

# Norwalk ACTS x Social Impact Partners Opportunity Youth Healthcare Training Pilot Evaluation

July – December 2024

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## Executive Summary →

The Healthcare Training Pilot Program, organized by Norwalk ACTS (NACTS), was launched to support workforce development by training Opportunity Youth (OY) 18-26-year-olds from the Norwalk Housing Authority without established college or career paths. This program focused on two high-demand entry-level roles with career paths in the healthcare sector: Patient Care Technicians (PCTs), a clinical role, and Patient Access Liaisons (PALs), a non-clinical administrative role. This program provided achievement coaching, paid STRIVE job readiness training, paid on-the-job training, and supportive services. The initiative brought together multiple stakeholders, including Nuvance Health-Norwalk Hospital (NH), the City of Norwalk, Norwalk Housing Authority (NHA), Social Impact Partners (SIP), and several nonprofit partners such as Open Doors - CT Economic Opportunity Hub, Youth Business Initiative (YBI), and Career Resources Inc (CRI) to address employment barriers and support youth through training and into the workforce.

The initiative received critical support through a \$75,000 grant from Amplify M&T Bank and Norwalk Hospital Foundation funding. Modeled on successful national workforce initiatives such as [Baltimore Promise's Grads2Careers](#), the program aligns with the [Fairfield County Community Foundation's report on equitable pathways for Opportunity Youth](#).

The pilot (*July–December 2024*) focused on recruitment, job readiness training, and hands-on work experiences. Participants completed two weeks of paid STRIVE job readiness training and six to eight weeks of on-the-job training at NH, culminating in potential employment opportunities for successful candidates. This report examines pilot outcomes, successes, challenges, lessons learned, and recommendations for moving forward.



## Key Program Components →

The program's success relied on a comprehensive support structure:

- **Paid STRIVE Job Readiness Training:** Practical preparation for workplace success
- **Paid On-the-Job Training:** Real-world healthcare experience at Norwalk Hospital
- **Supportive Services:** Assistance addressing barriers like transportation and connecting to supportive services
- **Achievement Coaching:** Ongoing guidance tailored to each participant's needs

## Program Outcomes →

- **79** individuals expressed interest in the program
- **43** individuals were selected for interviews
- **20** candidates were selected for the STRIVE Job Readiness Training
- **15** candidates were selected (**10 PCTs and 5 PALs**)
- **14** candidates proceeded to OJT opportunities
- **11** participants completed training
- **8** participants were deemed work ready
- **8** participants received hiring commitments and secured full-time positions at Norwalk Hospital

## Key Successes →

- **NACTS as a Convener and the Power of Collective Impact:** NACTS effectively orchestrated Norwalk's workforce development ecosystem, uniting diverse stakeholders. This collaborative approach ensured participants had access to necessary resources and aligned all partners on program goals.
- **Targeted Outreach:** The data agreement with NHA and Norwalk Public Schools (NPS) enabled targeted outreach to Opportunity Youth
- **Trusted Community Messengers:** Utilizing Youth Business Initiative (YBI) and Career Resources Inc (CRI) for recruitment proved highly effective, leveraging their established community trust

- **Employer Engagement:** Nuvance Health demonstrated flexibility by adapting hiring practices and offering work-based learning, even considering candidates with past challenges
- **STRIVE Job Readiness Training:** Participants praised the training for providing practical skills, community building, and boosting confidence
- **Achievement Coach Impact:** The Achievement Coach was crucial in providing personalized support.
- **Nuvance Health's Career Readiness Academy:** Nuvance Health will incorporate the learnings from this pilot into its new Career Readiness Academy, ensuring sustainable workforce development practices

## Amplify Fund Impact and Program Expansion

Thanks to the support from the M&T Amplify Fund, the Healthcare Training Pilot Program has achieved significant success, with eight opportunity youth from the Norwalk Housing Authority now employed full-time at Norwalk Hospital. The program's impact extends beyond the initial pilot:

- **Model Scaling:** Nuvance Health is now scaling this model internally across their network, incorporating lessons learned from our pilot.
- **Additional Funding:** Nuvance Health has secured additional private philanthropic funding, including support from Norwalk Hospital Foundation, National Fund for Workforce Solutions, and other local foundations.
- **Organizational Impact:** The pilot was one of the largest training initiatives ever tested at Norwalk Hospital and required overcoming internal barriers, such as logistical and operational challenges and union negotiations. These lessons demonstrated the value and impact of our model.

## Future Plans

Nuvance Health plans to launch the Career Readiness Academy this fall, with Norwalk ACTS continuing to serve as a strategic partner focused on recruitment.

## Challenges and Lessons Learned →

- **Accelerated Timeline:** The rapid implementation created pressure points and affected program planning
- **Employer Administrative Hurdles:** Complex HR processes and union negotiations caused delays and required additional stipends
- **Transportation Barriers:** Some participants faced challenges accessing training and work sites
- **Achievement Coach Transition:** The initial coach's departure disrupted services and highlighted the need for better documentation and supervision
- **Job Placement Gaps:** The need for candidates to apply after their occupational training created a gap in employment and did not guarantee employment

## Recommendations for Future Implementation →

- **Extend Planning Time:** Allow more time for coordination and planning
- **Strengthen Employer Agreements:** Establish clear HR onboarding pathways and commit to specific job openings
- **Explore Temporary Staffing Models:** Implement a temporary staffing model to streamline the transition to permanent employment
- **Refine Communication Systems:** Create clear communication protocols for real-time tracking and problem-solving
- **Enhance Support Roles:** Strengthen the Achievement Coach role with standardized documentation and supervision
- **Improve Transportation Options:** Partner with transit systems to provide reliable transportation
- **NACTS Staffing capacity:** NACTS needs resources to support staffing to continue the high level of oversight required

## Conclusion →

The Healthcare Training Pilot Program demonstrated the power of collective impact in supporting Opportunity Youth. The program's innovative approach to breaking down barriers to healthcare employment provides a valuable model for future workforce development initiatives. However, successful replication will require careful attention to NACTS staffing capacity, administrative processes, and sustainable funding mechanisms. The success of this pilot is evident in Nuvance Health's decision to incorporate learnings into their new Health Career Academy. This ensures the program has a lasting impact beyond the initial scope. By continuing this partnership and expanding the model with additional philanthropic support, NACTS can create sustainable pathways to healthcare careers for opportunity youth in the Norwalk community.

