

Pathways to Work program aims to help unemployed people in D.C.

D.C. Council member David Grosso met Wednesday with the inaugural class of the Pathways to Work job-readiness program to learn how private initiatives are helping tackle unemployment in the city.

AmeriHealth Caritas D.C., a Medicaid provider, launched the program in January with 14 participants in the three-month initiative.

"I think this is a great way to learn from each other and work together to try and improve our city," Mr. Grosso told the group during a roundtable meeting. "I hope each one of you gets full-time employment out of this opportunity. But more than that, an opportunity to grow, just as people."

Unemployment is falling across the city, but residents in the District's poorest neighborhoods continue to experience joblessness at a much higher rate.

"We see that we have this big class gentrification that's going on," said Charisse Vickerie, an AmeriHealth account executive. "We wanted to give them that opportunity to step into the middle class, what was blocking them from having these jobs before we just wanted to open up that door."

Stephanie Hafiz, AmeriHealth's director of member engagement, said it was important to include Mr. Grosso, the Education Committee chairman, so that he can be aware of the program and possibly recommend additional resources.

"The program is really contained and we're not looking for financial resources," Ms. Hafiz said. "Just supporting in the way that he does, understanding what the program is all about and providing any outlets or resources that he may have at his disposal to compliment the program, to make the program better than it is."

AmeriHealth Caritas D.C. launched the initiative as one of its corporate responsibility programs. It's open to any D.C. resident over the age of 18 with at least one child. No prior experience is necessary, although applicants are asked to prepare a resume and pass a drug test and background check.

The inaugural class included 14 women from some of District's poorest neighborhoods who had learned about the opportunity through the Department of Employment Services.

The three-month program includes a paid internship in one of AmeriHealth's departments, such as community engagement, marketing and accounting, among others.

Each woman has a mentor, and the program provides training in computer literacy, email etiquette, customer relation and interpersonal office skills, work and life balance workshops, even meditation.

A partnership with the YWCA allowed the interns to participate in a certification program for hospitality and guest services.

AmeriHealth employees are organizing a career fair at the conclusion of the program to give the interns a chance to network with health care employers in the area as well as companies like Comcast and Pepco.

The two overarching goals of the program, said Ms. Hafiz, is to increase employment opportunities for D.C. residents and provide participants with a job-readiness foundation.

"They were assigned at the beginning to supervisors who really were responsible for teaching them job etiquette and work-ethic type skills," she said.

Laura Kelly / The Washington Times D.C. Council member David Grosso meets with AmeriHealth Caritas D.C. employees and interns on Wednesday at the Wilson Building. [more >](#)

By [Laura Kelly](#) - The Washington Times - Wednesday, April 19, 2017