



MEDIA RELEASE

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Highline College Awarded \$232,500 for New Certificate to Help Those Living Homeless in Hotels

DES MOINES, Wash. — Thanks to a \$232,500 Washington State Department of Commerce grant, Highline College is prepared to offer a new 19-credit certificate this spring to help those experiencing homelessness.

Due to the high rate of homelessness in the Puget Sound area, King County and other municipalities have had to come up with creative solutions to help alleviate this crisis. One such solution is the [King County Health Through Housing Initiative](#), a regional approach that includes the purchase of former hotels, nursing homes and other existing facilities. The county's goal is to create up to 1,600 emergency housing units by the end of 2022 through this initiative.

But serving these facilities and those who live in them is another challenge as there's not currently a funded educational program to do the proper training required — yet.

Using the grant money over a two-year cycle, Highline College and Catholic Community Services will develop a strong partnership to recruit, educate and employ current and formerly homeless individuals so that they can begin on a path toward self-sufficiency and serve others who may be going through similar struggles.

Dubbed the Housing & Shelter Facility Operations certificate, the goal of the certificate is to help homeless individuals both at the individual and community level by providing career-wage jobs in the hotel janitorial and maintenance sector.

“We are looking at career pathways. Period,” said Justin Taillon, an instructor and head of Highline's Hospitality & Tourism Management department.

“I just happen to know hotels right now are having difficulty finding people. Wages are very quickly going up.”

Catholic Community Services will work with Plymouth Housing, Downtown Emergency Services Center (DESC), Chief Seattle Club, Evergreen Treatment Services REACH program and Mary’s Place to connect individuals who are homeless and already living in hotels throughout South King County with the college. Once enrolled at Highline, students will be able to earn the certificate in one to three quarters. The certificate is a combination of Human Services and Hospitality & Tourism Management courses that prepare students to work in hotels that do and do not serve those without permanent housing.

“It takes a unique skill set and that’s what this certificate is all about,” Taillon said.

Teresa Pan, an instructor and department coordinator for Highline’s Human Services department, said students in this certificate will exhibit core skills in case management, active listening, empathy, critical thinking and cultural responsiveness, among others.

“Individuals experiencing homelessness face many challenges, both physical and emotional,” Pan said. “Food insecurity and the lack of affordable housing make it more difficult for them to get back on their feet. Housing provides the stability they need to address unemployment, substance use, mental and physical health.”

Students of the certificate will learn a variety of tangible skills as well. These will include how to conduct compassionate customer service, how to do a 45-point inspection and how to write a resume, cover letter and thank you letter.

Once students have completed their certificate, which is [Workforce Education Services](#) (WES) and [I-BEST](#) funded, at least six hotels have agreed to work with the college to hire those students.

“They will be able to place these students if they successfully complete the training program,” Taillon said, adding that, as part of the certificate, students will choose a specialization area in one of the following categories: housekeeping operations, maintenance technician or commercial landscaping.

Until then, students can enroll in classes for the Housing and Shelter Facility Operations certificate and get more information about the program by contacting Teresa Pan at tpan@highline.edu or Justin Taillon at jtaillon@highline.edu.

Learn more about Hospitality & Tourism Management at host.highline.edu.

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Links within this release:

- <https://kingcounty.gov/depts/community-human-services/initiatives/health-through-housing.aspx>
- <https://workforce.highline.edu/>
- <https://elcap.highline.edu/what-we-offer/i-best/>
- <https://host.highline.edu/>

Founded in 1961 as the first community college in King County, Highline College annually serves more than 13,000 students. With over 70 percent students of color, Highline is the most diverse higher education institution in the state. The college offers a wide range of academic transfer, professional-technical education, basic skills and applied bachelor's degree programs. Alumni include former Seattle Mayor Norm Rice, entrepreneur Junki Yoshida and former Washington state poet laureate Sam Green.