



Advancing Opportunities for Justice-Involved Individuals

Brooklyn Communities Collaborative Workforce Development Program
2023 - 2024

Brooklyn Communities Collaborative (BCC), a New York State not-for-profit, promotes health equity in Brooklyn through community-driven initiatives. Founded in 2019, BCC works to leverage the combined financial power of anchor institutions and local community resources to address health-related social needs. By empowering communities and fostering partnerships across sectors, BCC is helping to overcome the complex and systemic challenges that disproportionately affect Brooklyn's underserved neighborhoods – whether it's supporting housing stability, advancing economic empowerment, expanding care management services, or strengthening community-based organizations (CBOs) in the area.

Workforce development is one essential component of BCC's overall mission to combat systemic disinvestment in Brooklyn. BCC focuses on localizing and diversifying hiring practices, with an emphasis on education, job training, and advocacy programs that create meaningful employment opportunities for local residents. Through partnerships with healthcare organizations, educational institutions, and community-based organizations (CBOs), BCC creates tailored workforce development programs that address urgent staffing needs while simultaneously expanding access to economic opportunities for Brooklynites.

BCC's workforce development model unites three critical groups: community members seeking employment, organizations providing workforce training and certification programs, and anchor institutions – large institutional partners facing workforce shortages. This collaborative approach fills high-priority jobs, increases economic opportunity for Brooklynites, and bridges the gap between employment training and opportunity.

KEY TAKEAWAYS



- **Training:** Two cohorts of 20 individuals each, all justice-involved, trained as Community Health Workers and Environmental Services Technicians.
- **Partners:** Kingsborough Community College, STRIVE, Bedford-Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation.
- **Graduation:** 90% overall graduation rate.
- **Placement:** 70% of graduates were placed in full-time employment.
- **Participant Feedback:** Participants reported increased confidence and a sense of hope post-incarceration.
- **Employer Feedback:** Employers expressed overall satisfaction with program graduates post-hire.
- **Supported By:** \$200,000 grant from the Affinity Legacy Community Grant Program for healthcare workforce development.



BACKGROUND



Unemployment for previously incarcerated populations is 5 times higher than the general population's, yet studies show employment is critical to reducing recidivism and aiding community reintegration. In Brownsville and East New York, two historically underserved communities in Brooklyn, the rate of incarceration is 3.5 times and 2 times the citywide average, respectively. New York State releases about 25,000 inmates each year, with more than half re-incarcerated within three years. This puts New York among the states with the worst recidivism rates in the nation.

In 2023 BCC was awarded \$200,000 from the Affinity Legacy Foundation for Advancing Opportunities for Justice-Involved Individuals, an 18-month workforce development pilot program supporting justice-involved individuals from Brownsville and East New York. The program supports re-entry and reintegration while strengthening the local healthcare workforce through training, mentorship, and skill development. The program also received support from the Altman Foundation and the New York Community Trust.

PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIPS



BCC worked closely with educational anchors and hospital employer partners on curriculum development and refinement, in addition to job placement and retention support. BCC also hosted joint convenings for training, hiring, and recruitment partners throughout the planning phase for the Advancing Opportunities for the Justice-Involved Individuals (AOJI) program.

BCC's healthcare partners, including Maimonides Health and One Brooklyn Health, identified shortages of Care Navigators (CN), Certified Recovery Peer Advocates (CRPA), and Environmental Services Technicians (EVS).

BCC determined that training a cohort of Community Health Workers (CHW) and a cohort of Environmental Services Technicians (EVS) would optimize job opportunities for participants. CHWs can serve as both CNs and CRPAs, and New York State made CHW services reimbursable under Medicaid beginning in 2024, increasing employment opportunities for program graduates. In addition, BCC's hospital partners consistently report difficulty hiring for EVS positions.

- **Community Health Workers (CHWs)** serve as a bridge between patients and the healthcare system, improving access to care and health outcomes, addressing social needs like housing and healthy food access, and lowering healthcare costs.
- **Environmental Services Technicians (EVS)** ensure that healthcare facilities are clean, organized, and well-kept. In addition to maintaining patient rooms, common areas, and administrative spaces, the EVS role can encompass many tasks that maintain the function of a hospital – from patient safety and support for clinical staff to patient transportation and dietary aides.

Studies have shown that when members of the healthcare workforce reflect the population of the communities they serve, patient experience and health outcomes notably improve. The curriculum of the CHW training, in particular, incorporated these proven results and aimed to instill in participants a culturally sensitive, effective approach to providing care. Both roles (CHW and EVS) contribute directly or indirectly to improving patient health experience and outcomes.

By considering healthcare institutions' feedback on their staffing needs, BCC's unique workforce approach bridges the gap between the hiring needs of anchor institutions and the rates of unemployment among the communities they serve.

RECRUITMENT, SKILL DEVELOPMENT, AND JOB READINESS



BCC partnered with **Bedford Stuyvesant Restoration Corporation**, an organization committed to racial equity and closing the wealth gap in Central Brooklyn, to conduct recruitment and placement support, for recruitment to both cohorts. Recruitment efforts successfully attracted 82 applicants for the CHW training and 150 applicants for the EVS training. Of the total applicants, 40 individuals – 20 for each program – were accepted.

Community Health Worker training partner - Kingsborough Community College, an organization with a proven track record in healthcare workforce development. Training took place from October to November 2023.

Environmental Services Technicians training partner - STRIVE, a leading nonprofit specializing in job training and career development. Training took place from May to July 2024 at SUNY Downstate.

The career readiness curriculum was a rigorous training program designed to equip trainees with essential skills for employment, long-term retention, and economic mobility, with covered skills including self-awareness, self-improvement, self-discovery, work readiness, professional development, and industry-contextualized training. The occupational skills development credentials portion of the program included first aid, CPR, AED, basic life support, blood borne pathogens, OSHA 10-hour general industry, and patient customer service. Resume writing and mock interviews were also provided to support participants' employment search.

All program costs were covered by BCC, and participants received a MetroCard and a \$1,000 stipend to support cost-of-living needs during the program.

"This pilot was more than a training program—it was a true pathway to economic mobility and dignity for justice-impacted Brooklyn residents who were ready for a second chance. Through a powerful collaboration with Brooklyn Communities Collaborative and Maimonides Health, we brought our proven STRIVE career readiness curriculum to individuals too often overlooked by traditional workforce systems. By involving healthcare employers from the beginning—not just at the point of hire—we created a model that's responsive to industry needs and rooted in equity. This partnership not only helped our graduates secure meaningful employment, but also demonstrated what's possible when workforce development centers justice, collaboration, and employer engagement from day one."

— Ayesha George, Executive Director of STRIVE New York

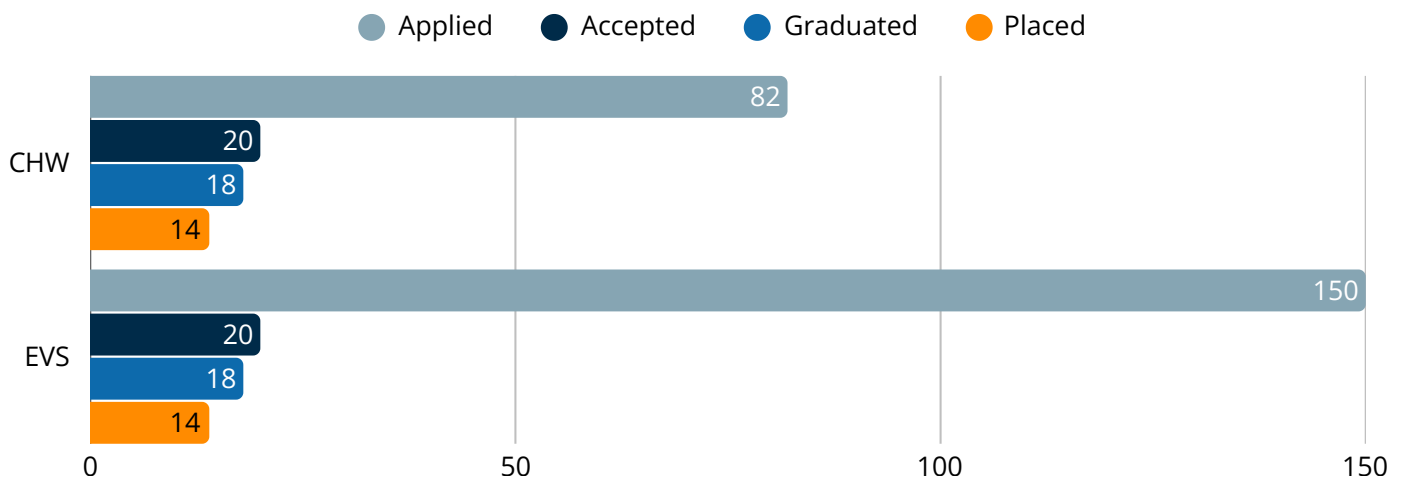
GRADUATION, CAREER DEVELOPMENT, AND PLACEMENT



The CHW and EVS training programs achieved a combined graduation rate of 90%, with 18 out of 20 participants completing each program. Graduates were connected to placement opportunities and received support services like mock interviews, dress-for-success tactics, and resume assistance.

Six months after program completion, 78% of graduates across both tracks had secured employment. This outcome reflects the effectiveness of a multi-pronged job placement strategy that included job fairs, virtual and in-person interviews, and individualized follow-up to encourage interview attendance and sustained engagement. Participants were also encouraged to maintain ongoing relationships with instructors, program staff, and peers, reinforcing long-term support and community connections beyond the training period.

In total, 36 trainees graduated from the program, with 28 going on to secure employment.



OUTCOMES



Trained CHWs secured positions at West Hab, Baltic Street, Covenant House, CAMBA, Fairview Nursing Home, RiseBoro Community Partnerships, and more in a range of community-facing roles, including:

- **Peer Specialists** assist with clients' social needs, working in conjunction with social services teams to provide support and appropriate services.
- **Forensic Peer Specialists** utilize their own history with the legal system and/or mental health recovery to deliver related services. These services reduce recidivism and help clients with reentry into the community.
- **Case Managers** assess individual or families' needs, plan a course of action, and link clients to services including housing support, primary and specialty care providers, food programs, and more.
- **Peer Bridgers** develop supportive peer relationships and provide one-on-one and/or group support during hospitalization, in addition to short-term support services following discharge.

Graduates trained as EVS's secured positions at Brookdale Hospital, Brooklyn Hospital Center, the NYC Parks Department, and VOCAL NYC, a harm reduction nonprofit.



PROGRAM LEARNINGS



One of the primary challenges faced by both cohorts was balancing the demands of the program with personal responsibilities like childcare and shift jobs. Time management was also a challenge for some participants. Once they graduated, some participants also reported difficulties adjusting to the professional standards and expectations in a corporate environment.

On the program side, HR staff turnover during the hiring period and the financial constraints facing safety-net healthcare institutions delayed some cohort members' job search and placement opportunities.

Despite these challenges, employer feedback gathered at 30- and 60-days post-hire reflected overall satisfaction with the program and employees.

The AOJI program helped justice-involved individuals build skills and realize the goal of attaining employment during the challenging time post-re-entry. Studies show that unemployment for previously incarcerated populations is five times higher than the general population's, demonstrating the need for supportive programs.

AOJI's outcomes, with just one of the program's participants rearrested, mirrors studies showing that recidivism rates tend to decrease for those who have obtained secured employment.

Through this pilot project, BCC and its community partners helped justice-involved individuals find gainful employment while addressing some of the most critical challenges currently faced in healthcare hiring.

ABOUT BROOKLYN COMMUNITIES COLLABORATIVE



Brooklyn Communities Collaborative (BCC) is a not-for-profit based in New York that works with local institutions and stakeholders to address longstanding health inequities in the borough. BCC was founded in 2019 with the goal of leveraging the financial power of anchor institutions and community resources to address the economic factors that improve the social determinants of health – whether it's supporting housing stability, advancing economic empowerment, expanding care management services, or strengthening CBOs in the area. BCC builds upon years of collaborative efforts with anchor institutions and community partners in Brooklyn.



CONTACT US

www.brooklyncommunities.org
info@brooklyncommunities.org