

CNA program builds careers



Booker Middle School Principal Dr. LaShawn Houston-Frost addresses the audience at the May 15 graduation of the United Way Suncoast Booker Middle School Resource Center's CNA program.

[COURTESY PHOTO]

Eleven newly pinned nursing assistants graduated May 15 from the United Way Suncoast Booker Middle School Resource Center's CNA program, moving one step closer to becoming certified nursing assistants.

This is the second cohort to graduate from the program, which was started to help families become financially stable and self-sufficient and to provide a career ladder to a new chapter in their lives.

In total, 23 individuals have successfully completed the seven-week program that is facilitated by the American Red Cross.

"These students are receiving more than just CNA training. The graduates will walk away with the confidence and the soft skills they need to enter a nursing assistant position and build a stable

foundation for their future," said Mireya Eavey, executive director of CareerEdge and Sarasota area president for United Way Suncoast.

The CNA training is funded through a partnership between CareerEdge Funders Collaborative, a workforce development nonprofit, and United Way Suncoast.

The funding pays for tuition and the state license exam that students must take upon conclusion of the program. CareerEdge also provided the Bridges to Careers soft skills training with modules including communication, teamwork, and professionalism in the workplace. United Way Suncoast provides additional services at the Booker Middle School Resource Center, such as financial coaching, legal advice workshops and mentorship programs.

The CNA program has given new hope to one

student in particular, Shimara Gary. Before joining the class, she was a dietary aid and was searching for her next career path. When she learned of the tuition-free CNA program, she realized that this might be what she needed to move forward in her medical career.

"The program has been beneficial to my family and me in that it provided the opportunity to better my life," Gary said. "I am excited to use this experience as a stepping stone toward my goal of becoming a registered nurse."

As part of graduation day, CareerEdge organized a job fair with local health care employers to connect students with potential CNA job opportunities.

The high demand for CNA's in the Sarasota area offers great promise to these graduates with the potential to earn approximately \$10 to \$15 an hour.