

A photograph of three men in a kitchen or food service area. They are wearing dark blue UPMC polo shirts and ID badges. The man on the right is also wearing a dark blue baseball cap with the UPMC logo. They are engaged in a conversation. The background shows stainless steel kitchen equipment and a doorway.

# Building Relationships That Work

Through connections with community organizations, **UPMC is breaking down barriers** to employment while assembling a stronger workforce.

By **Andy Mulkerin** | Photos by **John Dillard**



It

wasn't long into **Raymonn Kennedy's** first experience working in a hospital that he realized something he hadn't been expecting. He was serving as a food service attendant at UPMC Shadyside, learning the ropes, and he quickly discovered that there was more to this job than delivering trays and moving carts up and down the hall.

"I believe it was my first week," Raymonn recalled. "I was working on Floor 7, and there was a lady in one of the rooms — I served her breakfast and lunch, and both times, I could just tell the moment I walked in, her day was the brightest; she was having the time of her life. We enjoyed our conversation, we cracked a few jokes, and she really enjoyed me being there."

"That impacted me a lot, because that's what I wanted to do; that's the goal. That's what I wanted to be when I came here."

Raymonn came to UPMC through a partnership with Auberle. The McKeesport, Pa.-based human services nonprofit operates, among other programs, the Employment Institute, a workforce development program that helps individuals who may face challenges finding, obtaining, or maintaining employment to succeed in the workforce.

Raymonn was part of the first cohort of eight individuals training at UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside, primarily in Food and Nutrition roles like food service attendant, cook, and catering host, through Auberle's Employment Institute.

It's a new extension of a partnership that's already paid dividends: More than 90 people have been placed into employment through a collaboration between Auberle and UPMC Magee-Womens Hospital over the past two years. Auberle was selected by Mutual of America Foundation as a 2023 Community Partnership Award Winner for its work with UPMC Magee and will be honored in May for the impact the program has had on the lives of Auberle's clients and on the health care workforce in Pittsburgh.



*Raymonn Kennedy joined UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside full time after learning about job roles in Food and Nutrition through the hospital's partnership with Auberle.*

And it's just one of a number of similar programs blooming throughout UPMC's footprint that are lifting up the communities we serve while creating a stronger workforce and a better experience for the people for whom we provide care.

### Filling Two Needs at Once

The national headlines have, in the years since the COVID-19 pandemic began, been teeming with anxiety about the health care workforce, and for good reason. Workforce shortages across all industries had long been forecast, given the baby boom generation's advancement toward retirement age. The pandemic accelerated that trend and brought about what some have deemed a "Great Reshuffle," as many Americans reconsidered their calling and looked to change gears in their careers.

Partnerships between UPMC and programs like Auberle's Employment Institute and Phase 4 Learning Center help to fill roles within our facilities that are chronically under-filled and that pose retention challenges. In addition, they help create long-term career opportunities for people in our communities — our neighbors, our friends, and in many cases our family members — who might be at a disadvantage when it comes to finding or keeping a job.

Since April 2023, UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside has partnered with Phase 4, a private, nonprofit secondary school for disadvantaged and at-risk young people in the Pittsburgh area, to help create pipelines from school to successful employment. Phase 4's students generally have not been afforded many advantages when it comes to preparing for the working world.

"Our students come from all different backgrounds," Danette Rocco, career counselor with Phase 4, said. "While many of us had people growing up who we were learning from without knowing we were learning from them — a mother or father or both, getting up early and going to work — many of the students haven't had that."



“They have transportation issues. They’re supporting their family, or some are in foster care. Many of them have been pushed along, forgotten, not encouraged, just passed over most of their life.”

The partnership with UPMC is one way Phase 4 helps to prepare these young people for life in the professional world after they graduate. That relationship started with a suggestion from a team lead in Food and Nutrition who had benefited from mentorship early in her career and wanted to pay it forward.

“**Sherry Upsher**, our team lead at UPMC Shadyside Patient Services, was actually the individual who put us in connection with Danette and Phase 4,” explained **R.J. Franz**, director, Food and Nutrition, Patient Services and Training and Development, UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside.

Having that guiding hand along the way, both from Phase 4 and from UPMC, is critical. “I wanted to help mentor students like I was mentored at UPMC,” explained Sherry, who was part of the first class of mentees. “They always have an option to better themselves, but need guidance to choose the right path. I can show you the right path, but it’s up to you to choose those options to succeed.”

In the Phase 4 partnership, each cohort — there have been three so far, with a fourth launching this spring — spends a full day with the team at UPMC Shadyside, learning about roles available to them in Food and Nutrition and Environmental Services and hearing from Human Resources and Talent Acquisition representatives about UPMC’s benefits. They then meet **Mark Farris**, senior career development coach, UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside, who walks them through the process of applying for a job with UPMC.

When the partnership started, Danette had been concerned that some students may have been frustrated or even discouraged from applying, due to the electronic paperwork. She mentioned to **Jessica Jones**, manager, Training and Development, Food and Nutrition and Environmental Services, that it could be a barrier.



*Sherry Upsher, team lead, Food and Nutrition, left, helped to forge a relationship between Phase 4 Learning and UPMC after she benefited from mentorship herself within her department and was looking for ways to pay it forward.*

“

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— **Sherry Upsher**, team lead, Patient Services, UPMC Shadyside



Danette was pleasantly surprised by the accommodations the team took to ensure the application process made sense to the students. “What impressed me was, those barriers I had mentioned were really heard by Jessica and the rest of the team, and they put solutions in place,” she said. “I wish many other corporations would take the time to do that.”

In the short time the partnership with Phase 4 has been in place, several graduates of the program have gotten full-time positions with UPMC as a result of their participation.

### Support Along the Way

Auberle works with more than 150 referring agencies to accept clients in need of support, including employment training and placement, and partners with more than 200 organizations like UPMC to place those individuals, both teen and adult, with potential employers. At the same time, Auberle supports their clients’ other needs, like transportation, housing, and mental health services.

The Auberle-UPMC relationship began through **Dawndra Jones, DNP**, vice president, Patient Care Services, and chief nursing officer, UPMC Magee-Womens Hospital, when she served on the board of directors of Auberle. Dr. Jones facilitated a partnership with **Chris Vitsas**, now vice president, Operations, UPMC Magee, to bring clients through Auberle to learn about and train for jobs in Food and Nutrition and Environmental Services.

“At Auberle, we try to help both the employer and the employee by filling chronically unfilled, yet really well-paying, jobs in the region,” explained Abby Wolensky, director of the Employment Institute. “What really makes the Employment Institute unique is that we’re focused on the whole person. We’re not just focused on them getting a job, but we’re focused on them keeping and growing in that job.”



Interacting with patients is **Luke Thomas’** favorite part of his job as food service attendant at UPMC Shadyside, which he secured through the hospital’s partnership with Auberle.

That means a close partnership between UPMC and Auberle to design a program that identifies positions with regular openings and matches them with candidates who have a high chance of success in those roles. It also means regular support from Auberle case managers like Todd Elston and Grace Mincarelli, who help the trainees join the program and are with them every step of the way. The case managers check in regularly to help their clients negotiate aspects of the working world they may not be familiar with and make sure their outside-of-work needs are supported.

“I had family members and friends who told me that UPMC would be a great career opportunity for me,” Raymonn explained. “So when Todd and Grace came up with this opportunity, I went and took it.”

Case managers like Todd and Grace have a special interest in seeing their clients succeed. “I’ve known Ray since he was maybe 10 or 11 years old,” Todd said. “To hear him talk about his experience [with UPMC], it can change his life.”

### “One Smile Could Change Their Whole Day”

The trainees in the Auberle program rotate through on-the-job experience in various roles to see what they feel most comfortable with and excel at most. It’s important as they consider their career prospects that they understand both their strengths and what makes them truly enjoy their work.

“I like the food service attendant [role] most,” **Luke Thomas**, one of the Auberle trainees at UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside, explained. “You move around a little more. I have ADHD, so I’ve got to always be moving around.”

The interactions with patients motivate him and keep him going throughout a shift: “One smile could change their whole day.”

Raymonn agrees. “Recently, my gram had been a patient over at UPMC Mercy, and I got to experience what the food service hosts did there, so when I got the opportunity to do it here at Shadyside, I really enjoyed it.”





*Jessica Jones, manager, Training and Development, Food and Nutrition and Environmental Services, coordinates the partnership between UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside and Auberle, speaking regularly with Auberle representatives like case managers Todd Elston and Grace Mincarelli.*

The Auberle trainees add value even in their short time on each rotation — and begin to build relationships that may continue into the future.

“From the first day that we met Ray and Luke in our department, they brought such an energy and such a positive spirit, it was hard not to like them,” said **Joy Meta**, manager, Food Services, UPMC Shadyside. “They asked a lot of questions and were so engaged with our staff, and there were no complaints from either of them.”

The real value in the partnership with Auberle is that it works both ways, bringing value to UPMC and to the individuals the program is training and teaching.

“I got to learn a little bit about myself,” explained **Jamir Parker-Fields**, who was also in the first cohort at UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside.

Jessica, who helped to design the business unit’s program with Auberle, noted, while the trainees are learning on the job, they’re also taking advantage of UPMC’s robust learning offerings.

“We worked with Learning and Development to get links to specific courses that the trainees wouldn’t otherwise be able to access since they aren’t yet employed by UPMC directly at the time of the rotation program.”

In addition to seeing how different job roles operate first-hand, they complete four courses in Learning by the time the rotation is over. The little things like that help to get the Auberle trainees acclimated to both UPMC and the world of health care in general as they get to know each role.

At the end of the four-week training program, **Katie Radkowski**, recruiter, and her team get what may be the most enjoyable job of all: Making job offers to the trainees who have successfully completed the rotation.

Jamir, Luke, and Raymonn were offered positions in the Patient Services department within Food and Nutrition at UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside at the end of their rotation in January — and all three accepted.

The program doesn’t end there.

“Once they accept the positions and are onboarded, it’s very important [for Human Resources] to have a great relationship with Auberle,” Katie explained. “Just having another point of contact for them if they’re having difficulties with the onboarding process, or scheduling a health assessment, or electronically signing the paperwork.”

# More **LIFE CHANGING** Than You Know

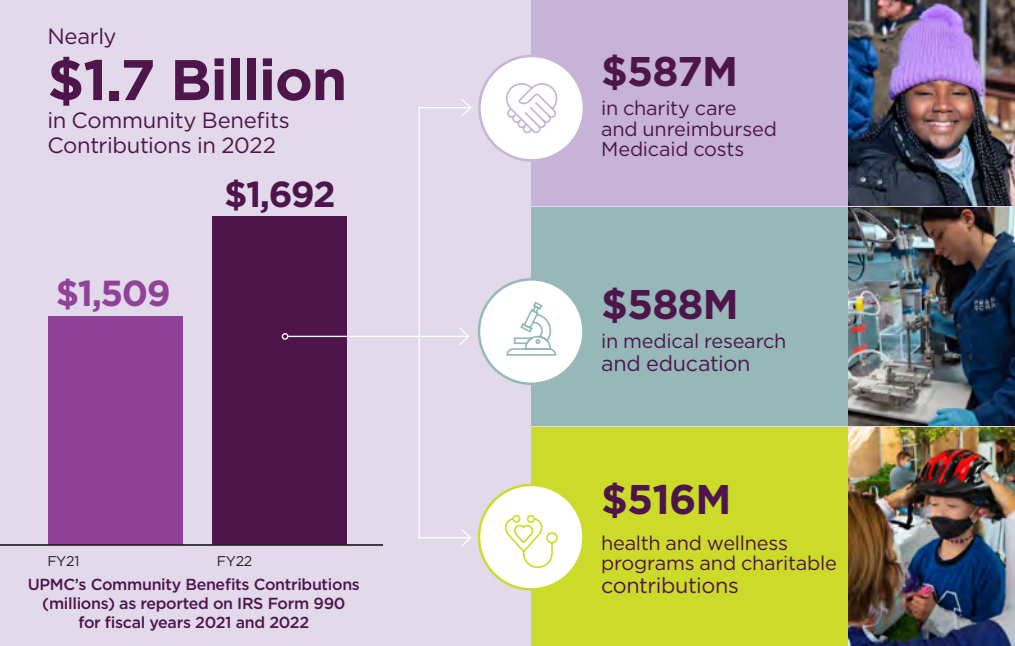
See the full report at [UPMC.com/AnnualCommunityReport](https://UPMC.com/AnnualCommunityReport)



## UPMC Is Known for Life Changing Medical Excellence and So Much More

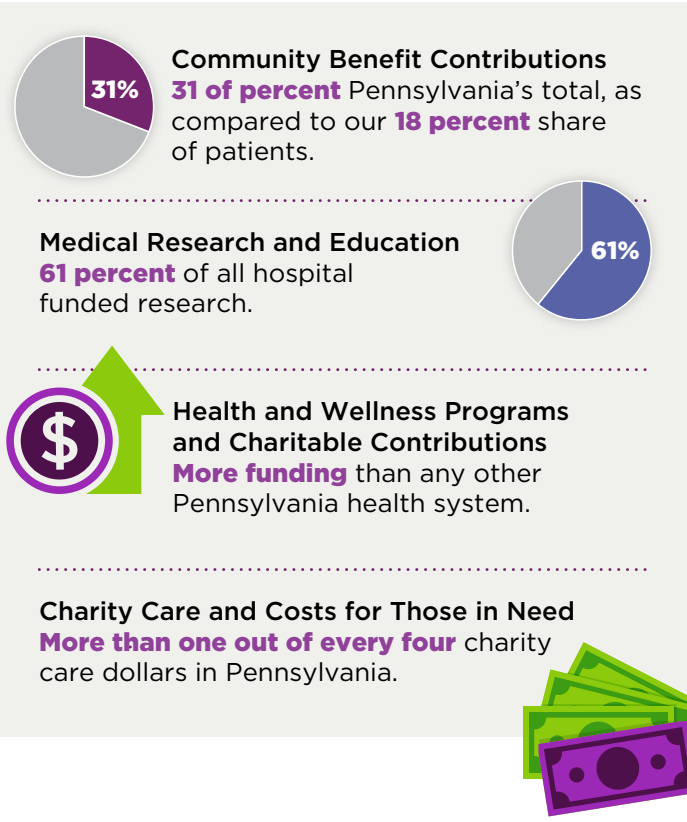
We’re about the Life Changing impacts we make in our communities, the Life Changing places where we deliver care and support, and the Life Changing experiences we create for our employees, our patients, and our members.

## Community Benefit Contributions



## Going Above and Beyond

UPMC contributes more than our fair share in Pennsylvania:



## Caring for the Vulnerable

by providing more care to our communities’ populations in need than any other health system.



### UPMC cares for:

- Allegheny County: **8 out of 10** pediatric patients from low-income families.
- Western Pennsylvania: More than **5 out of 10** Medicaid patients.
- West Central Pennsylvania: Bedford, Blair, Somerset Counties: **3 out of 4** substance abuse patients.
- Northwest Pennsylvania: **8 out of 10** pediatric patients from low-income families.
- North Central Pennsylvania: **7 out of 10** seniors.
- Central Pennsylvania: **6 out of 10** babies born to low-income families in Dauphin County.



### A Win-Win for the Community

Partnerships like those with Auberle and Phase 4, and many other workforce development programs throughout UPMC's footprint, benefit the young people who receive training, education, and support — and in many cases ultimately find rewarding and meaningful careers — while making a difference in UPMC facilities.

“The labor market is still very challenging,” R.J. noted, “and this past year we have had to be very creative. Our recruitment team does a fantastic job with routing us applicants, but finding these types of pipelines is so helpful.”

“We get to show them you don't have to be a doctor or nurse to have a successful career in health care,” he added. “There are many different avenues, and we let them experience that and give them a little bit of a hands-on exposure to the environment.”

“Our partnership with Auberle, like our hospitals themselves, represents a service to the community. The missions of both organizations really align,” said Chris, from Magee, who now serves on the board of directors of the Auberle Foundation himself, alongside **Lauren Lloyd**, vice president, Human Resources, UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside, who chairs the Auberle board.

“We've had countless program members move on to other career pathways and education,” he added, “and grow in their careers from EVS and Food and Nutrition to working the front desk, serving as a transporter, becoming a medical assistant, or working in Supply Chain.”

Ultimately, according to Danette, from Phase 4, the biggest impact may be for the young people who have previously been “passed over in life,” who get to experience what their professional future might look like.

“This program is life-changing for the kids.” **FF**



***Jamir Parker-Fields** accepted a position with UPMC Presbyterian Shadyside after completing the first cohort of the Auberle program at the hospital.*

UPMC facilities throughout our regions support the needs of the community while **developing a pipeline for future health care workers.**

Other workforce development programs and partnerships include:

**Eagle's Nest Leadership Corporation** | UPMC Hamot partners with the Eagle's Nest Leadership Corporation to support the community and help young people pursue meaningful, long-term employment in health care. Eagle's Nest focuses on instilling hope in students by providing a concrete plan for a pathway to a career, as well as resources, support, and opportunities.

**Williamsport Area School District** | Volunteer Services at UPMC in North Central Pa. partners with Williamsport Area School District's Special Education department to offer volunteer work training opportunities for high school students with special needs to prepare them for post-school outcomes. Through the program, students gain vocational skills in a supervised work environment and some have gone on to full-time positions within UPMC.

**Freedom House 2.0** | Inspired by the development of an early model for EMS service pioneered in Pittsburgh, Freedom House 2.0 is a collaborative effort of UPMC Health Plan and Partner4Work, part of the Allegheny County Workforce Development Board. Freedom House 2.0 is a model for recruiting, training, and employing underserved and economically disadvantaged community members for positions in health care in the Pittsburgh area and will soon be expanding into other communities UPMC serves.

**Project SEARCH** | UPMC partners with international nonprofit Project SEARCH to provide on-the-job learning and training for high school students with disabilities, with the ultimate goal of competitive employment with UPMC or elsewhere in the community. The program, with sites at UPMC Hamot, UPMC Jameson, UPMC Mercy, UPMC Passavant, and UPMC Chautauqua, has resulted in UPMC employment for dozens of participants since its inception in 2008, and successful employment elsewhere in the community for dozens more.

**Energy Innovation Center** | The Energy Innovation Center (EIC) is a Pittsburgh nonprofit that partners with employers on sustainable workforce development initiatives. UPMC's partnership with the EIC began in 2017 with four cohorts per year training for Environmental Services positions at UPMC's Pittsburgh hospitals; the program now trains six cohorts per year in EVS and patient care services, and trainees find placement at UPMC's hospitals throughout Allegheny County. Since its inception, the program has graduated 675 trainees.

[Check out additional UPMC in Central Pa. partner programs.](#)