

EFFECTIVE RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES for HOME CARE

Prepared by The ICA Group

Introduction

Home care is among the highest growing occupations in the US, with demand expected to double during the next three decades as baby boomers age and life expectancies increase. Caregiver shortages loom as a major threat to business growth, however. Low wages, lack of benefits and the physical demands of the work discourage many people from joining the profession. Rural areas face additional challenges in attracting and retaining home care workers, due to lower population, further travel distances between clients, and higher poverty which makes clients (and providers) more dependent on public programs to pay for services.

For insights about other cooperative's recruitment and retention practices, ICA interviewed Circle of Life Caregiver Cooperative (COL) in Bellingham, Washington, and Home Care Associates (HCA) in Philadelphia, along with Community Living Alliance (CLA), a nonprofit in Madison, Wisconsin that emphasizes cooperation and worker empowerment in its service delivery model. ICA also attended a two- part webinar, "Recruitment: Strategies and Solutions," produced by the Institute for Professional Care Education (IPCE).

All three of the agencies ICA interviewed report turnover rates below the 2014 median of 61.6%, but their performance is somewhat mixed when compared with median turnover rates in their respective regions:

Home Care Agency	Workforce		Ratio: Direct Care to Admin	Turnover Rate	
	Direct Care	Admin		2015	Regional, 2014
Circle of Life Caregiver Coop	58	4	14.5	53.0%	50.9% (Pacific)
Home Care Associates	202	18	11.2	50.0%	52.2% (Northeast)
Community Living Alliance	950	67	14.2	35.6%	88.7% (Great Lakes)

Source of Regional Data: Private Duty Benchmarking Study, 2015 Edition, PHI

Of the three agencies ICA interviewed, Circle of Life is the only one that characterizes its market as rural. Community Living Alliance, which serves Dane County, estimates that 70% of its clients are in the City of Madison, 20% are in the surrounding suburbs, and 10% are in "rural" Dane County.

Key Success Factors

ICA's literature review found five main factors consistently associated with successful recruitment and retention of home care workers as follows:

- Increased wages
- Access to employer-sponsored health insurance
- Access to quality training
- Peer mentoring
- Opportunities for advancement

Summarized below are the practices of the three agencies ICA interviewed in relation to these factors.

Wages

HCA starts workers at \$8.00 per hour (110% of \$7.25 minimum wage) plus a transit pass. COL starts workers at \$11 per hour (116% of \$9.47 minimum wage) and pays higher hourly rates for shifts of less than 3 hours. CLA pays the County-mandated minimum living wage of \$11.66 (161% of \$7.25 minimum wage in Wisconsin), and noted that they compete with entry-level wages up to \$15 per hour for fast food workers and grocery baggers in their market.

(Todd Costello at CLA noted that 43% of home care workers in Wisconsin receive public assistance; see <http://www.seiuhcwi.org/category/uncategorized/homecare/>)

Health Insurance

Both CLA and HCA offer health insurance, although the bulk of CLA's workers are part-time (by choice, as family care providers on CLA's payroll) and therefore ineligible. HCA is finding that people often prefer a higher hourly wage in lieu of benefits, in some cases because it is advantageous for them to buy health insurance on the ACA Marketplace. Thus, HCA offers the option of a \$10.50 wage if people waive benefits. COL does not offer health insurance.

Other Benefits

All three agencies provide paid time off (in CLA's case, for full-time staff only). HCA and CLA offer dental insurance, and 401-k/403-b retirement plans. HCA also offers life insurance and disability insurance.

Quality Training

HCA used to do a 3 to 4 week group training session, and formerly hired only people they trained themselves. Now, due to the tight labor market they need to get people onboard fast, then train them on-the-job which is done over a 12-week period.

At COL, 80% of new hires have previous caregiver experience. For candidates who are not yet licensed, COL pays for half of the \$345 tuition for the state-required 75-hour training

and 100% of fees for the license application (\$85) and exam package (\$115). New hires train with another caregiver and the length of training time varies, based on the clients' complexity of care and caregivers' readiness to work solo.

COL also pays for all CEU training and license renewal costs. Caregivers can earn CEUs through six staff meetings held at Cascade Connections Training Center, with which COL partners. COL also pays conference fees, when applicable, and holds other occasional in-house training on non-credit topics, such as self-care, yoga and communications.

In addition, as co-op members, workers at HCA and COL receive training about reading financial statements and cooperative governance.

CLA provides an 8-hour training covering personal care basics including infection control, hand washing, universal precautions and body mechanics. They briefly reinforce soft skills at this time, especially the importance of calling in when unable to cover an assignment and setting appropriate boundaries with patients. An RN then provides one-on-one on-the-job training for specific client needs. CLA sometimes offers additional training about dealing with difficult clients, along with dementia and Alzheimer's care.

Neither HCA nor COL get any workforce or philanthropic funds for training, although HCA formerly did. CLA recently received a state Department of Workforce Development grant to fund its dementia and Alzheimer's training.

Peer Mentoring

At all three agencies, staff trainers during onboarding effectively serve as informal mentors. COL, in particular, emphasized the importance of these early relationships.

Opportunities for Advancement

HCA and COL caregivers may advance into administrative roles, or at COL are sometimes asked to help with payroll and other administrative tasks, which is viewed as a pleasant diversion from home care work in the field. Experienced caregivers at COL can lead care teams, and at HCA, may be assigned to daytime shifts (8 am to 4 pm) at a LIFE (PACE) day care program that HCA staffs, generally considered a "prime job."

Experienced caregivers at CLA can join its team of "On-Call" staff who earn a higher hourly wage (\$14.25) in exchange for guaranteed hours of 15 to 40 hours per week, depending on their availability. Sometimes this work includes companionship-type care such as accompanying someone to church, going out for dinner, or taking a drive in the country. In addition, CLA has a private-pay arm, and this care typically earns a higher rate.

Recruitment Practices

Outreach

HCA recruits home care workers through a combination of worker referrals, plus its website and job fairs. COL attracts about 60% of candidates via worker referrals, in

addition to its website. COL also posts jobs on the (state's) WorkSource job board and at the Community Food Co-op, of which they are a business partner.

CLA likewise ranks worker referrals as its top source of applicants, followed by job fairs and outreach to students at technical colleges and other post-secondary institutions. CLA specifically targets aspiring nurses, occupational therapists, pharmacists and special education majors. CLA also recruits Hmong and Hispanic caregivers through ethnic and neighborhood associations.

Both CLA and the IPCE webinar emphasized the move away from “desk” recruiting to ongoing community outreach as the new norm for successful recruitment. An example described by an IPCE presenter is her agency’s “Senior Assistance” training, offered free to the public, and targeted to people who desire to help seniors but lack experience, or may be caring for a loved one and cannot afford tuition for technical school courses.¹ The 20-hour training is held monthly and often attracts informal family caregivers who may then decide to enter the profession. Class size is typically six to 10 persons and the course covers topics such as grooming, fall prevention, infection control, bed making, bedpan use, and operation of hospital beds and other durable medical equipment used in a home setting. The agency’s CEU courses are likewise free and open to all in the community, and the agency brands its training using the title Center for Caregiver Excellence.

The IPCE webinar presenters summed up their recruiting advice into two maxims: “Always be recruiting,” and “Never lower your standards.”

Advertising

HCA advertises in the Metro (a free daily paper), and posts jobs on Career Builder and Indeed.com. They are getting ready to try mycnajobs.com as a new resource. COL advertises on Craigslist and at community colleges and the local university. CLA advertises on Monster.com, workforce system and technical college job boards, and care.com. CLA also promotes job opportunities with posters at community “hubs” such as the library or farmers market and said this is especially effective in rural areas.

In crafting ads, selling the mission and purpose of the business is considered important, stating that the business is looking for “exceptional caregivers” or “people who are passionate about caregiving,” for example. Another strong selling point may be the training and continuing education opportunities offered and the value placed on skill-building and career development. In online ads that link to the agency’s website, one might highlight its high caregiver satisfaction, using quotes from caregivers, noting the low turnover rate, and using images of caregivers that show them functioning as a team (at a staff meeting or Alzheimer’s walk, for example).

One presenter in the IPCE webinar suggested crafting a “personal ad” that describes individual clients, e.g., a person with Parkinson’s or a former motorcyclist who needs post-accident care, to which job seekers may feel a connection. Another has had great success

¹ Participants pay \$15 for a course workbook.

generating applications by “boosting” its Facebook posts for sharing beyond its “friends” list to other users targeted by location, interests, and demographics. The cost is modest (\$100 to \$200 range) and one can start small to test the effectiveness of this approach.

Cooperative Ownership Advantage

COL and HCA report that candidates have a generally positive impression of cooperatives and especially like the prospect of dividends. Still, it can take a while to instill the value of ownership among new workers, and some reject the idea of added responsibility. COL has found that some workers prefer a hierarchical structure because it is what they are used to, stating “they want a job, not ownership.” At HCA, 40% of eligible workers are members, and at COL, 100%.

Screening and Selection

COL and HCA review applications and do a phone screening prior to scheduling an interview. CLA offers both a paper and online application and seeks a minimum of six months’ continuous work experience in the last two years in any job (recently relaxed from one year as the labor market tightens).

Presenters in the IPCE webinar likewise use phone interviews to initially assess applicants’ experience and determine if they meet state licensing criteria. One noted that all personnel are trained to be able to respond to phone inquiries from potential candidates. Another mentioned their use of an online [pre-hire assessment](#) specific to caregiving (offered through the SilverStone Group).

All of the agencies use interviews to probe an applicant’s previous experience, whether informal or professional, and assess key skills and attributes sought, including maturity, stability and reliability (job history), ability to self-manage, and a caring heart. Other important qualities are strong communication skills (with both clients and peers), a willingness to learn, and particularly in the case of the co-ops, cooperation and teamwork.

Interview questions are often situational (“what would you do if ...”) or may ask, “what three characteristics should a great caregiver have?” or “tell me your core values or life priorities.” The question, “If you were hiring a caregiver for a loved one, what qualities would you look for?” will often elicit applicants’ description of themselves. A common basic “gut check” is whether the individual is “someone you would want to care for your own family member.”

COL noted that once individuals are hired, cross-training and communication with clients is used to further assess them during their three-month probation.

Onboarding

At COL, new workers train one-on-one with another caregiver until they are ready to work on their own. CLA workers likewise receive one-on-one training, and RN supervisors conduct “stay” interviews at the 8 to 9 week mark to prevent caregivers leaving at this

vulnerable time. HCA augments its initial 12 weeks of on-the-job training with in-person training in small cohorts, and shared experiences through staff meetings.

One IPCE presenter explained that new hires begin on an on-call basis, and are matched with new clients as these are added. When the agency has extra capacity, workers are used to assist in the office or help staff events.

Worker Engagement

Cooperative Advantage

HCA workers are eligible for membership after three months of employment. COL workers are on probation as caregivers for three months, and eligible for membership after six months. HCA feels that coop membership assists them in retaining quality employees, noting that “when people make the commitment, they stay. They become the biggest champions with other workers.” COL believes the coop model encourages problem-solving in the field and in groups. As owners, workers have enough autonomy to make consumer-friendly changes.

At HCA, half of the 12- person Board are worker owners. COL has a 7-member Board and all are worker owners. COL pays Board members a monthly stipend and HCA pays Board members hourly for their time to attend meetings.

HCA summarizes the main advantages of being worker-owned as “empowerment, mutual support and professional development.” COL echoes that the co-op model strongly encourages mutual accountability, and adds that worker-ownership creates “respectable jobs” in an industry that often disrespects workers.

Treating Staff as Customers

CLA views recruiting and scheduling caregivers as a “sales” function and believes exemplary customer service is the key to effective sales. Thus, at every touch point with caregivers, administrative staff thank them for their work as personal care workers, ask if they have any questions or concerns for follow-up, and confirm that they know how to reach their direct supervisor.

CLA regularly holds drawings for gift or gas cards for workers who accept extra shifts, has cookies available when they drop by the office, and provides information about “life supports,” such as tax credits that may benefit them. Each week the CEO takes 10 caregivers out to lunch to hear from them personally and share information about the organization’s advocacy efforts on their behalf. Annually, they award a Caregiver of the Year. In sum, CLA continually acts to recognize and affirm caregivers’ contribution.

