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**Press Release: CEP, Inc Awarded Rural Health Grant**

Northwest Wisconsin Concentrated Employment Program (CEP, Inc) recently received a \$150,000 grant from the federal Office of Rural Health Policy, in the Health Resources and Services Administration, to fund the first year of a three year project. The grant's purpose is to provide training and pre-employment services for people interested in becoming direct care health workers. In addition, it includes continuing education for direct care supervisors and managers.

The executive director of CEP, Inc., Steve Terry, described the grant as "meeting the needs of our elderly and disabled while also providing an important employment opportunity for the residents of Northwest Wisconsin. Over the course of the next three years, the Direct Care Worker Initiative will recruit, train, and help to place 300 individuals, while also providing training for their supervisors. If we're successful this first year, the grant allows for two more years of funding, for a total of \$375,000."

There is currently a shortage of direct care workers in the eleven counties of Northwest Wisconsin, with over 1300 people on waiting lists for in-home, personal care services. The Wisconsin Department of Health Services wants the waiting lists eliminated, with all eligible people receiving the needed services. In addition, the State has expanded long term care options, making more citizens eligible. At the same time, the general population is aging, further adding to the need for personal care workers.

The grant has three primary goals, according to Terry. "First, the grant seeks to increase the number of people receiving these direct care services. By increasing the number of trained workers, the grant will help decrease the number on waiting lists, while also serving the expanded population group."

"Secondly, the funding will increase the numbers of trained and certified direct care workers: 75 the first year, 125 the second year, and 100 the final year of the grant. Once trained and experienced, we want to help employers keep these workers. That ties in with the third goal of initiating policies that enhance job satisfaction and retention of direct care workers."

To implement this grant, CEP, Inc staff will work closely with both public and private service providers, as well as a working consortium consisting of the Wisconsin Personal Services Association (WPSA), Northern Bridges, and Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College. For more information regarding the direct care workers grant initiative, contact Sue Bodoh, Grant Manager: sbodoh@nwcep.org.

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