

Sun Life clerks casting shadows on front desk work

CAVIT students accompany staff as part of medical assistant program

By **LINDSEY GEMME**
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CASA GRANDE – Through the last few weeks of February, over 40 local high school students from across Pinal County stepped behind the glass at Sun Life Family Health Center to help front desk staff.

The teens, enrolled in Central Arizona Institute of Technology (CAVIT)'s medical assistant program, shadowed and worked with Sun Life's healthcare staff with assorted tasks to increase their skills and real job experience. These included answering telephones, greeting patients, updating and filing patients' medical records, filling out insurance forms and verifying demographics and insurance coverage, handling correspondence, and scheduling appointments.

CAVIT's medical assistant coursework is a two-year program for juniors and seniors of Pinal County high schools.

"The students attend CAVIT's

program two hours a day, five days a week during the school year, while still attending their home schools," explained Jeff Wooley, a teacher in the medical assistant program.

"They learn the skills and knowledge of being a medical assistant, as well as workforce soft skills such as resume writing, filling out applications and interviewing skills."

Lauren Reed, a junior at the Casa Grande Union High School, was hands-on in her office filling out paperwork and helping to process Sun Life patients late last month during her shadowing experience.

"It's been great – busy!" she commented during a brief break Wednesday morning, Feb. 26. When asked why she decided to enter the medical field, she said, "Well, I want to be an oncologist. So, this is a good first step."

"It's been mainly just watching," commented CAVIT student Alexandra Nelson, on her first day 'on the job.' Nelson is a senior at the Sacaton alternative school Vechij Himdag

MashchamakuD. "But it seems like a good job," she added.

Nelson graduates high school in June, and immediately will be able to enter the workforce as a medical assistant.

Students that complete the course earn a certificate of completion. And then at the end of the school year, the student must pass the Arizona Department of Education Program completer Medical Assistant Test, which is based on the ADE Medical Assistant Standards, Wooley said.

"A student that completes the program has the option of going into the workforce or continuing onto college. Medical assistant program graduates generally have a good success rate with getting hired on after graduating. Our class of 2013 has six of 33 working locally as a medical assistant, and our class of 2012 has 16 of 34 working in various places throughout the state."

In fact, three of Wooley's former students have actually been hired on to work at different Sun Life offices in the last year.

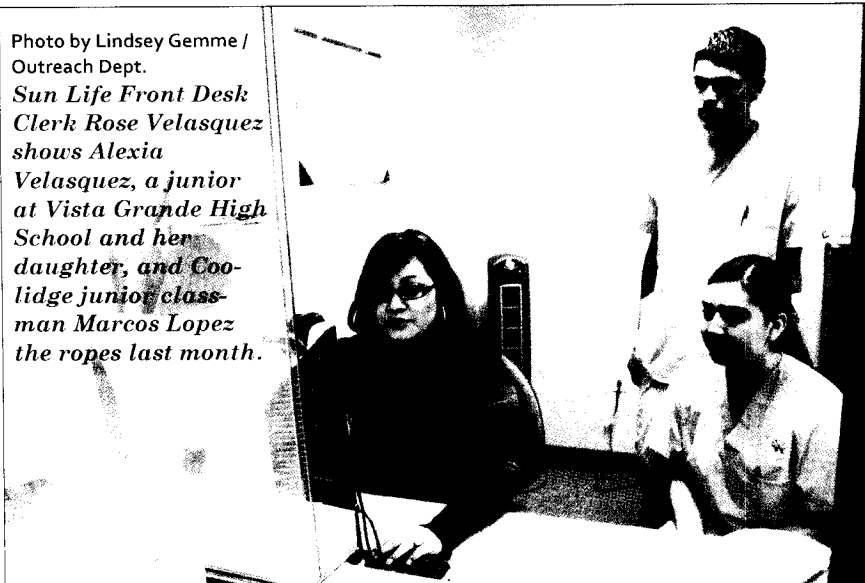
Jorge Santana, now an Outreach & Enrollment specialist at Sun Life, was one of those successfully-hired students. What he felt was the best part of the program and shadowing experience was that he got "real, hands-on training," and "a chance on building a great network and becoming friends with staff, as well."

And Sun Life CEO Travis Robinette says that the company also benefits greatly from the partnership with the students and CAVIT.

"Sun Life always welcomes these learning opportunities for area youth," Robinette commented, "because we can contribute to developing our future healthcare leaders here in Pinal County."

Photo by Lindsey Gemme /
Outreach Dept.

Sun Life Front Desk Clerk Rose Velasquez shows Alexia Velasquez, a junior at Vista Grande High School and her daughter, and Coolidge junior classman Marcos Lopez the ropes last month.



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