2006 INNOVATIONS AWARDS PROGRAM
APPLICATION

Deadline: March 4, 2006

INSTRUCTIONS: Complete and submit this document electronically if possible, preferably in Microsoft Word format (.doc or rtf). This application is also available at www.csg.org in the Programs section. Determine the appropriate “Change Driver” from the enclosed matrix and indicate that in the appropriate space listed below. Keep in mind that the matrix is only meant to show potential relationships between change drivers, trends and issues, and is not exhaustive. Be advised that CSG reserves the right to use or publish in other CSG products and services the information that you provide in this Innovations Awards Program Application. If you object to CSG potentially using or publishing the information contained in this application in other CSG products and services, please advise us in a separate attachment to your program’s application.

ID #: 06-E-06NJ
Change Driver: Resource Management
State: New Jersey

1. Program Name: Career Ladders
2. Administering Agency: New Jersey Department of Human Services
Office of the Assistant Commissioner for Human Resources,
Office of Human Resources Operational Excellence
3. Contact Person (Name and Title):
Kim Rogers McLean, Director,
Office of Human Resources Operational Excellence
4. Address: 222 South Warren Street, PO Box 700, Trenton, NJ 08625
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7. E-mail Address: Kim.Rogers.McLean@dhs.state.nj.us
8. Web site Address: http://www.state.nj.us/humanservices
9. Please provide a two-sentence description of the program.
The Career Ladders Program, offered by the New Jersey Department of Human Services in partnership with the New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development, was developed for direct services blue collar DHS staff in order to meet the need of retaining quality individuals with a commitment to our clients by providing an opportunity to eventually qualify for professional positions. The certificate in either Child Protective Services, Mental Health Services, or Disability Services is approved for 12 college credits toward a degree at fifteen (15) of the New Jersey’s Community Colleges.
10. How long has this program been operational (month and year)? Note: the program must be between 9 months and 5 years old on March 4, 2006 to be considered.
The program began in September 2004 with a certificate program for Child Protective...
11. Why was the program created? What problem[s] or issue[s] was it designed to address? Indicate how the program applies to the “change driver” that you listed above.

The Career Ladder Program began as part of the State of New Jersey’s Child Welfare Reform Plan which was implemented to overhaul New Jersey’s Child Welfare system as a result of some tragedies that garnered national attention. The New Jersey Department of Human Services (25,000 employees) is the parent organization of the Division of Youth and Family Services - DYFS (5,000 employees) which is responsible for children’s protective services. One of the first strategies deemed important in changing the organizational culture of and practices in DYFS was to concentrate on the development and training of the current civil services employees. The majority of training and retraining efforts identified in the Child Welfare Reform Plan focused on the social work staff. It was recognized that in order to effectuate true change management, all staff had to be trained, including those who are usually first contact to the clients, like the receptionist, drivers, social service aides, etc. The spirit, intent and importance of the message needed to be delivered simultaneously to all levels of staff.

Secondly, the Career Ladders program provided an opportunity for the internal non-degreed staff to attain college credits towards a degree which could ultimately lead to staff moving into the social work field as a professional. The concept of the program is to invest in its current workforce who already have a proven dedication to the clients it serves, and afford them the opportunity for future career growth and advancement. Many of the current training for the non degreed staff focuses on specific job skills. This program combined the practical application of a training program with the academic understanding of the theory behind the practices. The succession planning philosophy of “growing our own” to ensure a committed and qualified workforce was mutually beneficial to both the organization and the individual.

12. Describe the specific activities and operations of the program in chronological order

The program idea began in May 2004 through a partnership between the Department of Human Services and the Community College Consortium representing the 19 community colleges in New Jersey. The intent was to develop a series of training courses which blended necessary practitioner information with academic college level courses. The new initiative, named the Career Ladder Program, would provide an opportunity for employees to begin an educational career path.

In July 2004, the New Jersey Community College Consortium sponsored a three day retreat whereby community college faculty and DHS staff began the process of outlining the requirements of the Career Ladders Program. The Department of Human Services staff, in conjunction with county college faculty, researched and developed a series of five training courses specifically: Module 1: Communication, Module 2: Cultural Competence, Module 3: Child Development and Identifying Abuse and Neglect, Module 4: Assessment and Documentation, and Module 5: Family and Community Centered Services, which totalled 150 course hours. The County College Consortium determined that the five non-credit courses were worthy of 12 college credits in an academic setting, once a student applied to the community college of choice.

In July 2004, there was some initial meetings held with the bargaining unions to market the program and its effectiveness. One union put the application and promotional materials on their own website for their membership. It was important to solicit the support of the unions in addressing such a critical program with their membership.
In order to ensure consistent message delivery and course content, two train-the-trainers sessions were held. Over 70 adjunct community college faculty participated in the train the trainer sessions and were evaluated based on overall effectiveness by DHS staff.

Simultaneously, the program was announced to DHS staff in August. The response was overwhelming. As a result of two e-mails sent to all users, 700 applicants applied for the program, many applying from other disciplines within Human Services, including developmental disabilities, blind, mental health, medicaid, etc. The application process included completion of an application and an essay on reasons for wishing to participate. Each applicant was evaluated and ranked on the strength of the desire to participate, as well as years of service, performance evaluation rating and lack of a disciplinary record. In September and October 2004, the several of the first year's 27 courses began with 297 students. Classes were held in 18 of the 21 counties in New Jersey. In the first graduating class, the average years of service was 19 years. There were quite a few students who had been with the department for over 30 years and viewed this as an opportunity of a lifetime.

All books and materials are provided for the students who attend. Many of employees are allowed to attend classes during working hours. Their time is considered regular training hours for the five modules. It should also be noted that the students who have shift work in critical care areas must attend classes on their own, after their work schedule. There were 43 of these individuals.

The students remain with their cohort for all five modules. Most of the faculty also remained with their class. The bonding that occurred between the faculty and the students is indescribable. Faculty from around the state witnessed first hand the dedication of the direct services staff. There were two full time faculty who taught 3 career Ladders classes, exclusively relieving them of other college courses. The class are scheduled to be held twice a week for three hour sessions each in order not to disrupt business operations. They are taught in a manner in which seasoned employees who have been out of school for many years are able to easily adapt to school work.

At the end of June 2005, a graduation ceremony was held for the 275 students who completed the program. This first year retention rate was over 92% which was unheard of by both the government organization and the community colleges. All of the college presidents or representatives from the nineteen community colleges and over a thousand family and friends came to the graduation ceremony to show their support.

Because of the overwhelmingly positive response to all components of the program and the interest of other disciplines in the same opportunity, a decision was made to expand the program to include certificates in mental health and disability services. In the New Jersey Department of Human Services, these fields encompass over 15,000 employees. There are 12 long term residential care facilities serving developmentally disabled and mentally ill clients which provide 24 hour care. Many of the staff are in professional fields like nursing, medicine and psychiatry, but the majority attend to basic life skills for the clients. In order to address this pressing need, two additional curricula were written, Understanding Mental Health and Understanding Disabilities to include staff from those respective divisions. The disability curriculum encompasses developmental, physical and sensory disabilities. The county colleges agreed to develop two more certificates of competency in mental health and disability services. Four of the five the courses were deemed necessary and relevant to students in all disciplines. The content of Module 3 was determined to be discipline specific and students wishing to major in other disciplines would replace the module 3 course with either Understanding Mental Health or Understanding Disabilities.

By Fall 2005 (year 2), over 600 applications were received. The fifteen new classes began to be delivered to 225 employees in the September, 2005. Additionally, a number of other provider organizations are paying the per student costs and sending students from nonprofit agencies who
provide similar services to vulnerable populations in New Jersey.

The program took less than a year to be implemented, from the initial conceptual idea to graduation of almost 300 students. It required that a government entity under tremendous scrutiny work at lightening speed, and that nineteen academic institutions speak in one voice. Never before had the colleges worked cooperatively together and simultaneously with a State agency. This is an unprecedented accomplishment in New Jersey.

13. Why is the program a new and creative approach or method?

As previously stated, the program encompasses the philosophy of “growing our own” to ensure a committed and qualified workforce, especially in the area of child welfare. Most employees entering this program are in positions within the Department of Human Services which only require an ability to read and speak English and high school diploma or equivalent. The direct services staff, especially in the institutional settings perform menial duties which have even less requirements and skills. However, it was also recognized that they also have more long term direct contact with our clients than many of the other staff. The introduction of this program honors the work that they perform daily by expanding their knowledge and skill sets to provide them an understanding and better awareness of the client base they serve.

The Department of Human Services runs a tuition reimbursement program. However, the staff who most need are least able to afford it because of their low paying wages and other family obligations. The initial monies required to take course work is very difficult for them to spare. This program alleviated this burden by sponsoring and funding the program for staff attendance. There is no cost to the student, just attendance and successful completion can lead to 12 college credits.

The achievement of a cooperative partnership with the New Jersey Community College Consortium for Workforce and Economic Development which represents all of the nineteen (19) community colleges throughout the state, to provide the training and to equate the training to the 12 college credits which can be applied toward an Associate’s degree, and the adoption of the Certificate Program at 15 of the 19 colleges as part of their curriculum which demonstrates the creativity and innovation. Ten of the colleges adopted a degree program in social services.

As a result of the Career Ladders program, community college faculty have changed course content material that is taught in the academic setting because the courses in the program reflect more current and relevant material, practice models and real life application for those interested in human services profession at the associates level.

14. What were the program’s start-up costs? (Provide details about specific purchases for this program, staffing needs and other financial expenditures, as well as existing materials, technology and staff already in place.)

The initial and only significant cost to the start up of the program was $29,000 charged by the New Jersey Community College Workforce Consortium to conduct the retreat and provide stipends to the faculty who initiated the development of the course work. Each class cost approximately 27,000 for 150 class hours and up to 20 students can be enrolled in each class. The materials cost approximately $175.

The internal resources of experienced training staff, as well as technology and equipment is available for our use. The major program cost was in staff hours, six of whom worked primarily on the curricula, student admission and course A small number of videos and books
were purchased. Two full time staff have the responsibility of coordinating the program, hereafter.

15. What are the program’s annual operational costs?

$400,000

16. How is the program funded?

It was primarily funded through State funds. However, staff from certain disciplines are able to have a portion of training course work federally reimbursed, which reduces costs. Additionally the tuition paid by the nonprofit provider agencies is credited to DHS costs, thereby realizing in another reduction of costs.

17. Did this program require the passage of legislation, executive order or regulations? If YES, please indicate the citation number.

No.

18. What equipment, technology and software are used to operate and administer this program?

PC’s, Laptop Computer, Projector, Microsoft Office - Power Point, Easels and Easel Pads, CD’s, VCR, TV, Video Tapes, DVD’s, power cords.

19. To the best of your knowledge, did this program originate in your state? If YES, please indicate the innovator’s name, present address, telephone number and e-mail address.

Yes.

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20. Are you aware of similar programs in other states? If YES, which ones and how does this program differ?

No.

21. Has the program been fully implemented? If NO, what actions remain to be taken?

Yes.

22. Briefly evaluate (pro and con) the program’s effectiveness in addressing the defined problem[s] or issue[s]. Provide tangible examples.

While it was intended that the Career Ladders program provide a necessary basic understanding for the lower level employees, the building of self esteem and self efficacy in the graduates is immeasurable. Approximately 15% have been promoted (during times of fiscal crises) to higher level positions. Approximately 20% have utilized other educational programs like tuition
reimbusement to continue their education. The expansion of the program to the other disciplines is also evidence of the success of the program.

Unfortunately, this program was developed and implemented before the training for professional social work staff. The intent of spreading the same message simultaneously did not occur, because the frontline clerical and para-professionals were trained first in the new models. This did cause a small bit of internal contention. However, some of the course work will soon be offered to the professional staff.

23. How has the program grown and/or changed since its inception?

The program as it was originally designed focused on providing a certificate in Child Protective Services to and provide clerical and para-professional staff the ability to pursue additional educational opportunities to qualify them for positions within our Child Welfare Division, thus developing an internal labor pool of better educated and more qualified workers. In 2006, the program was expanded to include a Certificate in Mental Health Services and a Certificate in Disability Services to which will support our Mental Health and Developmental Disability Facilities.

Additionally, other organizations like the New Jersey Education Association - NJEA which is the teacher’s union is modelling this program for their teacher’s aide positions in response to the "No Child Left Behind" Act. Another union, New Jersey AFSCME is modelling the program for their membership in other government entities and healthcare organizations.

One county college is partnering with their county Workforce Investment Board to offer Career Ladders as a pre-employment training for unemployed workers looking for work the area of human services.

24. What limitations or obstacles might other states expect to encounter if they attempt to adopt this program?

Funding for training and other "soft skills" programs is very difficult in times of fiscal distress. The inclusion of the unions early in the process was a key aspect.

Return a completed application electronically to innovations@csg.org or mail the paper copy to:

CSG Innovations Awards 2006
The Council of State Governments
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Deadline: All original applications must be received by March 4, 2006 to be considered for a 2006 Innovations Award.