THE BEDFORD CITIZEN

Carleton-Willard Partners with IINE to Offer Workforce Training for Immigrant Workers

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Carleton-Willard ESOL students and resident volunteers at a graduation ceremony. CARLETON-WILLARD

With recent changes to U.S. immigration policy affecting healthcare workers, Americans may wonder who will care for the sick and older population.

Carleton-Willard Village in Bedford, in partnership with the International Institute of New England (IINE), has been helping documented immigrant workers integrate successfully into its staff.

Kim Ianiro, chief human resources officer at Carleton-Willard, said the partnership began two years ago, when residents who knew about the work of IINE in assisting immigrant workers invited the organization to give a lecture at the village.

The staff at Carleton-Willard, including CEO Chris Golen, were so impressed they explored working with IINE. Residents spearheaded the effort, first by organizing a clothing drive for workers, and later becoming mentors to immigrant employees who were taking ESOL (English for Speakers of Other Languages) classes put on IINE.

So far, Carleton-Willard has held “two training sessions to help their employees learn English.” Ianiro believes the language barrier is one of the greatest obstacles to success for those new to this country. The second language session culminated in a graduation ceremony in June for the 15 employees participating.

The ceremony included documented workers across all levels of the Carleton-Willard workforce, from certified nursing aides working in direct personal care to staff working in the kitchen, dining room, and housekeeping. All completed the program and showed improvement when tested at the completion of the course.

Ianiro hopes to begin another training program in January. Along the way, some 18 residents have stepped up to support the language learners.

“They learned from one another, with lots of laughter,” Ianiro noted.

When asked about the effects of President Donald Trump’s newly announced immigration policies, including the termination of the Temporary Protected Status (TPS), Ianiro said four people, whose documentation had expired, had to leave Carleton-Willard’s employment. She mentioned the “fear factor” affecting workers as a result of the changed policies.

On Oct. 2, Ianiro was one of five panelists at a webinar offered by IINE, headlined “The Cost of Closing Doors: Immigration and the U.S. Healthcare System.”

Jeff Thielman, CEO and president of IINE, introduced Ianiro, saying, “Kim has been a valuable IINE partner. Carleton-Willard has hired multiple IINE clients into caregiving roles. In addition, our Lowell staff has provided English classes on site to help the existing staff of Carleton-Willard improve their skills and become more confident and successful in their roles at the company.”

The panel discussed how IINE prepares immigrants and refugees for healthcare careers and how IINE partners with regional healthcare organizations to help address workforce needs. They also discussed how recent changes in immigration policy are already harming the health care system.

IINE staff member and panelist Alexandra Weber noted the shortage of qualified workers across all healthcare sectors in Massachusetts.

“Immigrants represent nearly a quarter of all licensed practical nurses and clinical technologists. Immigrant workers are especially important to the eldercare system,” she said.

The recent termination of the TPS designation for Haitians and other immigrants is especially significant. Weber referenced a recent Boston Globe article which reported about 5,000 of the 35,000 Haitians in Massachusetts alone are employed in nursing homes.

IINE programs provide a variety of supports to help immigrant healthcare workers achieve success. Language classes and assistance with credentialing are two important aspects.

The experience of panelist Efdjeen highlights this. Trained in medicine and pharmacy in Haiti, Efjdeen’s credentials did not transfer to the U.S. healthcare system; she first became a certified nursing assistant, then a medical assistant, and is now employed in a

community health center. Both language and cultural differences are barriers, she noted.

Speaking from the perspective of an employer, Ianiro echoed Efjdeen's observation on the language barrier.

"Unfortunately, most of us don't speak multiple languages so the ability to speak English, to understand a resident's or patient's needs, is critical," Ianiro said. "We've been working very closely with IINE, whether it's been having the ESOL classes here or using your services, which are incredible, for case management and working with people individually. We have rethought our onboarding and orientation processes to be more open and welcoming. But it comes down to the biggest barrier being English."

Regarding the ESOL classes, Ianiro said, "We've had overwhelming support from our residents and volunteers — there have been about 18 — to reinforce the learning by practice conversation, sharing of stories, and learning on both sides."

Editor's Note: Carleton-Willard Village President and CEO Chris Golen is a member of The Bedford Citizen board. He had no role in writing or editing this story.