

Asbury Methodist Village

In 2017, Asbury Methodist Village (AMV) a leading continuing care retirement community in Montgomery County, introduced an eight-week pilot program for its housekeeping associates. With guidance from MCAEL, AMV set up this program as an additional benefit to staff with limited English proficiency. Fifteen associates were selected to attend two one-hour sessions per week, held during their shift hours. Instruction covered a range of topics, including grammar and sentence structure, daily living and workplace vocabulary, and workplace-related procedures.

Motivation

At the root of this program is a desire on AMV's part to improve the everyday lives of employees with limited English proficiency. All employees are required to have a certain level of spoken English, but some are limited in their ability to write in English. Leadership at AMV noticed that this has had an impact on their ability to move up within the organization and wanted to provide staff with this life-changing opportunity. AMV hopes that improving the ability of employees with limited English skills to communicate in English will also increase these employees' chances of being promoted and improve AMV's employee retention rate.

"From an organizational standpoint, we want to see people grow in all types of ways. So when you come here to work, we'll teach you these skillsets that translate beyond the gate here. It'll help them if they want to stay at AMV, which is great. That would be ideal, for them to be able to improve their communication skills and help them rise up the ranks. They might decide that with this skillset, they could venture into nursing or transfer to another department." (Tim Leiter, Director of Human Resources, AMV)

In turn, AMV human resources leadership feel that this type of class will help elevate the level of staff engagement with long-term residents, improving their overall experience living at Asbury Methodist Village. As Tim Leiter explains, "we have a real big focus on our associates. We hold our associates at the same level we hold our residents or our customers. We think the better we can treat them, the more enriching experience we can give them, that will translate to what they can give to our residents in their experience. There's that immediate result that our customers can communicate better with our staff members, which is fantastic. That is what you want."

Already, participants in this pilot class expressed having greater confidence in their ability to interact with AMV residents. Approximately 1,400 people over the age of 60 currently reside at AMV, located on a 134-acre campus in Gaithersburg.

MCAEL's Contributions to the Process

In introducing this English class, AMV sought out MCAEL's knowledge and expertise in adult English literacy to guide the process. According to Director of Human Resources Tim Leiter,

MCAEL assistance was crucial in helping to find a qualified, experienced and dedicated instructor:

“Finding the instructor was the hard part, and MCAEL found ... a phenomenal instructor.” MCAEL supported the cost of the instructor to develop the curriculum, select teaching materials and provide instruction.

Emily Luyo, the ESOL instructor for this program, found great satisfaction and motivation from AMV’s dedication to its employees. In explaining why she joined the pilot program, Emily said: “While at work and while in my class, they got paid, while learning. So I thought “wow” I had never heard of that before, I had never seen it. ... I think it’s great. That’s why I want to be a part of this. Maybe if more organizations tag on to the same idea, they may see their employees progress or grow within their organization.” By the end of the program, Emily saw its incredible potential for enabling the students to have greater professional opportunities.

Program Success

Overall, this pilot class was a success for Asbury Methodist Village and AMV intends to continue the program, with the hope of expanding it to other departments, including dining, maintenance, and nursing.

There has been an immediate impact on staff engagement as participants in the pilot class have gained confidence in communicating with colleagues and residents. As AMV’s experience shows, workplace-based ESOL programs can have a multi-level impact, benefiting staff, clients, and the organization itself.

“This is a benefit that our associates get by working here that will help them for hopefully the rest of their life. ... I hope all fifteen [participants] continue to grow and this helps not only them, but their families moving forward. As an employer, that’s the biggest thing you can do to gain that loyalty, gain that engagement, to create a personal connection with your employees. An annual increase of a few percentage points will not translate into a significant change in an employee’s quality of life. However, by offering an opportunity like this one, to improve their English while at the workplace, I believe that will really help them better their quality of life and the lives of their families.” (Tim Leiter, Director of Human Resources)