



Recruitment and Retention Efforts at State Supported Living Centers

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Table of Contents

TABLE OF CONTENTS	2
1. INTRODUCTION	3
2. RECRUITMENT ACTIVITIES	4
SSLCS CURRENTLY RECRUIT EMPLOYEES SEVERAL WAYS:	4
3. CONCLUSION	12
APPENDIX A. LIST OF ACRONYMS	13
APPENDIX B. DETAILS BY SSLC CAMPUS	14
TABLE 1. SSLC CAMPUS FILL RATES.....	14
TABLE 2. SSLC CAMPUS TURNOVER RATES.....	16
TABLE 3. SSLC CAMPUS TERMINATION TYPES.....	17

1. Introduction

The HHS Health and Specialty Care System (HSCS) intends to hire and retain qualified staff who ensure we deliver services 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 fiscal year 2019, HSCS undertook several projects focused on state supported living center (SSLC) employee retention, including:

- Overtime management review
- SSLC staff “Think Tanks”
- Strategic recruitment bonuses

The overtime management review identified the need for more robust retention and recruitment efforts across HSCS, with a focus on nursing and direct support professionals. HSCS also held a Think Tank series that included staff from different classifications to discuss improvement for system collaboration, job satisfaction, and overall functionality improvement. Other recruitment and retention efforts included pay raises for certain staff positions at San Angelo SSLC and sign-on bonuses for new employees.

2. Recruitment Activities

SSLCs currently recruit employees several ways:

- Position postings on the internet: SSLC staff reviews and updates job descriptions 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 people who are not employed by an HHS agency, a website¹ was created specifically for recruitment. Information, including SSLC employment opportunities, benefit information, and help applying are on the website. HSCS is modifying the website and developing a video for people who are considering working in an SSLC.
- Job Fairs: 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 and universities. In FY 2019, HHSC attended 24 job fairs across the state.
- Market salary adjustments for certain positions: HHS provides adjusted starting salaries for specific SSLC staff classifications to compete with private-sector starting salaries in specific market areas. These positions include:
 - Nurses
 - Social workers and behavioral/mental health professionals
 - Habilitation therapists
 - Physicians, psychiatrists and physician assistants
 - Food service workers and direct support professionals in certain geographical areas

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

- Salary exception requests: SSLCs request commissioner approval for salary offers more than the allowable 7 percent above minimum (or greater than market salary) when necessary to recruit qualified applicants for difficult-to-fill positions. In fiscal year 2019, SSLCs received approval for 52 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.
- 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
 - American Association of Family Practitioners Family Medicine Experience Recruitment Guide
 - American Psychiatric Association
 - American Association of Retired Persons
 - Express Hire Classified Adds
 - The Quarterly Texas Nursing Voice Ad
 - The Local Jobs Network
 - Information listings for all RNs, LVNs and nurse practitioners were purchased from the Texas Board of Nursing for facilities to use for area mail-outs.
 - HSCS purchased a direct email ad campaign targeting nurses within a 45-mile radius of all the SSLCs.
 - Several SSLCs use “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.

- 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.
- 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 have used the physician placement contract with Enterprise Medical to hire physicians.
- Some SSLCs serve as clinical training sites for student dietitians, therapists, or psychologists; use social worker practicums; or provide clinical rounds for nursing students. There has been some success recruiting students 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 recruitment materials and 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.
- Meetings with academic institutions to develop service partnerships such as telemedicine or placement of academic institution employees in the SSLCs.
- In FY 2019, recruiters for HHSC conducted eleven SSLC presentations at various universities, community colleges, the Texas Chapter College of Physicians Meeting, Careers in Psychology Panel and Networking Night, the

TXABA Conference, the Texas Society of Psychiatric Physicians Spring Conference and the TexMed Physician Conference.

- **Recruitment Grants:** Brenham and Mexia SSLCs have been awarded the 2019 Rural Communities Health Care Investment Program grant. The \$10,000 award helps recruit non-physician medical personnel such as nurse practitioners, advanced practice registered nurses, and physician assistants.
- **Market Rate Increase for DSPs:** The 86th Legislature appropriated funding for market rate increases for DSPs at the centers with highest vacancy and turnover rates: San Angelo, Abilene, Corpus Christi, Lubbock, and San Antonio SSLCs in FY 2019.
- **Sign on Bonuses for DSPs:** To address the critical shortage issues at San Angelo, HSCS offered \$2,000 sign-on bonuses to new DSP hires through August 31, 2019. The sign-on bonuses require new DSP staff to commit to at least one year of employment at the SSLC. Between May 1 and October 16, San Angelo hired 308 DSPs.
- **One-Time Bonuses for DSPs:** HSCS gave 6,670 end of year, one-time merit bonuses to eligible DSPs across all SSLCs. The bonuses support retention efforts and will extend to DSPs who did not receive a bonus when they become eligible after 6 months of employment.
- **Workgroups:** HSCS leadership appointed two workgroups focusing on retention and recruitment in FY 2019. One is a retention workgroup identifying recommendations to increase employee retention at state hospitals and state supported living centers. The other is a behavioral health workforce shortage workgroup focusing on recruitment solutions for behavioral health professionals. The workgroups are active, and recommendations are forthcoming.
- **Recruiter:** In fall 2018, the LBB approved a new FTE for the state office recruitment department. The new recruiter started work October 1, 2018.
- **Retention Activities**
- SSLCs seek to retain employees in several ways:

- **Salary equity adjustments:** SSLCs request approval for salary equity adjustments for staff currently working in critical shortage occupations. The adjustments will address salary inequities for similar positions in the relevant labor market. Before the request, the SSLC considers the employee's education, skills, related work experience, length of service, and job performance as well as funding availability. As of July 31, 2019, SSLCs, received approval for 294 equity adjustments across the state. Of those equity adjustments, 172 went to current DSPs at San Angelo as a result of the market rate change.
- **Payment of professional license fees and continuing education program:** If funds are available, SSLCs may 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 must to repay the SSLCs in a timely manner. The SSLCs provide tuition reimbursement to eligible employees upon successful completion of pre-approved courses if the facility has funds available.
- **Academic stipends:** SSLCs may grant eligible employees an academic stipend to defray educational expenses other than tuition such as books and lab fees 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 filling critical shortage occupations and has improved retention of those employees in the defined shortage occupations.

- **Educational Leave:** To support employee training and education, the HHS Executive Commissioner, the DSHS Commissioner, or designee may provide educational leave to release eligible employees from regular work duties without loss of pay or benefits to attend training or education at a vocational school, technical school, college, or university. This training or education must:
 - relate to current or prospective job duties; and
 - benefit HHS by increasing employee knowledge, understanding and skills needed to achieve HHS goals and objectives.
- In FY 2019, various SSLCs approved educational leave for nineteen RNs, two LVNs, and three DSPs.
- **Awards and recognition programs:** SSLCs award and recognize employees for outstanding performance and service longevity. Awards for outstanding employees 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 raises:** 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 affect direct support professionals and other residential and direct care staff.
- **State Supported Living Center “Think Tanks”:** SSLC state office organized think tanks throughout FY19 to bring focus groups of staff to Austin

to hear what challenges they face operationally, and how processes and policies could be streamlined to improve their job satisfaction and encourage them to make their careers at an SSLC. More than 60 employees participated in person, with nearly 400 SSLC employees completing an online survey related to the think tanks.

- **Encouraging open communication and information:** SSLCs use numerous and varied ways to encourage open communication and information sharing, such as direct texts between state office leadership and employees, 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. We have implemented QR codes to allow employees without computer access to download messages from the System Office on their personal phones if they wish.
- **Employee councils and staff recognition efforts:** Several SSLCs have an employee council to help employees get to know each other better and provide an enjoyable work environment. The employee council develops activities such as Employee Appreciation Day, holiday parties, and other fun events for all employees. Other SSLCs have similar committees and councils intended to highlight positive achievements by staff on campus and recognize outstanding work. Other centers hold fairs, festivals, parades, field days and basketball and volleyball tournaments for staff to recognize their hard work.
- **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 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.

- **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.
- **Licensed Vocational Nurses and Registered Nurses:** The SSLCs also continue to face significant challenges recruiting and retaining LVNs and RNs. HHS leadership approved pay raises for RNs and LVNs at centers with the highest vacancy rates. Abilene, Corpus, Lubbock, Mexia, and San Angelo all received market rate increases for LVNs and/or RNs. The market rate increases improved fill rates across the board;
 - Abilene: RN fill rate improved by 5%.
 - Corpus Christi: LVN fill rate improved by 6%.
 - Lubbock: LVN fill rate improved by 46%.
 - Mexia: LVN fill rate improved by 31%.
 - Mexia: RN fill rate improved by 16%.
 - San Angelo LVN rate improved by 21%.

3. Conclusion

Recruitment and retention of qualified personnel remains a challenge at SSLCs. Several recruitment and retention strategies, including partnering with local universities and colleges, advertising in a multitude of ways, using equity pay adjustment when appropriate, and offering tuition reimbursement to staff who qualify are proving helpful in attracting and keeping the best staff possible so long as there is available funding. SSLCs will continue to innovate and update recruitment and retention efforts as funding allows, and as the employment market and applicant pool changes.

Appendix A. List of Acronyms

Acronym	Full Name
CAPPS	Centralized Accounting and Payroll/Personnel System
DELRP	Dental Education Loan Repayment Program
HHS	Health and Human Services
HSCS	Health and Specialty Care System
ICF/IID	Intermediate Care Facility for Individuals with an Intellectual Developmental 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 B. Details by SSLC Campus

Table 1. SSLC Campus Fill Rates

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

Facility Name	Active Positions	Filled Positions	FY 19 Fill Rate	FY 18 Fill Rate	% Change from FY18	Number of DSPs	Total Hires	Total Terms
Abilene	1,405.21	1,148.38	81.7%	81.0%	+ .5%	1,187.67	600.00	564.00
Austin	1,172.37	942.46	80.4%	80.4%	=	968.50	418.00	384.00
Brenham	1,066.72	901.59	84.5%	89.5%	-5%	934.74	485.00	534.00
Corpus Christi	932.78	705.18	75.6%	75.06%	+ .5%	729.42	380.00	364.00
Denton	1,727.11	1,508.34	87.3%	87.94%	- .6%	1,543.75	536.00	573.00
El Paso	473.40	424.96	89.8%	89.43%	+ .4%	434.25	168.00	155.00
Lubbock	852.50	729.69	85.6%	85.13%	+ .5%	748.33	328.00	314.00
Lufkin	1,197.19	1,053.08	88.0%	86.16%	+1%	1,078.33	466.00	417.00
Mexia	1,497.00	1,262.83	84.4%	84.55%	- .2%	1,285.67	470.00	450.00
Richmond	1,334.04	1,208.33	90.6%	91.25%	- .7%	1,233.25	482.00	460.00

Facility Name	Active Positions	Filled Positions	FY 19 Fill Rate	FY 18 Fill Rate	% Change from FY18	Number of DSPs	Total Hires	Total Terms
Rio Grande	254.54	198.62	78.0%	N/A	N/A	206.58	127	106
San Angelo	953.08	701.08	73.6%	71.36%	-2%	721.33	473.00	359.00
San Antonio	830.17	711.58	85.7%	88.03%	-2%	735.83	354.00	384.0
Total	13,696.12	11,496.14	83.47%	84.30%	-8% from FY 18	11,807.67	5,287.00	5,064.00

Table 2. SSLC Campus Turnover Rates

Table 2 provides details on turnover rates by SSLC campus.

Facility Name	Y 2018 Rate	FY 2019 Rate	% Change
Abilene	48.1%	47.5%	-.1%
Austin	41.1%	39.7%	-1%
Brenham	42.7%	57.1%	+14%
Corpus Christi	46.8%	49.9%	+3%
Denton	42.4%	37.1%	-5%
El Paso	34.5%	35.7%	+1%
Lubbock	46.0%	42.0%	-4%
Mexia	37.1%	35.0%	-2%
Richmond	30.3%	37.3%	+7%
Rio Grande	N/A	51.3%	=
San Angelo	57.6%	49.8%	-8%
San Antonio	47.6%	52.2%	+5%
Total	42.2%	44.10%	+2%

Table 3. SSLC Campus Termination Types

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

Facility Name	Voluntary	Involuntary	Transfer	Retirement	Death
Abilene	333	190	20	17	4
Austin	225	126	13	20	0
Brenham	03	205	8	17	1
Corpus Christi	228	112	3	18	3
Denton	370	168	6	25	4
El Paso	09	40	0	5	1
Lubbock	188	102	10	13	1
Lufkin	260	122	10	22	3
Mexia	251	158	15	21	5
Richmond	332	81	14	32	1
Rio Grande	80	21	3	2	0
San Angelo	231	110	2	12	4
San Antonio	234	132	4	14	0
Total	3,144	1,567	108	218	27