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Inner-city jobs

Year-old training program works

— A year ago this month, a challenging experiment began in Minneapolis' poorest neighborhood, Phillips. From bulging ranks of welfare recipients and other unemployed people, could simple entry-level training produce workers needed by Abbott Northwestern and Children's hospitals? The answer is in: Yes. When the current four-week class of 13 trainees finishes next week, graduates will number 106. Of the first 93 (most from Phillips and nearby Powderhorn), 78 got hospital jobs, with 75 percent retention.

The jobs may not be high-tech, but they do require upgraded skills — the thrust of a Citizens League labor-shortage study. In this case, the work skills that people with little or no work experience often lack: reliable job attendance, getting along with others, positive attitude and suitable dress.

Jobs, along with housing and safety, are important for neighborhood stability. That's why Allina (parent of Abbott Northwestern), Honeywell and other funders launched the \$500,000 program in partnership with Project for Pride in Living (PPL), a human-service agency that provides the training. It's worked "beyond expectations," says Nancy Gerber, a hospital human resources manager. It's worked so well, in fact,

that it will be extended another 18 months past the scheduled end in March.

This week, current trainees got actual job experience by shadowing regular hospital workers. Such experience complements lectures on such subjects as job applications, interviews and on-time attendance. Most entry jobs have been in housekeeping and food service. Two new workers got promotions and one won an employee recognition award. When graduates don't get jobs or fail to keep them, that often reflects poor attitudes, domestic problems, unstable day care and housing moves.

Because trainees often have less than an eighth-grade education, PPL recently began diverting some inadequately qualified applicants to math and reading programs at Summit Academy OIC. PPL also is stepping up its effort to find trainees with clerical or nursing-aide experience, skills that are in demand. PPL works closely with the hospitals to tie training to actual need, an important ingredient in success.

The program's extension is a demonstration of its success. But so are the dozens of workers taking home paychecks, earning benefits, being role models for their children and contributing to the inner city.