

Section 7: Successes and Challenges

7.1 Description – Brief story of student success that illustrates the power of ABE programming

Success Story: Assurealle M Williams

Date: 9/12/2025

Enrollment: 02/13/2025-9/10/2025

Service Model: Healthcare (CNA)

Funding: OIC

AMW is 38 years old and resides in Ramsey County. She identifies as Black or African American and self-attests that the annual household income is below 200% FBG. She is a single mother raising two children, ages 8 and 6. She worked as a childcare teacher for seven years before deciding to pursue a new career. AMW discovered Hmong American Partnership's (HAP) training program while searching online for career pathways training. She took the opportunity and enrolled in the Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) training on February 13, 2025.

To enroll in the CNA training, participants are required to take a Reading and Math assessment and score at High Intermediate ABE or higher reading level. AMW took the test on February 26, 2025, and scored one level below the requirement. Since she has been out of school for some time, test-taking proved to be a challenge. To retest, she needed to complete a minimum of 40 hours of the ABE Literacy course. She began attending classes on March 3 and completed the required 40 hours on March 21. On March 25, she retested and achieved the required reading level to enroll in the CNA course. She was enrolled in the summer CNA course at HAP Academy OIC. While waiting for her CNA class to begin, she enrolled in a Career Readiness course to ensure she would be well prepared for work.

One of the challenges she faced was time management, as she had to balance online course assignments with caring for her children. With support from the CNA instructor, ABE instructor, and student advisor, she completed and submitted all her assignments. Although she did not meet the original deadlines, after she communicated her situation, the CNA instructor and student advisor worked with her to establish a schedule and gave her additional time to submit her assignments.

She dedicated a few hours each day to studying and preparing for her CNA certification exam. On September 2, 2025, she achieved her short-term educational goals by completing the CNA training and earning her certification. She was proud of her hard work and dedication and shared

the good news with a staff member at the Salvation Army, where she volunteers every Wednesday and utilizes available resources. In recognition of her efforts, the staff rewarded her with a new laptop.

During the program, her Student Advisor supported her in retaking the Nursing Assistant Knowledge exam. The cost of the CNA retake was covered by alternative funding, as OIC funds have been exhausted. The Student Advisor coordinated with the CNA instructor to establish a timeline for her to complete her missing assignments. Based on the Student Advisor's recommendation, she also met with the Bridge instructor to navigate Canvas and review her assignments.

On September 8, 2025, AMW accepted a full-time CNA position with Moments Hospice under Guardian Hospice, LLC. She will earn \$21.00 per hour with benefits, and her overtime rate will be \$31.50 per hour. Her start date is September 22, 2025. She looks forward to applying the professional growth she gained from the program in her new role.

The advice she would like to share with future students is: *“Try to meet deadlines, and communicate with your instructor if you need more time. Never give up, even if you miss a deadline. Failure only happens when you stop trying.”*

7.2 Most Pressing Challenges

HAP Academy OIC continues to face several pressing challenges that impact program capacity, staff sustainability, and the ability to fully meet student demand. One of the most significant challenges is limited funding relative to the scope and intensity of services provided. While the program has successfully leveraged multiple grant sources to support career pathway programming and wraparound services, these resources are often restricted in use and time-limited. This creates ongoing uncertainty in sustaining key positions, expanding programming, and maintaining the level of support required to serve students with significant barriers.

A related challenge is staff capacity and workload. The program operates with a relatively small team responsible for delivering instruction, case management, student support services, and workforce connections. As enrollment and program offerings have grown—particularly in high-demand areas such as healthcare, IT, and business—staff are managing increasingly high caseloads and competing responsibilities. This is especially evident among student advisors, who provide intensive case management and support services to address complex student needs. High caseloads can impact the ability to provide individualized support at the level necessary to ensure persistence and successful outcomes.

Additionally, the program serves a student population with significant and ongoing barriers, including housing instability, transportation challenges, childcare needs, mental health, and

financial insecurity. While wraparound supports are in place, the demand for these services continues to exceed available resources, placing additional strain on staff and program systems.

To address these challenges, HAP Academy OIC continues to explore opportunities to diversify funding streams, strengthen partnerships, and improve operational efficiencies. This includes pursuing additional grant funding, refining program structures to maximize staff capacity, and leveraging partnerships to expand access to support services. However, the program recognizes that these challenges are ongoing and require sustained attention to ensure long-term program stability and continued high-quality service delivery.

7.3 Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

HAP Academy OIC is a Hmong-led nonprofit organization with a mission to empower and uplift a diverse community of learners through equitable access to education, workforce training, and career pathway opportunities. The consortium's vision for diversity, equity, and inclusion is rooted in ensuring that individuals from historically underserved communities—including communities of color, immigrant and refugee populations, and individuals experiencing economic hardship—have meaningful access to high-quality programming and the support necessary to succeed. This vision is embedded across all levels of the organization and is shared among staff, providers, and students through program design, staffing practices, and a strong emphasis on culturally responsive service delivery.

This commitment is reflected in the consortium's implementation of targeted and inclusive strategies. HAP Academy OIC offers programming specifically designed for diverse populations, including English Language Learners and New Americans, with integrated instruction that supports language development alongside career training. Programs such as CNA for New Americans are intentionally structured to meet the needs of immigrant learners entering high-demand fields. In addition, the organization prioritizes wraparound support services—including assistance with transportation, childcare, housing, and food security—to address systemic barriers that disproportionately impact the communities served. Staff are reflective of the communities they serve and are equipped to provide culturally competent instruction, advising, and case management.

As a result of these efforts, HAP Academy OIC has strengthened its ability to engage, retain, and support students from diverse backgrounds, leading to increased participation in career pathway programs and improved outcomes in credential attainment and employment. Students experience a more inclusive and supportive learning environment where their cultural identities and lived experiences are recognized as strengths. Moving forward, the consortium will continue to build on this foundation by deepening its equity-focused practices, expanding culturally responsive programming, and ensuring that diversity, equity, and inclusion remain central to all aspects of program development and delivery.

7.4 Professional Development in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

HAP Academy OIC is committed to ongoing professional development in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to ensure that staff are equipped to effectively serve a diverse student population. The consortium participates in and sponsors DEI-focused training opportunities through state ABE professional development systems, workforce development partners, and community-based organizations. These trainings emphasize culturally responsive instruction, implicit bias awareness, trauma-informed practices, and strategies for supporting English Language Learners and New Americans in career pathway programs.

Participation in DEI professional development is guided by staff roles and program needs. Instructional staff, student advisors, and leadership are prioritized for training opportunities that directly impact teaching practices, student engagement, and service delivery. At the same time, the consortium promotes broad participation across all staff to ensure that equity and inclusion are integrated throughout the organization rather than isolated to specific roles. Leadership also encourages ongoing learning through team discussions, shared resources, and internal reflection on equity-focused practices.

Lessons learned from DEI professional development are actively applied across instructional and support service areas. Instructors incorporate culturally responsive teaching strategies and adapt the curriculum to better reflect students' backgrounds and experiences. Student advisors apply trauma-informed and culturally aware approaches in case management and support services. Program design continues to evolve to better meet the needs of diverse learners, including the integration of language support within career training and the expansion of targeted programming such as CNA for New Americans. Additionally, staff use insights from DEI training to strengthen communication, build trust with students, and create a more inclusive and supportive learning environment.

Through ongoing professional development and intentional application of DEI practices, HAP Academy OIC continues to strengthen its ability to serve its diverse community effectively and equitably.

7.5 Procedure for Reporting Discrimination and Equity Concerns

HAP Academy OIC maintains a formal grievance process to ensure that all students and staff have a clear, accessible pathway to report concerns related to discrimination, harassment, or other equity issues. The process is structured in multiple levels to support timely resolution while providing opportunities for escalation when needed.

- **Level 1:** Concerns are first reported to the Program Manager, who is responsible for reviewing the issue, gathering information, and working toward an initial resolution.

- **Level 2:** If the concern is not resolved or requires further review, it is elevated to the Director for additional investigation and determination.
- **Level 3:** If necessary, the concern may be escalated to the Chief Academic Officer, who provides final review and resolution.

This structured approach ensures that concerns are addressed promptly, fairly, and consistently, with appropriate oversight at each level.

Staff and students are made aware of these procedures through multiple channels, including program orientation, student handbooks, staff onboarding, and ongoing communication from program leadership. Information about the grievance process is communicated clearly to ensure that all individuals understand their rights and the steps available to report concerns. HAP Academy OIC is committed to maintaining a safe, inclusive, and respectful environment, and this process supports accountability and transparency in addressing equity-related issues.