Student of Excellence: Elaine Clayton, RN-to-BSN

Arizona State University

Elaine Clayton, an RN-to-BSN student at the ASU College of Nursing and Health Innovation, had a vision for partnerships between trade unions and The Crossroads, Inc. to facilitate recovery for union workers who have substance addictions. Crossroads is a system of transitional living facilities for people in recovery from substance addictions. Elaine completed her Leadership Evidence-Based Project on the subject and presented it in mid-February, as keynote speaker to Crossroads board of directors at its annual retreat.

It was no accident that Elaine Claytons presentation to the board was titled "Trade Unions and The Crossroads – Working Together for Recovery." Her diverse 30-year career had been a journey that brought her to this point and made her passionate about the subject.

Claytons journey began in San Francisco in the late 1970s. Married to the Labor Liaison for Region 9 of the Occupational Health and Safety Administration, she became aware of the many serious workplace injuries and deaths caused by employees with substance addictions. During the same time, she embarked on a work career that was as diverse as it was formative.

Telling her own Story

Perhaps it is best to let Elaine Clayton tell the story of this part of her journey. "I decided to make a career change in my early 30s and traded in my office job for a job as a union laborer removing asbestos and other hazardous materials," Elaine recounted. "I was required to take a number of health and safety classes and was immediately intrigued by the profession and challenges that came with it. Throughout the years I continued to take vocational and other classes eventually becoming a foreman on construction projects, which in time led to my becoming a health and safety professional. I worked in the profession for 12 years and ultimately became a vocational instructor at a community college in the Phoenix area, teaching industrial health and safety. However, my knowledge of health was limited to occupational injuries, illnesses and routine screenings. I realized I could not answer employees health questions outside of the occupational scope, which I viewed as a shortcoming on my part and a disservice to the employees. I wanted to literally unite health with safety and renew the original health and safety model for which unions were historically known. I came to the conclusion that becoming an RN was the path to do what I needed to accomplish."

Clayton earned an Associate Nursing Degree from Gateway Community College, passed her state licensing examination, and has been in practice as a registry nurse working in many hospitals since 2001. In 2009, she enrolled in the RN-to-BSN program at the ASU College of Nursing and Health Innovation to advance her knowledge and skills.

Return to the Beginning

Flash back to that presentation to The Crossroads board in early February 2010. At the retreat, Elaine Clayton presented the leadership project she developed in her baccalaureate program. Everyone who attended saw the potential for a rich collaboration between The Crossroads and the local unions to facilitate recovery for union members with substance addictions. She also mailed the presentation to every union she contacted during her clinical leadership rotation. Not even Elaine anticipated how quickly things would move after that.

One week later, the RN-to-BSN student called her ASU nursing mentor and professor Gail Hock, MS, RN to inform her of the first potential partner for the program she proposed in her presentation – JBS Packerland, Local 99 United Food and Commercial Workers Union (UFCW). "Elaine had been in communication with JBS Packerland and e-mailed them the presentation we saw at the retreat," Hock related. "They flew her to Colorado a few days later and on her return home she was offered a position at Local 99 at the JBS Packerland plant in Tolleson, Arizona.

"Our union is very excited about the possibilities of this program – educating our 1,200 members at JBS to more effectively use their health benefits, gaining better health results for the individual workers, and lowering costs which keeps the benefits affordable and available," Paul Rubin, Secretary-Treasurer, Executive Assistant to the President, Local 99, said.

The Next Career Step

While completing her remaining general requirements and planning to graduate this summer, Elaine Clayton is now Community Case Manager at JBS Packerland. She reports to Dr. Ernie Vesta, MD, medical director, JBS, who developed the current healthcare model that the plant in Tolleson and the UFCW are following. Her primary responsibility is to ensure JBS Packerland employees and their families get the most out of their healthcare dollar. She assists employees or often their family members from diverse cultures in maneuvering through the red tape of the healthcare system. Clayton works with employees to secure excellent healthcare providers and accompanies them to doctors appointments when requested. She also goes to an employees residence to provide healthcare education to the employee and/or family members to make certain they understand their diagnosis and treatment plan. She monitors employees with chronic conditions and provides the support and encouragement necessary to help them remain compliant with their plan of care.

According to Clinical Assistant Professor Gail Hock, Elaine Clayton seized the opportunities that the ASU RN-to-BSN program provides. "The activities in the practice component are flexible enough to allow students to pursue their personal professional interests and build their professional networks," Hock said. "Our faculty and administration strongly believe ASU RN-BSN graduates are engaged, innovative professionals who utilize evidence-based practice to facilitate positive change. Our graduates demonstrate holistic population-based perspectives and are

critical thinkers, client advocates and effective communicators. Elaine Clayton is an exemplar of the edge which our RN-to-BSN program strives to provide students."

Lee Pioske, MS, LISAC, CACIII, Executive Director, Crossroads, first met Clayton a couple of years ago. "It was easy to see that she absolutely had a great affinity for those people we were trying to help," Pioske observed. "She had developed relationships with various local unions and began to foster a relationship between Crossroads and those unions. We believe this budding relationship has the potential to turn into something beneficial for both Crossroads and these unions. With someone like Elaine involved, only good things can happen."

Old Can Be New Again

What Elaine Clayton values most about this position is the opportunity to demonstrate that this healthcare model works. In the 1930s and 1940s Kaiser Industries did more than treat their employees occupational injuries and illnesses. They provided holistic healthcare services to union construction, shipyard and steel mill workers and their families. The employees felt valued and became more committed and the employers had healthier employees and families, which reduced healthcare costs.

"What was old is new again – Kaiser experienced great success using this model and I am convinced that the UFCW and JBS can replicate it and improve upon it," Clayton remarked. "I believe the UFCW and JBS can and will set a new standard in Arizona that others will want to follow." Elaine Clayton not only brought her RN license with her to the RN-to-BSN program at ASU. She brought the experience of a 30-year journey, her passion to help people, and the spirit of collaboration to make things happen.

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