

# **Volunteers of America Texas’ HPOG “PROMISING PRACTICE” CASE STUDY**

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## ***Customized Hospital Partnership Results in 15 New Hires in 6 Months***

**From the 2018 HPOG Employer Engagement Promising Practice Series**

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### **Introduction and Overview**

In early 2017, Volunteers of America Texas’ (VOA TX) HPOG program leaders were worried about their “stagnant” employment outcomes and launched exploratory conversations with several new employer-partners to forge stronger employment connections. Less than nine months later, thanks to a multi-pronged and rapid relationship-building process with one large hospital system, 15 HPOG participants are now newly-employed there. This case study walks through how the grantee formed a high-level relationship and used that relationship to develop a customized training program for Patient Care Technicians. The pilot program gave HPOG participants an edge in successfully competing for openings at the hospital. Moreover, thanks to the strong relationship between VOA TX and the hospital system, HPOG participants from other training programs secured job offers as well. The VOA TX experience shows how a focused relationship with a major employer can quickly boost employment outcomes for HPOG participants.

#### Introducing Volunteers of America Texas and its Operating Environment

Volunteers of America Texas is a statewide nonprofit with operations in Dallas/Fort Worth, San Antonio and Houston, with the HPOG grant located at the Houston location. The HPOG program is part of VOA TX’s Financial Opportunities Center, an integrated service delivery model that empowers low-income families to stabilize their finances for long-term sustainability. Clients can access three core services that are bundled together in a holistic delivery system: employment services, financial coaching, and income supports.

VOA TX and its HPOG partners operate in a large metropolitan area in the Houston suburbs, with high concentrations of both health care employers and low-income families. In 2017 VOA TX placed 110 HPOG participants in healthcare jobs, achieving 63% of its original goal. However, employment outcomes significantly accelerated during the fourth quarter of FY 2017. This case study focuses on one of the drivers of VOA TX’s rising job placement outcomes – a new partnership with one of the largest area health care employers in the Houston region.

### Shifting Focus from Enrollment and Completion to Employment

When asked about their recent sharp rise in employment outcomes, VOA TX HPOG Project Director Danita Wadley noted that they “went through the school of hard knocks first”. As a new HPOG grantee, they focused attention and resources in year one of the grant (2015-16) on enrollment and participant completion of training programs. This left less staff time available to develop deeper connections with employers.

By spring 2017, the HPOG team was determined to engage more with local employers. The premier employer of health care talent in their region is CHI St. Luke’s hospital system, part of the national [Catholic Health Initiatives](#) (CHI) network of hospitals. With over 10,000 employees in numerous locations, the CHI St. Luke’s hospital system has a continual need for new talent, and its website lists over 100 job openings. However, the VOA TX team didn’t have an existing relationship with CHI St. Luke’s. LaSonya Bishop, the VOA TX HPOG Operations Manager, and an HPOG employment coach began working with recruiters at St. Luke’s. Unfortunately, due to hospital staff turnover, they were unable to form a relationship. “We were spinning our wheels,” Bishop admitted. Direct messages to more senior hospital staff whom they didn’t know went unreturned.

### **Developing a New Customized Training Partnership**

Wadley and Bishop asked their strategic partner, United Way of Greater Houston, to make a “warm introduction” with the Director of Human Resources at CHI St. Luke’s. At Wadley’s request, the HR director brought in the hospital’s director of nursing, because, as Bishop noted, “we also need hiring managers on board” in order to develop and sustain a partnership. In mid-February 2017, the four leaders met and developed a plan to offer a customized training program for Patient Care Technicians (PCTs) for CHI St. Luke’s. The focus on a short-term training program gave the partners an opportunity to prove the value of a relationship, while also helping recruit candidates for a high volume and difficult to fill position.

During this initial conversation about the hospital’s needs and expectations, both of the St. Luke’s leaders “fell in love with the HPOG program”. Bishop believes this affinity was due to several factors:

- VOA TX team established its credibility as an effective workforce provider by sharing data that demonstrates how a partnership can address an employers’ business interests. For example, they described post-hire employment success rates from traditional programs (mostly from the Financial Opportunity Center’s training programs in the building trades), such as an employment retention rate of 87% after 3 years, and an internal promotion rate of 79%.
- VOA TXs’ description of client-driven HPOG service philosophy appealed to hospital representatives. For example, they described how clients chart their own paths, and

compared HPOG support staff to football coaches who provide guidance and support for participants.

- The program’s holistic services that are reflected in all VOA TX financial opportunity center programs (including HPOG) also appealed to hospital officials. These services include skills training for credentials, and other supports such as financial education.
- The post-placement supports provided additional assurance for successful placements. VOA TX offers its clients career coaching for up to 5 years following training. [For more information about their intensive career coaching model, see the box on page 5.]

In the two months after the first luncheon, LaSonya Bishop and VOA TX employment coach, Nancy Smith, held several meetings with CHI St. Luke’s to learn more about the organization’s culture and to plan a custom training program for PCTs. They developed a plan focused on creating special workshops to discuss key cultural and attitudinal expectations needed to be successful within the St. Luke’s system. Thanks to Smith’s direct involvement in the planning of the pilot program, she was well-positioned to provide expert guidance to participants in the pilot program (as well as to other students who were interested in CHI St. Luke’s).

The VOA TX team also needed to bring their training partners on board. This was especially true for Lone Star Community College, which had to revise their standard Patient Care Technician training program. At Lone Star, the VOA TX team worked directly with a senior manager to ensure that the customized CHI St. Luke’s PCT program had high level sponsorship and attention. Fortunately, their courses already included soft skills in the curriculum, so only minor adjustments were needed. The changes mostly involved swapping out general soft skills training for the customized modules delivered by CHI St. Luke’s staff. The PCT training program also included financial literacy courses, delivered by a different VOA TX partner, Frost Bank. The plans called for active participation during the training by several hospital staff members. CHI St. Luke’s director of nursing kicked off the training program by personally delivering the first soft skills workshop. The hospital’s recruiters also conducted workshops and did mock interviews.

By April 2017, two months after their first conversation, all of the partners were ready to deliver a new 12-week Patient Care Technician customized training program with CHI St. Luke’s. The six-month timeline below outlines the program delivery process for the pilot cohort, and participant results at each stage of the program.

Timeframe	Project Activities and Results
April-May 2017	<b>Participant Selection:</b> 15 interested HPOG participants attended an orientation session at Lone Star Community College, took a basic skills (TABE) screening test, and underwent a background check. Twelve of the participants passed the background check and scored above the 9 <sup>th</sup> grade level on the TABE math and reading. They are advanced for interviews with CHI St. Luke’s recruiters. Nine

	HPOG participants are ultimately selected for the PCT training program.
May – August 2017	<b>Training Delivery:</b> The nine HPOG participants began the 12-week PCT training program at Lone Star Community College’s North Harris Health Professions campus. Bi-weekly workshops focused on the hospital’s culture and practices are led by CHI St. Luke’s director of nursing and recruiters from human resources. [For an outline of the hospital-led topics, please see the Appendix.] Following these workshops, a VOA TX career coach holds additional workshops and individualized coaching meetings so that participants can further explore these specialized topics. In addition, officials from Frost Bank deliver three financial literacy workshops to guide participants in money management basics. Following the skills training, participants are placed into a PCT clinical experience at various CHI St. Luke’s locations.
September 2017	<b>Credentialing and Employment:</b> All nine enrolled HPOG participants successfully completed the PCT training program, with 100% pass rates on their state certification tests. CHI St. Luke’s recruiters surveyed participants to help match them with current openings that fit their goals. They also created a unique job code to ensure that program participant applications receive special attention. The recruiters coordinated a hiring event attended by program participants and hospital supervisors for relevant positions. All nine HPOG participants are hired by CHI St. Luke’s at different locations for full-time positions, starting at \$14 an hour plus benefits.

In addition to these nine new PCT hires, the new relationships built during this process began to pay off in other ways, resulting in six additional hires at St. Luke’s. By working closely with CHI St. Luke’s recruiters, the VOA TX HPOG team learned that the hospital needed strong candidates for open respiratory therapist and surgical technician positions. The VOA TX team identified recent training program graduates for these occupations, and helped broker interviews for 12 qualified HPOG candidates. Because the recruiters knew and trusted the VOA TX team, these recommendations carried weight, and they conducted screening interviews with all 12 HPOG candidates. By September 2017, three HPOG participants landed jobs as respiratory therapists and three others were hired as surgical technicians. All of these new hires were the result of VOA TX’s efforts to develop strong relationships at CHI St. Luke’s.

As of early 2018, the new partners were planning a second PCT cohort, to begin in March 2018. With the initial success at CHI St. Luke’s as an example, VOA TXs’ leaders are ready to “take this show on the road” with other large employers that have high-volume, hard-to-fill health care jobs. Based on the success of United Way’s “warm introduction” to CHI St. Luke’s senior managers, VOA TX is using the same networking strategy to launch exploratory conversations with other employers. The HR Director at CHI St. Luke’s introduced VOA TX to the HR Director at Methodist Hospital, another large nonprofit hospital system in the Houston area. While the discussions with Methodist Hospital are still in the early stages, they quickly zeroed in on a need for RNs and LPNs. In December 2017, VOA TX held two lunch-and-learn events with Methodist Hospital where LPN training participants could learn more about Methodist’s organizational culture and the application and recruiting processes for new hires. Participants with an interest

in employment at Methodist Hospital have an opportunity to interview for openings after they earn their state occupational certification.

### **Intensive Career Coaching Keeps Participants Engaged with HPOG after Training Completion**

VOA TX's intensive career coaching is built on strong relationships, with two group or one-on-one meetings per week while participants are enrolled in training programs. For a typical 12-week certification training program, such as PCT, this pace results in around 25 group or individual meetings before an HPOG participant completes training. Coaches continue to provide ongoing assistance once on the job, mostly via virtual coaching. Post-placement supports provide an additional incentive for program graduates to stay engaged with their career coaches. For example, one Patient Care Technician hired by CHI St. Luke's in 2017 is receiving tuition assistance from VOA TX for her nursing degree, in order to move up a career ladder at CHI St. Luke's. Beyond such incentives, the VOA TX team cites the strong foundation and well-connected relationship built over many conversations and meetings that helps to ensure continued engagement and progress reporting with clients. "Participants like to brag to their coach about how well they are doing," said Bishop.

### **Lessons Learned about Building New Partnerships**

This case study about how HPOG's leaders at Volunteers of America Texas built a customized training program with its partners in a large hospital system offers several lessons.

- **The Value of a Warm Introduction with Senior Leaders:** Senior leaders in large institutions may be difficult to reach. They also can be guarded, since so many vendors knock on their doors to develop business with them. By securing an introduction from a trusted intermediary who knew both organizations, VOA TX was able to quickly establish the trust needed to work closely together and have an honest conversation about hard to fill positions, in order to better address this need.
- **Dedicate Consistent Staff Capacity to Partnership Development:** VOA TX dedicated significant staff time to build the array of partnerships needed to develop and deliver this custom program. LaSonya Bishop estimates that during the initial months of program development she devoted more than 50% of her time to forming the hospital partnership and organizing the contributions of other key partners in the pilot program. She advises others to "bring your educational partners on board with the need to

deliver holistic services, so that they support the changes needed to foster greater success for our students.”

- **Articulate HPOG’s Value Proposition:** In initial conversations, VOA TXs’ leaders communicated a value proposition that aligned with senior hospital leaders’ needs and interests. These included the programs’ holistic approach to help support participants in acquiring valued soft skills, and the continuing career coaching support once a participant is on the job. Also, by incorporating and coordinating its other HPOG partners’ contributions within the pilot program, VOA TX took a burden off the employer.
- **Engage Employer Stakeholders in Each Project Stage:** In the pilot phase, hospital officials were involved in each stage of the project, including candidate selection and training delivery, not just in the final recruiting stage. As Danita Wadley advised, “get employers on board and get them involved in the build out of plans. We look for employer partners who want to invest in plans together”.
- **Differentiate HPOG Participants from Other Candidates:** In addition to letting hospital officials know about ongoing coaching services for new hires from the HPOG program, the customized training plan equipped participants with workplace knowledge valued by the employer. These program features gave HPOG participants an edge in the hiring process, and transmitted important information for on-the-job success. The hospital’s recruiters ensured that pilot program participants received special attention during the hiring process. “It takes many touches in developing the extra shine needed to sparkle like a diamond,” concluded LaSonya Bishop, about the 100% employment success rate of the PCT pilot program.

# Case Study Appendix

## Outline for the CHI St. Luke's Workplace Culture Workshops

During the Patient Care Technician pilot training program, officials from CHI St. Luke's hospital delivered bi-weekly workshops on important workplace culture topics. These workshops gave participants an opportunity to learn about the attitude, qualities, and soft skills valued by the hospital and necessary for ongoing employment success. The topics are listed below, organized into four themes.

### 1. Hospital Core Values

- Reverence
- Integrity
- Compassion
- Excellence

### 2. Working With Peers

- Conflict Resolution
- Problem Solving
- Decision Making
- Team/Group Dynamics

### 3. Dealing with Patients

- Customer Satisfaction
- Difficult patients
- Helping Others
- Customer Needs

### 4. Stress Tolerance

- Relaxation Techniques
- Self Awareness
- De-Escalation
- Patience