

Reentry effort leads to 22 hires for Advocate Aurora Health

Posted on Friday, Sep 24, 2021

As part of its Returning Citizens initiative, Advocate Aurora Health has hired 22 formerly incarcerated individuals in the past year and provided tailored support to help them adapt to the workplace.

Kim Quetschke, a talent sourcing specialist with the health system, described the program's outcomes during a webinar hosted by the Metropolitan Milwaukee Association of Commerce. It was launched in August 2020.

"Health care is a very welcoming place to returning citizens," she said yesterday. "There are actually very few convictions that would prevent someone from working in health care."

She explained the program aims to give people equal access to employment opportunities and hire individuals that "reflect the communities we serve." She noted that only 55 percent of formerly incarcerated people find employment within one year of release.

When the pilot first began, the health system set a goal of hiring seven people who had gone through the criminal justice system by the fourth quarter of last year. The program exceeded that goal and placed workers in roles including certified nursing assistant, community health worker, housekeeping, patient transporter, food and nutrition specialists and other positions.

“We provide training to hiring leaders so they can provide extra support needed for returning citizens,” Quetschke said. “And it’s different with everybody. Does the team member need a little extra help with technology, computer skills, or with signing up for benefits?”

She noted the program helps reduce recidivism among participants and boosts their household income. Other participants in the webinar spoke to the community benefits and economic factors for hiring formerly incarcerated individuals.

Frederick Nelson, an employment and training specialist with Employ Milwaukee, says these individuals often feel like “they have something to prove,” and can demonstrate a higher level of commitment to a business that gives them a chance.

“Everybody has made mistakes. I think employers have to be more empathetic to the re-entry population,” he said.

Conor Williams, an economist with the Community Advocates Public Policy Institute, is also the facilitator for the Milwaukee Reentry Council. He noted many people have “a lot of fear and mistrust” associated with engaging with people who’ve previously been to jail or prison.

“If we allow that fear and mistrust to lead us, it only compounds the problem,” he said. “We are all better than the worst things we have done.”

-By Alex Moe