

Testimony of  
Kerri Kubalak  
DCW Heroes Program Manager  
Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit  
before the  
Senate Health and Human Services Committee  
June 21, 2022

Good morning, Senator Brooks, and members of the Senate Health and Human Services Committee as well as Senator Ward and Senator Collette of the Senate Aging and Youth Committee. Thank you for having me.

My name is Kerri Kubalak from the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU). I have been the Program Manager of Direct Care Worker Heroes since January 2021. DCW Heroes is made possible through a grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Labor & Industry. Prior to this role, I was the Academic Specialist and Career Coordinator for the WATCH Project, a Health Profession Opportunity Grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

For six years, I have worked to recruit and support low-income individuals in northcentral and northeast Pennsylvania to enter and proceed along a Nursing and Healthcare Career Pathway. Frequently, for our participants, entry into nursing begins with becoming a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA). WATCH and DCW Heroes has recruited and guided nearly 2,000 individuals through training, credentialing, and the first few months of employment.

It's been both a challenging and rewarding experience to help these individuals enter a nursing career. About six months ago, those challenges increased significantly when Credentia assumed the contract for nurse aide credentialing. As I summarize these challenges below, please keep in mind that the training to become a CNA is less than four weeks, many have only a high school diploma or GED, and most are low-income.

- **Limited test dates and availability**
  - 15 Regional testing sites across Pennsylvania
  - 9 sites are in southeastern Pennsylvania and the Philadelphia area
  - Limited seats available at each test site due to COVID-19 restrictions
  - Waiting times of 2-4 months or longer to test
  
- **Credentia issues**
  - Information to the Nurse Aide Registry *not accurate*
    - + Students *without testing* have been issued certification
    - + Students *who failed* issued certification
  - Login issues with participant accounts
  - Payment processing issues (not registering; double billing; no 3<sup>rd</sup> party payment procedures)
  - Attestation form uploading issues

- Approval to schedule exam is not instant
  - Unable to search for availability by location
  - Unable to search written and skills exam availability simultaneously (first time test takers required to take exams on same day)
  - High rate of test cancellation
  - No notice of cancellation (often after participant is physically there)
  - Burdensome to reschedule after cancellation (week or longer)
- **How this affects Nurse Aide Trainees**
    - Significant time to schedule exams because of the inability to search by location or simultaneously
    - Take time off work without pay to travel to limited locations (2-3 hours on average to arrive at 8:00 am)
    - Travel to unfamiliar area creating stress prior to exam
    - Struggle to arrange transportation and childcare
    - Suffer learning loss due to time frame from training to testing
    - May need to schedule up to three times due to cancellations or exam failures

The impact of the challenges has adversely impacted our participants. I can tell you that DCW Heroes has seen an all-time high failure rate for first time test takers. In addition, there is a high attrition rate of individuals deciding not to pursue their credentials due to these issues. Finally, DCW Heroes Career Counselors have spent countless hours on the phone with Credentia attempting to resolve payment, scheduling, and exam issues for our participants. DCW Heroes participants are the fortunate ones; they have experienced and knowledgeable Career Counselors advocating on their behalf. How many other Pennsylvanians have simply given up trying to navigate these challenging technical obstacles?

As you know, Pennsylvania and our nation has a severe nursing shortage—at all levels from direct care workers through advanced registered nurses. Instead of creating barriers, we should be facilitating entry into the field. Over the past 18 months, DCW Heroes has helped hundreds of participants complete training, attain certifications, and become employed. Its average wage increase is \$6.90, helping participants and their families become more self-sufficient. Please see the attached DCW Heroes Infographic. The entire DCW Heroes team and CSIU is proud of our work.

We thank you, Madame Chair, and members of both Committees for whatever assistance you may provide to enable us to continue to not only train, but certify, nurse aides. Doing so will ensure more CNAs can make significant contributions to Pennsylvania's healthcare industry and, most importantly, their patients.

Thank you.

# DIRECT CARE WORKER HEROES



• SINCE JANUARY 1, 2021 •

**500+**

PARTICIPANTS



**900+**

TRAINING  
COMPLETIONS

**\$6.90**

AVERAGE WAGE  
INCREASE



## EMPLOYERS HIRING DCW HEROES PARTICIPANTS:

Bayada Pediatrics

Evangelical  
Community Hospital

Geisinger Medical Center

My Home Care, LLC

Strawberry Fields, Inc.

UPMC Susquehanna

Valley View Nursing Center

## DCW HEROES TRAINING OPTIONS INCLUDE:

Professional Care Worker  
Nurse Aide Training (CNA)  
CPR  
First Aid  
Mental Health Specialty  
Geriatrics Specialty  
Bias, Diversity, and Inclusion in Healthcare  
OSHA Certification for Healthcare Workers  
Bloodborne Pathogens First Aid  
Airborne Pathogens First Aid

## SERVICE AREA:



Tamika, DCW Heroes  
Participant



To hear about a  
participant story,  
scan the QR code.



DCW Heroes is a Direct Care Worker Training grant from the PA Department of Labor and Industry and is administered by the Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit.