

Our Caring Tradition

A Publication of **Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital**



**BACK TO
SCHOOL**

Investing in Our Community



SENTARA

Martha Jefferson Hospital

BACK TO SCHOOL with Sentara

Community generosity creates life-changing career opportunities

For years, Latanya Smith struggled to advance her career in health care. A wife and mother of three, the youngest of whom recently graduated from high school, Smith has held a part-time position on the Environmental Services team at Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital while working a full-time job as a personal care aide in assisted living at The Colonnades. She has long dreamed of advancing her nursing career by earning her credentials as a certified nursing assistant (CNA). »

“I always wanted to further my education, but I could never find the time or the money for CNA courses,” she says. “The CNA class costs about \$1,000, and it was just very hard to find that extra money.”

In June 2023, Smith got one step closer to her dream. She and 10 other students completed a free six-week preparatory course, paid for with community support through the Martha Jefferson Hospital Foundation.

“I encourage anybody who wants to be in the healthcare field to utilize this program,” she says. “Education is everything in the job market.”

Improving Community Health

Smith has passed this wisdom on to her daughter, Seirra Winn, community relationships coordinator for Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital’s newly created Career Pathways program. Winn comes to the

*Workforce
development
truly is
the Caring
Tradition
in action.*



program after serving as a community health worker for Sentara’s Starr Hill Health Clinic, where she developed programs to address food insecurity, access to care and other urgent needs identified through the Community Health Needs Assessment (CHNA).

The CHNA study, undertaken every three years by Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital, the University of Virginia and the Blue Ridge Health District, identifies major gaps in care and services that lead to health inequities in our region.

“For me, a job is a steppingstone to improved overall well-being,” says Winn. “It doesn’t stop at having the funds to put food on the table and secure safe, affordable housing.





It improves health equity and access to care. It's fundamental to a healthy life.”

Thanks to community generosity and Sentara's tuition assistance program, anyone with a high school diploma can find job opportunities at Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital and then receive full funding to earn a two-year, four-year or master's degree.

All offerings are tailored to the needs of the student, and many paths offer the opportunity to earn a salary while attending class, enabling individuals to advance their careers while supporting their families.

Workforce development programs are nothing new at Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital. Over the past decade, community generosity to the Martha Jefferson Hospital Foundation's Haden Nursing Institute and the Center for Clinical Education have helped more than 200 Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital employees earn degrees and deepen their professional expertise. Prompted by a shortage of healthcare workers that is straining capacity at hospitals and nursing homes nationally and here in the Blue Ridge, this year the Foundation expanded the scope of these programs to include recruitment efforts like the CNA program.

“Workforce development truly is the Caring Tradition in action,” says Kimberly Skelly, the Foundation's executive director. “We are improving health equity in our community while ensuring our capacity to continue to provide clinically excellent care.”

A Steppingstone to Success

For the June CNA class, students came from the hospital's Environmental Services team and from Westhaven, Charlottesville's oldest and largest public-housing community.

Winn collaborated with Shelly Bryant, Westhaven's program coordinator, to consider the individual needs of each participant and make sure they had the support they needed to complete the program. This meant not only removing cost and scheduling barriers, but also helping some participants arrange for reliable access to transportation and the internet.

“Sentara's goal is to meet people where they are and help them get to the next level,” says Winn.

The individualized support made the difference: All 11 students completed the class. They celebrated their achievement together in June at a moving graduation ceremony on the Sentara Martha Jefferson Hospital campus, with their families in attendance.

Bryant reflected on the sense of possibility that made it such a special day. “The Westhaven students want to get out of public housing,” she says. “Many of them want to own their own homes, work in leadership roles or start their own businesses. They want to be self-sufficient and independent. To have Sentara open that door for them is a blessing.”

All 11 students have since passed the CNA exam, and Sentara hopes to place most of these graduates in nursing positions that lead them toward work in the departments of their choice. Also, a new group of students started the CNA class in September.

Smith has applied for a full-time job at Sentara as a patient care technician, and she is now training to run electrocardiograms and other cardiac monitoring equipment. Her dream is to become a registered nurse. “I'm taking baby steps toward it, but that is my end goal,” she says. “This opportunity to advance my career has meant the world to me.”

 For more information, visit [mjhfoundation.org/workforce-development](https://www.mjhfoundation.org/workforce-development)