



ABCD Press

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***SkillWorks* Awards \$1 Million Grant to ABCD to Educate Community Health Workers**

April 13, 2007 (Boston, Mass.) – *SkillWorks: Partners for a Productive Workforce* has awarded a three-year, nearly \$1 million grant to Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD) and a coalition of employer partners to implement new training and education programs for community health workers.

The grant will fund the Community Health Worker Initiative of Boston, a 31-organization partnership led by ABCD, which is working to increase employer investment in training and promotion, develop recognized career pathways, and establish a recognized post-secondary certificate program for community health workers. The funding was prompted by a recent Massachusetts Department of Public Health report showing that crucial community health centers lack needed staff.

“The work that ABCD and the employer partners are doing to foster a viable workforce with community health workers is essential to the populations these workers serve, and to the economic development of the region as a whole,” said Loh-Sze Leung, Director of SkillWorks. “The education and training, career coaching, and certificate development that this program is providing are important to creating a community health worker workforce that can advance in wages and skills. And with a more skilled community health workforce comes a healthier public, especially for populations who struggle to get information and access to quality health care.”

The Massachusetts Department of Public Health noted that community health workers are an essential, if overlooked, part of the public health system because they improve access to health care for underserved populations. However, despite their importance, SkillWorks’ research found that community health workers are often not well-rewarded, job tenure is unstable, and turnover is high. Without investment in the advancement of community health workers, the public health system could suffer and underserved populations will go without critical, life-saving information.

“This grant represents an outstanding investment in our low-income communities,” said ABCD President/CEO Robert Coard. “We are grateful to *SkillWorks*, the Boston Foundation and other

fundors for recognizing the importance of this initiative and to the Massachusetts Department of Health for paving the way. We are delighted to be working with all of our partners to advance the agenda of community health workers on the front lines of preventive care who play such a key role in promoting the health and well-being of our disenfranchised residents. They are central players in public health and antipoverty efforts to narrow the painful health disparities gap that plagues the inner-city.”

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The Community Health Worker Initiative of Boston is divided into two components. The first, which is focused on creating enhanced career opportunities for community health workers, provides education and training to workers; helps create an enhanced career path for workers through one-to-one coaching, career plan development, and by providing assistance to accessing training and education programs; and supports the expansion of the certificate program at the Community Health Education Center in Boston. The second component centers on policy work and systems change advocacy, by working with employers to develop career ladders for community health workers and implement best practice in their human resource development. Additionally, the initiative is working with government agencies and public and private organizations to increase funding for community health workers.

In 2006, SkillWorks provided \$50,000 to the CHW initiative to help plan the program. As lead partner, ABCD coordinated the planning and the implementation of the program. Employer representatives include Whittier Street Health Center; East Boston Neighborhood Health Center; The PACT Project at Partners in Health/Brigham and Women’s Hospital; Department of Public Health’s Refugee and Immigrant Health Program; Latino American Health Institute; Boston Housing Authority; Boston Private Industry Council; Morgan Memorial Goodwill Industries/Boston Career Link; JobNet; DotWell; Codman Square Health Center and Dorchester House Multi-Service Center, as well as ABCD’s own health division. Education and training partners include Community Health Education Center; Bunker Hill Community College; Urban College of Boston; MassBay Community College; University of Massachusetts Boston; World Education, Inc; The Medical Foundation; Creative Workplace Learning; JFY NetWorks; SEIU Training and Upgrading Fund and Ben Franklin Institute of Technology. Systems change advocacy partners include the Massachusetts Association of Community Health Workers; Massachusetts Public Health Association; Massachusetts League of Community Health Centers; Massachusetts Department of Public Health; Center for Community and Health Education Research and Service, Inc and 1199 SEIU.

The SkillWorks grant to ABCD of \$330,000 per year for three years is part of its Community Health Worker Advancement Initiative, which is funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation awarded SkillWorks a grant of nearly \$1.7 million in 2005 to expand its career advancement programs to frontline health care workers.

“We are excited to support SkillWorks’ Community Health Worker Advancement Initiative,” said Sally Petrucci George, program officer at the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation. “As an organization, we have made a strong commitment to supporting frontline workers, which include community health workers. SkillWorks’ efforts have been very successful and can provide a national model for workforce development. We are pleased to be a part of their efforts.”

SkillWorks, the largest public/private investment in workforce development in Boston’s history, is an economic development program that is working with employers to address workforce challenges in the Boston area. The initiative seeks to change the way employers hire and promote entry-level workers from the city’s neighborhoods. It is an ambitious effort on the part of philanthropy, government, community organizations, unions, and employers to create a workforce development system that helps low-skill, low-income residents move to family-sustaining jobs and helps employers find and retain skilled employees.

Workforce Partnerships are central to the SkillWorks strategy for changing how employers hire and promote Boston's entry-level workers. These partnerships of employers, community organizations, and training providers receive large-scale, multi-year grants to offer an array of educational and other resources that help workers attain career-oriented first jobs and opportunities to advance. Currently, five partnerships receive SkillWorks funding to help workers in the health care, hospitality, service, and automotive industries move into family-sustaining jobs.

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SkillWorks is funded by: the Annie E. Casey Foundation; the Bank of America Charitable Gift Fund and the Frank W. and Carl S. Adams Memorial Fund, Bank of America, N.A., Trustee; Boston 2004; the Boston Foundation; the City of Boston's Neighborhood Jobs Trust; the Commonwealth of Massachusetts; the Jessie B. Cox Charitable Trust; the Hyams Foundation; the John Merck Fund; the Paul and Phyllis Fireman Foundation; the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation; the Rockefeller Foundation; State Street Foundation; the William Randolph Hearst Foundation; and United Way of Massachusetts Bay.

ABCD serves more than 100,000 low-income Boston and Greater Boston residents annually through its central offices and a decentralized neighborhood network of Neighborhood Service Centers (NSCs). ABCD programs and affiliations include Fuel Assistance; Child Care Services; Head Start; Child Care Choices of Boston; Education; Career Development; Housing and Homelessness Services; Health Services; Family Planning; Urban College of Boston; University Alternative High School; William J. Ostiguy High School for youngsters with substance and alcohol abuse problems; Weatherization; Foster Grandparents; a Holiday Toy Drive; Elder Services; Intergenerational Programs; management services for city, state, federal and private sector payroll deduction campaigns, an Independent Living Program serving people with disabilities; advocacy and consumer services.

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