

Governor Christie Hails State Funded Pilot Program Offering Drug Counseling Apprenticeship

Wednesday, July 19, 2017 Tags: [Addiction Taskforce](#)



Program Addresses Increased Demand for Skilled Drug Counselors

Trenton, NJ – Building upon his efforts to explore all avenues in the fight against drug addiction, Governor Chris Christie today met with case managers and support staff at Homeless Solutions in Morristown to discuss an innovative approach to increasing the number of skilled drug counselors in the state. The employees are currently participating in a 45-week, state-funded, on-site drug counseling certification program and company-paid apprenticeship.

"In order to combat the opioid epidemic, we need more qualified professionals who have the ability to understand and help those who are in need to navigate the complex addiction recovery process," Governor Christie said. "The drug counseling certification program at Homeless Solutions will give staff on the front lines critical skills where they are desperately needed. These counselors will immediately be armed with the knowledge they need to assist clients in need of drug rehabilitation, helping to save lives."

Ten Homeless Solutions employees are participating in the program, funded through a New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD) grant to Rutgers University, which has been designated the department's Health Care Talent Development Center (TDC). To be certified as a drug counselor, each participant must complete 3,100 hours of training and pass a state licensing examination. The course is expected to conclude in February 2018, with participants receiving the training at the shelter during their work day. Homeless Solutions is also providing participants with a paid apprenticeship.

"This innovative drug counseling apprenticeship program demonstrates how responsive the state can be to the needs of employers and will help prepare New Jersey's workforce for this accelerated growth. Programs like these will serve as a model for other organizations seeking to improve the skills of their existing workforce," said Labor Commissioner Aaron Fichtner, who joined the Governor at the roundtable.

Homeless Solutions is a private, non-profit which operates out of a Morris County-owned building. It has 85 beds for homeless men, women, and families. The drug pilot certification program helps case managers tackle underlying issues of substance abuse, which often contribute to homelessness.

According to the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics, employment of substance abuse and behavioral disorder counselors is projected to grow 22 percent from 2014 to 2024. Additional growth is expected as addiction and mental health counseling services are increasingly covered by insurance policies.

Rutgers University was awarded a \$900,000 grant last year by LWD to serve as one of the TDCs, which develop innovative job training programs with partners in New Jersey's leading industry sectors to better align existing job training with the needs of employers. As the State Health Care TDC, Rutgers is offering the drug counseling certification program through the County College of Morris, which provides an instructor to Homeless Solutions for the training. The program is just one of many training programs Rutgers has been developing for the Health Care field under the grant received from the LWD.

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1/14/2018

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