

The Power of Pathways: Building an Inclusive Health Workforce with EMS Corps

The Need: Homegrown Health and Emergency Response Talent

Access to a quality job and financial security play a significant role in living a long and healthy life.ⁱ However, San Mateo County's booming economy leaves many residents out of financial well-being. The majority of San Mateo County's Latina and African American households do not have enough income to meet their basic needsⁱⁱ and unemployment rates for Latina, African American, and Pacific Islander residents are higher than the County average.ⁱⁱⁱ Recent research on economic mobility also reveals the importance of removing the unique and persistent barriers to opportunity that young men of color, particularly Black young men, face.^{iv}

The Bay Area's growing health sector offers numerous opportunities for economic mobility,^v but its workforce rarely reflects community demographics. In San Mateo County, where 60% of residents are people of color,^{ix} there is a need for pipelines of homegrown talent that represent the communities emergency responders serve. African American and Latina clinicians are underrepresented in California's primary care workforce,^{vi} and the number of employed registered nurses of color does not reflect statewide demographics.^{vii} Nationally, nearly 84% of emergency medical technicians and paramedics are White.^{viii}



Photo Credit: Belen Seara, San Mateo County.

Three of San Mateo County's first EMS Corps trainees

The Solution: Emergency Medical Services Corps

Responding to young residents' need for more quality jobs and the healthcare sector's representative workforce shortage, Alameda County's Health Care Services Agency developed an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) training program for underrepresented young men with disadvantaged backgrounds. In 2017, San Mateo County Health formed a partnership with EMS Corps to make the program available for San Mateo County residents. Four local young men joined the Spring 2018 cohort.

"EMS Corps was my path from boyhood to manhood."

-Emmanuel Guterrez, EMS Corps graduate

“We are excited to have this new EMS employment pipeline of highly trained and diverse Emergency Medical Technician candidates.” -Brad White, Regional

Director; American Medical Response

EMS Corps’ five-month training includes anatomy and physiology, illness prevention and treatment, and public health issues. In addition to the EMT curricula, trainees participate in life coaching, mentorship, physical training, health and wellness, community service, and leadership development. EMS Corps also provides students with resources to address other needs in their life, including a monthly stipend and case management.

EMS Corps has a strong emphasis on employer relationships and successfully places its graduates into jobs with local ambulance companies as well as local recovery centers and hospitals. Alameda County employers value EMS Corps’ community-centered approach and its graduates are highly sought-after. Of the 194 EMS Corps graduates, more than 141 are working in a related field. EMS Corps also helps trainees set long-term professional goals and prepares them for numerous career pathways. Many program alumni become firefighters, doctors, nurses, and police officers.

The Essential Ingredient for Success: Brotherhood, Coaching, and

Specificity

Brotherhood: EMS Corps’ cohort model and emphasis on community creates strong bonds that help participants weather challenges and create opportunity during the program and throughout their careers. Each cohort collectively creates its own mantra, which serves as a rallying point during the five months of training. Alumni retain strong connections with the program, returning to serve as mentors, tutors, and skills instructors.

Coaching: The life coaching EMS Corps provides is one of its most powerful elements. Students participate in weekly sessions where they learn how to overcome obstacles and achieve their goals. Participants and staff note how the coaching transforms trainees’ perspective not only toward their career trajectory, but also their families, relationships, and communities.

Specificity: While EMS Corps has created co-educational cohorts, gender-specific trainings have been more effective. By creating a program specifically for young men of color, who experience some of the greatest structural barriers to economic mobility, EMS Corps has created a pipeline of exceptional providers uniquely qualified to serve the needs of communities most impacted by health inequities. The program is also designed and led by people who have shared experiences with participants and maintains a laser focus on students’ specific needs.

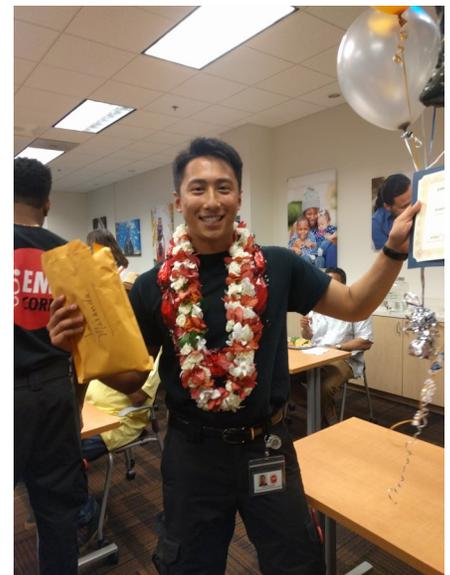


Photo Credit: Grace Streltsov, San Mateo County

San Mateo County resident Julian Miranda at his graduation from EMS Corps

“Where is the dreaming? Where is the power of what I can become? It doesn’t exist in our communities, in our schools or anywhere else. They now know who they are and what they can do. Five weeks of coaching puts them in that status. That’s powerful, powerful. It’s the power of the mind.” -Dr. Valerie Street, EMS Corps Life Coach^x



Photo Credit: Emergency Medical Services Corps

EMS Corps trainee participating in Emergency Medical Technician training.

Challenge: Commitment and Recruitment

Trainees face a number of challenges, from the full-time schedule to the fast-paced curriculum as well as occasional crises in their personal lives, but EMS Corps’ life coaching, case management, and specific supports help students overcome whatever obstacles they face. Given San Mateo County’s recent participation in the program, recruiting local prospects willing to travel to the training site in San Leandro can be challenging. However, word is spreading about the program’s strengths and interest in the Peninsula grows.

word is spreading about the program’s strengths and interest in the Peninsula grows.

Looking to the Future: Replication and Expansion

San Mateo County’s first EMS Corps graduates are currently working in the field while they pursue careers in law enforcement, nursing, and fire service. EMS Corps’ fourteenth cohort began August and four San Mateo County residents are participating. The model has been replicated in Los Angeles and Erie, Pennsylvania. EMS Corps’ Executive Director is also exploring the feasibility of a female EMT training program with gender specific supports. By creating economic opportunity for residents most impacted by health inequities, EMS Corps is building a stronger health workforce and healthier communities.

“Public agencies are now looking at the community in a different light, because now once they see the young men from our program,...it breaks down the stereotypes that some folks may have had towards young men of color, and as well as what young men of color have toward public agencies.” -Michael Gibson, EMS Corps Executive Director^{xi}

Endnotes

ⁱRobert Wood Johnson Foundation (2011). Issue Brief #4: Income, Wealth and Health.

ⁱⁱInsight Center for Community Economic Development (2018). California Self-Sufficiency Standard Fact Sheet: San Mateo County Key Facts.

ⁱⁱⁱU.S. Census Bureau (2017). Employment Status, 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.

^{iv}Chetty, R., Hendren, N., Jones, M., & Porter, S. (2018). Race and Economic Opportunity in the United States: An Intergenerational Perspective.

^vJP Morgan Chase & Co. (2015). Strengthening the Bay Area: Building a Middle-Skill Workforce to Sustain Economic Growth and Expand Opportunity.

^{vi}Healthforce Center at UCSF (2015). California’s Primary Care Workforce: Supply, Characteristics and Pipeline.

^{vii}California Health Care Foundation (2017). California’s Registered Nurses. California Health Care Almanac Quick Reference Guide.

^{viii}DataUsa (2016). Race and Ethnicity. Emergency Medical Technicians & Paramedics.

^{ix}U.S. Census Bureau (2017). Hispanic or Latino Origin by Race. 2012-2016 American Community Survey 5-year Estimates.

^xPublic Broadcasting Service, (2014). Lifesaving training changes outlook for young men in Oakland. PBS NewsHour.

^{xi}Public Broadcasting Service, (2014). Lifesaving training changes outlook for young men in Oakland. PBS NewsHour.