



Recruitment and Retention Efforts at State Supported Living Centers

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1. Introduction

Employees at the Health and Human Services (HHS) state supported living centers (SSLCs) work closely with the individuals in residence, their families or guardians, regulatory agencies, and the public. The work is fast-paced and can be stressful, but it also provides a great deal of satisfaction for employees to know they are enhancing the lives of individuals served at the SSLCs.

HHS aims to be proactive in hiring and retaining qualified staff who will ensure services are performed in accordance with the federal conditions of participation for intermediate care facilities for individuals with intellectual disabilities or related conditions (ICF/IID), the United States Department of Justice settlement agreement, and other relevant operational standards and practices.

During the 2016-2017 biennium, the Department of Aging and Disability Services was dissolved and all agency functions were transferred to HHS. The SSLCs and state psychiatric hospitals are now under one division. This opportunity has enabled facilities with similar recruitment and retention challenges to share resources and best practices. The division's name was changed in June 2018 from State Operated Facilities to the Health and Specialty Care System to assist with staff recruitment.

Additionally, as a result of the transformation of HHS, the ICF/IID component of the Rio Grande state center was transferred from Texas Department of State Health Services management to HHS SSLC management on April 1, 2018. Transfer of management activities, including recruitment and retention of staff, are ongoing, and therefore efforts related to the Rio Grande SSLC are not reflected in this report. HHS will include Rio Grande SSLC in future SSLC staffing reports.

2. Recruitment Activities

SSLCs currently recruit employees in several different ways.

- **Position postings on the internet:** SSLC job descriptions are being reviewed and updated to reflect current responsibilities and opportunities. SSLC jobs are posted in the Centralized Accounting and Payroll/Personnel System (CAPPS) Health and Human Services (HHS) Job Center. All jobs posted in CAPPS are also listed on the Texas Workforce Commission's website. For those individuals who are not employed by an HHS agency, a website¹ was created specifically for recruitment. Information, including SSLC employment opportunities, benefit information, and information on how to apply are on the website. The website is still being developed to include a promotional video for individuals who are considering working in an SSLC.
- **Position postings for critical shortage occupations:** SSLCs have designated certain positions as critical shortage occupations. These are direct support professionals, resident specialists, social workers, licensed vocational nurses, nurses, nurse practitioners, pharmacists, physicians, psychiatrists, behavior analysts, psychological assistants, associate psychologists, psychologists, rehabilitation therapy technicians, registered therapist assistants, and registered therapists. SSLC hiring managers and recruiters attend job fairs and partner with local high schools and colleges to increase awareness about career opportunities. SSLCs also work to be a viable competitor for graduating medical professionals by building relationships with local colleges.
- **Market salary adjustments for certain medical professional positions:** HHS provides adjusted starting salaries for specific medical professional SSLC staff in an attempt to compete with starting salaries in specific market areas. These medical professional positions include nurses, registered therapists, physicians, psychiatrists, physician assistants, and nurse practitioners.
- **Salary exception requests:** SSLCs request commissioner approval for salary offers greater than the allowable seven percent above minimum (or greater than market salary) when necessary to recruit qualified applicants for

¹ <https://hhs.texas.gov/healthcareers>

difficult-to-fill positions. In fiscal year 2018, SSLCs received approval for 44 salary exceptions.

- **Advertising and other recruitment methods:** SSLCs advertise employment opportunities using a variety of media sources, including print advertising in local and regional newspapers, digital advertising through social media and job websites, billboards, local radio and television commercials. They also attend local job and career fairs statewide.
 - ▶ The management specialist/recruiter reviews CAPPs daily to determine the biggest need for qualified applicants and follow up on any incomplete applications. This process has increased awareness among applicants that additional action is needed to complete an application. Recently, this resulted in the hiring of a psychiatrist for the Austin SSLC.
 - ▶ Market rate salary research was conducted for direct support professionals, licensed vocational nurses and registered nurses around all facilities.
 - ▶ New promotional items to give away at recruitment events, new table drape and recruitment brochures were purchased. An HHS management specialist/recruiter and SSLC recruiters attended targeted career fairs for veterans, nurses, physicians, advance practice registered nurse (APRN), and general healthcare students and professionals including events at the following in 2016:
 - ◇ Texas Workforce Commission
 - ◇ Medical Careers CareerMD
 - ◇ Greater Houston
 - ◇ PracticeLink Physician and APRN
 - ◇ Texas Woman's University School of Nursing
 - ◇ Texas Academy of Family Physicians Annual Session and Primary Care Summit
 - ◇ Veterans in Government
 - ◇ MEGA Warrior Transitioning Readiness Workshop
 - ◇ Texas Veterans Commission
 - ◇ Hiring Red, White and You!
 - ◇ Austin Community College
 - ◇ Expo Experts
 - ◇ The University of Texas at Austin School of Nursing
 - ◇ The University of Texas at San Antonio Health Science Center's School of Nursing
 - ◇ National Student Nurse Association Conference
 - ◇ Texas Medical Association's TexMed Annual Conference

- ◊ American Legion
- ◊ Nurse.com
- ◊ Centurion Military Alliance Expo
- ◊ South University School of Nursing
- ◊ MyDentalJobs.com
- ◊ Texas Society of Psychiatric Physicians
- ◊ Galen School of Nursing
- ◊ TexMed Physician Conference
- ▶ SSLCs place employment advertisements on local radio and television stations, billboards and in local and regional newspapers. Additionally, the SSLCs use banners and billboard-style signage near the entrances of campuses to advertise available positions. These activities have succeeded in recruiting nurses and direct support professionals. For example, San Angelo SSLC advertised employment opportunities on theater screens prior to the start of a movie and in high traffic areas such as building lobbies in San Angelo, Big Spring, and Midland. Online and print marketing was purchased and posted in:
 - ◊ Texas Association of Family Practitioners publication
 - ◊ Craigslist Austin
 - ◊ Texas Nurse Association Career Connect website
 - ◊ Indeed.com
 - ◊ AAFP FMX
 - ◊ Texas Nursing Voice
- ▶ Information listings for all registered nurses (RN), licensed vocational nurses (LVN) and nurse practitioners (NP) were purchased from the Texas Board of Nursing for facilities to use for area mail outs.
- ▶ A direct email ad campaign targeting nurses within a 45-mile radius of all the SSLCs was purchased.
- ▶ Facility job requisition coordinators collaborate with the Texas Workforce Commission through the Workforce Solutions for job referrals and application assistance for direct support professionals. This collaboration has helped recruit direct support professionals. For example, San Angelo SSLC conducts “express hire” events at the Concho Valley Workforce Solutions office twice a month to expedite the hiring process, resulting in a large influx of direct support professionals.
- ▶ Several SSLCs have begun “express hire” events for direct service professionals, during which mass advertisement is done and conditional job offers are made during the event. Candidates are immediately

- scheduled for fingerprinting so they can start work quickly. These events have seen some success across the system.
- ▶ SSLCs advertise professional positions, such as physicians, psychiatrists, registered therapists and psychologists, in national professional journals and on association websites. SSLCs have had limited success with this method.
 - ▶ Some SSLCs serve as clinical training sites for student dietitians, therapists, or psychologists; utilize social worker practicums; or provide clinical rounds for nursing students. There has been some success in recruiting students after graduation. In addition, San Angelo SSLC hosts clinical rotations and has developed a mental health training program for Angelo State University nursing students to encourage them to apply to the center after graduation.
 - ▶ Some SSLCs host on-campus job fairs for nurses, direct support professionals, and support service positions, such as maintenance, custodians, and food service. These efforts have been successful for many of the facilities. The management specialist/recruiter supports the SSLCs when requested by sending additional recruitment materials or by attending career fairs. Some SSLCs attend local high school career fairs to discuss possible career choices for students after graduation and host groups of high school seniors for brief tours of the facilities to explain the services provided in each area.
 - ▶ Lubbock SSLC worked with HHSC Media Services to develop materials to recruit LVNs, RNs, and direct support professionals. The flyer was distributed to local supermarkets, laundromats, churches, colleges, nursing homes, retail businesses, etc. Lubbock SSLC mailed a letter to all licensed physicians in the Lubbock area to recruit for the Medical Director and other physician positions. San Angelo SSLC purchased a list of active nurses in the San Angelo area and mailed a recruitment letter targeting LVNs for employment. San Angelo SSLC has worked with their Volunteer Services Council to put postings on the Volunteer Services Council Facebook page.
 - ▶ Meetings with academic institutions to develop service partnerships such as telemedicine or placement of academic institution employees in the SSLCs.

3. Retention Activities

SSLCs seek to retain employees in several ways.

- **Salary equity adjustments:** SSLCs request approval for salary equity adjustments for incumbents of critical shortage occupations due to salary inequities for similar positions in the relevant labor market. Prior to the request, the SSLC considers the employee's education, skills, related work experience, length of service, and job performance. In fiscal year 2018, SSLCs received approval for equity adjustments for a Psychiatrist III, Dentist II, and Cosmetologist position.
- **Payment of professional license fees and continuing education program:** SSLCs pay licensure fees and required training and continuing education costs for employees whose positions require them to maintain professional licensure.
- **Tuition reimbursement:** Per HHS human resources policy, SSLCs can provide tuition reimbursement to eligible employees whose course of study leads to the necessary license, certification, or credentials needed to meet the qualifications for a shortage occupation when funds are available. Eligible employees must maintain their work commitment and meet the terms and conditions of the tuition reimbursement agreement or they are obligated to repay the SSLCs in a timely manner. Tuition reimbursement is provided to eligible employees upon successful completion of pre-approved courses.
- **Awards and recognition programs:** SSLCs award and recognize employees for outstanding performance and service longevity. Awards for outstanding employees may include administrative leave for performance in an amount not to exceed a total of 32 hours per fiscal year; a merit increase or a one-time merit payment; an engraved plaque or framed certificate; a special award item at a cost not to exceed \$100 per employee; a special parking place or other similar privilege. Certificates of service awards are given to employees who reach a major milestone in their state service — 5, 10, 15, 20, 25 years or more.
- **Merit program:** When funds are available and HHS approval is granted, SSLC employees may receive a merit increase or a one-time merit payment for outstanding performance. For fiscal year 2019, 3.5% merit raises have been approved for 30 percent of SSLC facility employees in pay classifications A15/B15 and below. These classifications will impact Direct Support Professionals and other residential and direct care staff.

- **Mentoring programs for direct support professionals:** SSLCs use formal and informal mentoring programs for direct support professionals. The informal mentoring programs vary from facility to facility and may include competency, training and development staff, supervisors or peers meeting with employees to provide encouragement and to address issues or concerns. Some SSLCs offer formal mentoring programs that provide leadership training to employees who show potential for, or interest in, advancement opportunities.
- **Academic stipends:** SSLCs might grant eligible employees an academic stipend and educational leave to defray educational expenses for employees who are attending school. The employee's course of study must lead to the necessary license, certification or credentials needed to meet the qualifications for critical shortage occupations, such as nurses, therapists, psychologists, and physicians. Employees must meet the eligibility criteria established by HHS related to tenure and job performance and sign a contract. Repayment is required if the employee does not complete the degree requirements or does not return to work. Although used on a limited basis, this program produces positive results in filling critical shortage occupations and has produced retention of those employees in the defined shortage occupations.
- **Encouraging open communication and information:** SSLCs use numerous and varied ways to encourage open communication and information-sharing. Activities include town hall meetings where leadership provides information about current activities and employees have an opportunity to ask questions; monthly or quarterly newsletters that provide current information and highlight individual, departmental and other accomplishments; and employee satisfaction surveys and suggestion boxes that enable leadership to address employee concerns privately or publicly.
- **Employee Councils and staff recognition efforts:** Corpus Christi SSLC supported employees in developing an Employee Council aimed at helping employees get to know each other better and provide an enjoyable work environment. The Employee Council has developed activities such as Employee Appreciation Day, holiday parties, and other fun events for all employees. Other SSLCs have similar committees and councils, such as Denton's Positivity Committee which is intended to help highlight positive achievements by staff on campus and recognize outstanding work. Other centers have held fairs, festivals, parades, field days and basketball and volleyball tournaments for staff to recognize their hard work.

- **NURSE Corps Loan Repayment Program:** This program enables dedicated registered nurses committed to caring for underserved people to serve in hospitals and clinics in some of America's neediest communities, improving the lives of their patients and transforming their own. Currently, Abilene, Brenham, Corpus Christi, El Paso, Lubbock, Lufkin, Mexia, and San Antonio SSLC are eligible for this loan repayment program. The management specialist/recruiter is working with the HHS nurse coordinator to make eligible nursing staff aware and to promote retention and recruitment of nursing staff. The management specialist/recruiter also signed up as an administrator on the Nursing CORPS website to provide employment verifications and other information needed to assist nurses in completing their applications.
- **Other Loan Repayment Programs:** In fiscal year 2016, new loan repayment programs were authorized, and some SSLCs have been included in the eligible designations. The new loan repayment programs include the Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals (LRPMHP) and the Dental Education Loan Repayment Program (DELRP). The LRPMHP was created to encourage certain mental health professionals to provide services in designated Mental Health Professional Shortage Areas. Eligible mental health professionals include psychiatrists, psychologists, licensed professional counselors, licensed clinical social workers, and advanced practice nurses who are board certified in psychiatric or mental health nursing. Currently eligible SSLCs include Abilene, Brenham, Corpus Christi, El Paso, Lubbock, Lufkin, Mexia, and San Antonio. DELRP was created to recruit and retain qualified dentists to provide dental services in Dental Health Professional Shortage Areas of Texas. Currently eligible SSLCs include El Paso, Lufkin, and San Angelo.
- **Licensed Vocational Nurses (LVNs) and Registered Nurses (RNs):** The SSLCs also continue to face significant challenges in recruitment and retention of LVNs and RNs. HHS leadership approved pay raises for RNs and LVNs at centers with the highest vacancy rates. In fiscal year 2018, salary increases were approved for RNs and LVNs at Lubbock, Mexia and San Angelo SSLCs. These increases appear to be successful in recruiting staff and reducing reliance on contractors.

4. Conclusion

Recruitment and retention of qualified personnel remains a challenge at SSLCs. The SSLCs implement a number of different recruitment and retention strategies, including partnering with local universities and colleges, advertising in a multitude of ways, utilizing equity pay adjustment when appropriate, and offering tuition reimbursement to staff who qualify, to try to attract and keep the best staff possible. SSLCs will continue to innovate and update their recruitment and retention efforts as the employment market and applicant pool changes.

List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
CAPPS	Centralized Accounting and Payroll/Personnel System
DADS	Department of Aging and Disability Services
DELRP	Dental Education Loan Repayment Program
HHS	Health and Human Services
ICF/IID	Intermediate Care Facility for Individuals with Intellectual Disability or Related Condition
LRPMHP	Loan Repayment Program for Mental Health Professionals
LVN	Licensed Vocational Nurse
RN	Registered Nurse
SSLC	State Supported Living Center

Appendix A. Details by SSLC Campus

Table 1 provides details on the position fill rates by SSLC campus.

Table 1. SSLC Campus Fill Rates

Facility Name	Active Position	Filled Position	Fill Rate	Head Count	Total Hires	Total Terms
Abilene	1,415.75	1,147.00	81.02%	1,182.17	565.00	569.00
Austin	1,173.50	943.00	80.36%	977.08	417.00	402.00
Brenham	1,066.30	954.00	89.47%	943.17	417.00	403.00
Corpus Christi	932.55	700.00	75.06%	747.25	260.00	350.00
Denton	1,727.32	1,519.00	87.94%	1,516.08	653.00	642.00
El Paso	471.90	422.00	89.43%	428.67	178.00	148.00
Lubbock	854.00	727.00	85.13%	756.92	348.00	348.00
Lufkin	1,197.25	1,037.00	86.62%	1,083.25	416.00	441.00
Mexia	1,498.50	1,267.00	84.55%	1,294.08	485.00	480.00
Richmond	1,333.75	1,217.00	91.25%	1,252.00	384.00	379.00
San Angelo	952.90	680.00	71.36%	743.58	340.00	428.00

Facility Name	Active Position	Filled Position	Fill Rate	Head Count	Total Hires	Total Terms
San Antonio	831.50	732.00	88.03%	719.08	375.00	342.00
Total	13,455.22	11,345.00	84.30%	11,643.33	4,838.00	4,932.00

Table 2 provides details on turnover rates by SSLC campus.

Table 2. SSLC Campus Turnover Rates

Facility Name	FY 2018 Rate
Abilene	48.1%
Austin	41.1%
Brenham	42.7%
Corpus Christi	46.8%
Denton	42.4%
El Paso	34.5%
Lubbock	46.0%
Lufkin	40.7%

Facility Name	FY 2018 Rate
Mexia	37.1%
Richmond	30.3%
San Angelo	57.6%
San Antonio	47.6%
Total	42.2%

Table 3 provides detail on the types of terminations by SSLC campus.

Table 3. SSLC Campus Termination Types

Facility Name	Voluntary	Involuntary	Transfer	Retirement	Death
Abilene	320	214	8	25	2
Austin	236	133	13	19	1
Brenham	253	121	8	20	1
Corpus Christi	218	108	1	21	2
Denton	398	206	4	28	6

Facility Name	Voluntary	Involuntary	Transfer	Retirement	Death
El Paso	96	45	0	7	0
Lubbock	189	138	6	12	3
Lufkin	278	140	11	10	2
Mexia	274	151	14	37	4
Richmond	255	80	12	29	3
San Angelo	257	144	4	22	1
San Antonio	204	121	5	12	0
Total	2,978	1,601	86	242	25