

## Long-Term Care Survey Alert

### **STAFFING: Top-Notch Staff Retention Program Saves Thousands And Boosts Satisfaction Scores**

**Find out how one facility keeps its turnover rates at only 5 percent.**

Costs associated with the turnover of just one direct-care worker can run into the thousands, experts say. One long-term care community is fighting back with a novel approach to employee training.

**Facility name: La Posada At Park Centre**, an award-winning retirement community in Green Valley, AZ, serves about 700 residents, including 58 in its skilled nursing center.

**What they do well:** A program launched in 2000 helps the organization retain direct-care workers and other valued employees through scholarships and training opportunities. The twist at La Posada is that a resident committee appointed by the CEO and funded primarily through resident donations spearheads the program. One resident was recently named Volunteer of the Year by the state affiliate of the **American Association of Homes & Services for the Aging** for his role in the Resident-Driven Employee Education Support Program.

The residents' generosity and teamwork with the La Posada Foundation has in recent years allowed La Posada to expand the program to include a summer internship program for area high school students, instruction in English as a second language, computer training, career counseling and more.

**Why the program pays:** The program has enhanced the organization's ability to recruit and retain quality staff, reports **Lisa Israel**, La Posada's chief executive officer.

**Advantage:** Last year, La Posada's turnover rate for direct-care staff hovered at about 5 percent, a remarkable achievement in an industry plagued by turnover rates approaching 100 percent.

Though La Posada measures its success in part by intangibles of "resident interest and support," the cost savings that go with low turnover are clear.

The cost of filling just one vacancy is about \$3,500, according to the **Institute for the Future of Aging Services**. Industry-wide, assuming a 45 percent turnover rate, that adds up to an expense of more than \$4 billion annually.

#### **Know What Employees Value**

In 2005, La Posada employees rated the program as one of the top two benefits available to them, the other being paid time off. They also rated the scholarship program as the number-one benefit La Posada should continue to provide.

At the same time, La Posada has found a meaningful way to foster a true sense of community between staffers, the residents they serve and the surrounding community. In addition to funds for scholarships for outside learning, a small group of residents, many with backgrounds in education, also tutor staff on site, helping them earn GEDs and generally hone marketable skills.

**Win-win:** "Residents get to use their talents," notes Israel. "Together, we're doing something positive in a time of workplace shortages."

Skills acquired by staffers through the program directly benefit La Posada. Staffers newly proficient in English, for example, are more at ease and comfortable with residents.

In 2005, AAHSA recognized La Posada's efforts with a "best practice" award. The facility has also been honored with best-workplace awards at the local and state level.

**Make it work for you:** La Posada is not a typical long-term care organization in that care is funded primarily by residents themselves, not Medicare or Medicaid. They do, however, hold that similar programs and principles could be replicated by others.

**Tip:** Not-for-profit providers may be able to work with their fundraising arms to direct resources to such programs. And many for-profit facilities will benefit from closer cost analysis of maintaining high turnover, advises Israel.

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