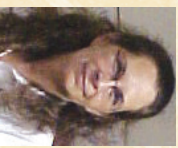
"I am finally a registered nurse, which has been a goal of mine since being a child. I have stayed in the long-term [care] setting and have been promoted to a nurse manager position. This program is a wonderful incentive for employees in long-term care. It allowed me to continue on the upward swing to self-sufficiency. I am a single mother and my change in status will help in a promising future for my daughter. Eliminating this program may cause [fewer] people to work in long-term care and [result] in less qualified care for seniors."

– Kristi Shamp of Alexandria has worked at Knute Nelson Memorial Home for four years. She completed her Associate Degree in Nursing on May 13, 2004, and now works at KNMH as an RN/Nursing Manager.



"Participation in the scholarship program has helped me as a person to fulfill my individual educational goals and to use the skills [learned] to render better service to the elderly. It has also promoted my family's values in regard to education, and uplifted my spirit and morale. I will use the skills [attained] to serve the community, the elderly, the disadvantaged, and the state at large."

– Joshua Orenge of Spring Park has worked at Presbyterian Homes on Lake Minnetonka as a NAR, TMA, and LPN for 12 years. He will complete his RN degree in December 2004.



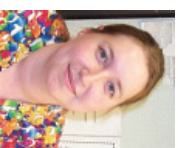
"I would not have been able to pursue further education without the scholarship program. The wages for an activity assistant/CNA are very low and there are very few wage raises. This makes it impossible to afford the cost of education classes and books. If the program is stopped I will be forced to decide between this job I love or school loans with full-time school and not being able to afford to work in a nursing home."

– Christine Peasley of Pelican Rapids has worked for three years as an activity assistant and CNA at Pelican Valley Health Center. She is currently working on her degree in social work.



"[The scholarship program] has had a tremendous impact [on my life]! I chose to enter a part-time nursing program so I could continue to work while going to school. The encouragement and support I've received from the entire staff and the residents at the care center has been overwhelming. Not a day goes by at work [without] at least one of the residents or staff saying, 'How is school going?' or 'Congratulations, you made the Dean's List!' It is humbling to know that so many people care about my education. I really enjoy working with the elderly population and I hope to work as an LPN at the Clara City Care Center until I retire."

– Jan Mulder of Clara City has worked as a nursing assistant at Clara City Care Center for four years. She will complete her LPN training in December 2004.



"Three months into the school year my husband was laid off from his job. Neither one of us were expecting that, and if I didn't have the scholarship I would have had to stop going to school and go back to work full time. Money was tight, but we made it through. Because of the scholarship program I was able to accomplish my goal of becoming a nurse."

– Christina Bohman of Alexandria worked at Bethany Community for four years as a both a CNA and as a TMA. She completed her Practical Nursing program in July 2004, and plans to return to school in Fall 2004 to start working on her nursing degree.



"My income is barely enough to take care of my family's needs, and I don't have savings that can pay for college. The scholarship program is indispensable for me to achieve my dream of gaining training in a nursing college. It is the only way I can work fewer hours, so as to create study time, and still have help paying tuition. Thank you!"

– Cletus Nkwenti of Spring Park has been a NAR at Presbyterian Homes on Lake Minnetonka for three years. He will complete his nursing (RN) program in 2007.



"This scholarship makes me feel that somebody, somewhere, cares for me and my future, and that I can improve my standard of living, make myself a valuable asset to PHS, and take more responsible positions at my job in caring to the elderly people."

– Willie P. Jarver of Brooklyn Park has worked at Arden Hills for three years as a nursing aide. He plans on finishing his LPN training in 2006.

"The scholarship program has had a tremendous impact for our employees that have utilized the program. It has enabled them to attend school, furthering their health care careers and yet be able to continue working at our facility, caring for our residents. The program has enabled some to graduate and continue at our facility or other facilities as a licensed nurse. With the shortage of licensed nurses in the long-term care field, this is a tremendous achievement. Our residents benefit from having newly graduated nurses that are already familiar with them and their care needs. The program is keeping staff in the long-term care field and making them even more valuable components to achieving higher quality care for our elderly."

– Ann R. Dirks, Facility Administrator, Park View Care Center, Buffalo

"As a result of the program, we have saved money from not utilizing outside pool staffing, decreases in overtime, retaining current staffing, and the recruitment of multiple CNAs and LPNs. This gave us additional money that wasn't tied up in other budget areas that could be used in a strategic plan to implement continuous quality care. Plus, we are so passionate about the program that we want to establish ourselves as a teaching facility for the gerontological population and for those interested in pursuing a career in the field of gerontology."

– Nancy Kollmann, RN/Director of Nursing, Good Shepherd Community, Sauk Rapids

"The program impacts our facility in three important ways. First, by helping us fill critical staffing shortages. This year alone three graduates of the program filled shortage positions for us: two nurses, and one social worker. Second, the program [provides incentives for] employees to remain in the long-term care industry by creating an attainable and attractive career path. Thanks to the scholarship program, nursing assistants making less than \$25,000/year have a path to careers paying over \$60,000/year. Third, the program enhances the quality of long-term care services. Scholarship participants offer a perspective unlike that offered by new hires (even new graduates) or other experienced staff. [They] have the credibility that comes with experience but also that fresh perspective that comes with recent education."

– Amy Larson, Human Resources, Sholom Home East, St. Paul

"The Nursing Facility Employees Scholarship Program has been a very effective tool for attracting and retaining staff at Rice Care Center. It has provided us with consistent staffing who are dedicated and interested because of the coursework they are involved in at school. They bring knowledge and a 'learning' attitude to the workplace."

– Nancy Stratman, Facility Administrator, Rice Care Center, Willmar

MINNESOTA HEALTH & HOUSING ALLIANCE

PROMOTING EXCELLENCE AND INNOVATION IN OLDER ADULT SERVICES

2550 University Avenue West, Suite 3505, Saint Paul, MN 55114-1900 • (651) 645-4545 • www.mhha.com

A Report on Minnesota's Nursing Facility Employee Scholarship Program

Minnesota Health & Housing Alliance





Arlisa Biedermann, NA, with Virginia Fittum, resident, St. John's Lutheran Home of Albert Lea

Improving Care Services

The **Nursing Facility Employee Scholarship Program** was enacted in 2001 to support long-term care facilities' efforts to recruit and retain qualified employees and to expand and improve Minnesota's long-term care workforce. Further, it seeks to improve the education and skills of long-term care employees, and provide them with a means of career advancement. Over the past two decades, staff shortages within the nursing field have become acute, as an aging workforce, low wages, and lack of career advancement opportunities have hurt efforts to recruit and retain a sufficient number of employees to care for Minnesota's aging population. Given the population over 65 is projected to double over the next 30-40 years, it is imperative that we expand and improve care services to adequately meet both current and future needs.

An Innovative, Valued Tool

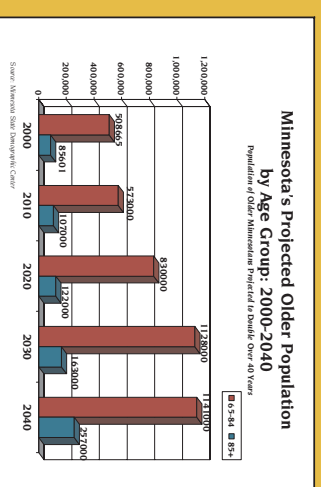
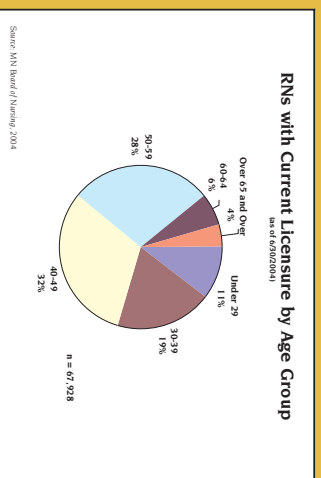
Since its adoption in July 2001, the **Nursing Facility Employee Scholarship Program** has been a highly utilized, innovative, and valued tool employed by most of Minnesota's long-term care facilities in their efforts to maintain a quality workforce. According to the Minnesota Department of Human Services, over 2,300 scholarships were awarded in the past year alone, helping train and educate long-term care staff statewide. Of these employees, nearly 75 percent pursued careers in nursing or other direct care positions, while most of the remaining 25 percent sought to improve their job-related skills in other long-term care fields, such as social work, activity planning, business management, or psychology.

The program itself costs very little, and if eliminated, the actual savings will be minimal. Recent projections by House Fiscal Analysis forecast the program's costs to be less than \$740,000 annually through fiscal year 2007. When compared with the direct and immediate benefits the program provides, any costs incurred, especially as low as those projected, are effectively mitigated. In essence, the scholarship program is perhaps the quintessential low-input, high-yield venture, whose tangible long-term benefits vastly outweigh the state's nominal initial investment.

Moreover, the **Nursing Facility Employee Scholarship Program** helps address shortages within long-term care by infusing an already depleted workforce with homegrown, newly educated nurses and care staff who likely would not have access to higher education. As it exists, the scholarship program is one of the few educational programs geared directly toward providing career advancement opportunities to line staff and low-wage employees, allowing for a means of self-improvement in a field frequently lacking advancement opportunities. Further, since comparatively low wages often preclude direct care staff from pursuing higher education, the scholarship monies become an essential tool for attracting, developing, and retaining qualified staff in long-term care settings. Equally important, the scholarship program allows facilities to improve the standard of care by further educating and training existing staff to better perform their care responsibilities.

How the program works:
From July 1, 2001, to June 30, 2003, all nursing facilities statewide received an increased rate adjustment of 7.5 cents per resident day to fund educational scholarships for employees.
After July 1, 2003, the 3.5-cent rate adjustment was replaced by a facility specific per diem system, where participating facilities are reimbursed for expenditures incurred by tuition and other direct educational costs. Ex: If a facility spends 75 cents per resident day, it receives a 75-cent per resident day reimbursement from the Minnesota Administrator of Human Services.
Eligibility requirements:
The student-employee must work at least 2.0 hours per week at the participating facility.
The student-employee's educational program must provide job-related training that would likely lead to career advancement at the facility or within long-term care field.
Administrators, department supervisors, and registered nurses are not eligible for scholarship reimbursement.
See Minnesota Statutes 256B.431, subpart 1a, 35.

A LOOMING CRISIS: Aging Caregivers and Older Minnesotans



70% of Minnesota nurses are over age 40 and can be expected to retire in the coming years

The population of Minnesotans age 65 and older is expected to double in the coming years



Alisha Fiedler, St. Benedict's Senior Community, St. Cloud

The Nursing Facility Scholarship Program is a small commitment from the state that goes a long way for long-term care providers, employees, and the growing elderly population they serve.

Need for Expansion

With Minnesota's rapidly growing population of citizens over the age of 65, the difficulties for the long-term care community are self-evident: To adequately meet projected needs, the field's workforce must drastically grow and improve, even before taking into account the additional problem of current staff shortages. Certainly, we cannot sit idly by and ignore the statewide staffing problems facing the long-term care community, simply hoping that more nurses or students choose to pursue careers in long-term care. Instead, a more proactive strategy is needed. The **Nursing Facility Employee Scholarship Program**, though not the total solution, is unquestionably a step in the right direction. In just under three years, the program helped educate and train over 2,300 new nurses and advanced-level employees in nursing facilities statewide. Further, most Minnesota Health & Housing Alliance member facilities indicate that with assurance of the program's future, they would either increase the number of scholarships awarded and/or increase the amount of money they disperse.

Aging services in Minnesota have long been providing the best possible care to their residents despite insufficient government support. As the state makes a commitment to caregiving, the scholarship program is a small investment that goes a long way for long-term care providers, employees, and the communities they serve. By providing money for nursing employee scholarships, Minnesota has begun to address current staffing issues and prepare for future challenges. Now, the Legislature has the opportunity to make certain that such progress is sustained. Simply put, the **Nursing Facility Employee Scholarship Program** is not merely a luxury item for the state's eldercare provider community, but rather is indispensable in helping to resolve their immediate and future healthcare workforce challenges. Its continued application and growth will help ensure that each nursing facility is equipped with sufficient and well-trained staff to meet the ever-growing demands and needs of their field and to provide the best possible care to every nursing facility resident in Minnesota.

"I believe the program has positively impacted employees and given the provider community a 'shot in the arm' for caregiver education."

— Robert J. Rau, Facility Administrator, Gamilia Rose Care Center, Coon Rapids

Leaders in Education Agree...

This scholarship program provides much-needed financial support for health care employees who are pursuing their education. One of our system's top strategic goals is to expand access to education for critical occupations, particularly in the health care field."

— Chancellor James H. MacCormick, Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System

"For many of these students, this program has enabled them to obtain an education they otherwise wouldn't have been able to access. Elimination of this program would be detrimental to greater Minnesota and would have an adverse affect on the current and future health care needs of Minnesotans."

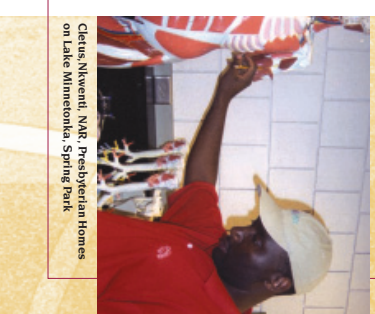
— Raymond C. Christensen, MD, Associate Professor of Family Medicine and Assistant Dean for Rural Health, University of Minnesota-Duluth Campus

"This program is a modest investment in those who care for the people of Minnesota. A responsible citizenry needs to attend to the needs of its people, and I strongly support the ongoing funding of the Nursing Facility Employee Scholarship Program."

— Timothy M. Caspar, Ph.D., R.N., Dean & Professor, Winona State University, College of Nursing and Health Sciences



Karen Ruesman, LPN, Manitoba Lutheran Homes



Gertis Nixewit, NAR, Presbyterian Homes on Lake Minnesota, Spring Park