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By Karin Elton , Marshall Independent

A big win for adult education

Thanks to new legislation just passed this session, SW ABE will receive tuition reimbursement, much more

MARSHALL - Believing in the importance of supporting a certified nursing program so much that it took money out of its general fund to finance it, Southwest ABE will now have a separate sustainable funding source for it.

Rep. Joe Schomacker, R-Luverne, helped successfully pass into law the ability of an Adult Education program to receive reimbursement for tuition, the competency test, books and up to 30 percent more for an individual financially supported in attaining the certified nursing certificate if the person is employed at a nursing home for 90 days, said Southwest ABE director Pat Thomas, who testified in March before the state Legislature committee for aging and long-term care.

"Joe Schomacker was the champion of the bill," said Thomas, "and (Sen.) Lyle Koenen helped shepherd it." Schomacker is chairman of the Minnesota House Aging and Long Term Care Policy Committee.

The Southwest ABE provided six CNA classes last year as part of the Southwest Minnesota Career Pathway Partnership Team. There were 66 individuals enrolled - the majority of which were covered by Pathway to Prosperity grants. Thomas told the

committee that Southwest ABE General Adult Education funds supported 11 students.

"If this bill had been in effect we could have served an additional 11 students potentially," she said.

Gov. Mark Dayton signed the bill June 1, and the change takes effect Oct. 1, said Thomas.

"This has the potential of allowing individuals a much greater ability to enter the health care field - a field that currently has a critical workforce shortage," said Thomas.

Prior to this change, the only entity that could get reimbursed for tuition was the long-term care facility if the student was employed for at least 90 days there.

Thomas said more ABE programs around the state can now help with the tuition if they have a CNA program.

"I believe our program here in Marshall is the only ABE program that uses its general ABE funds to pay for tuition to take this career training," she said. "I believe that other ABE programs would use this funding

mechanism to provide more CNA trainings."

The CNA trainings are an investment in the community.

"It's an investment in (students') lives, in their children," she said. "We help people help themselves. And it really gives a good return on that investment. Plus, our employers really benefit. I truly believe this will change the face of health care training in providing the opportunity for more people to enter into this field. We now have a sustainable funding source to provide more CNA trainings under our FastTRAC or Career Pathway model."

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