



**workforce**  
SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON

## Improving Healthcare Outcomes and Employee Success Through Funding and Sourcing of Workforce Training Programs

**KOELSCH COMMUNITIES**, established in 1958, is a family-owned and operated independent living, assisted living and memory care provider to almost 3,000 residents in 36 communities across eight states. Their innovative care techniques and programs are nationally recognized in the Senior Living industry. Nurses are involved with every aspect of resident care, including health assessments and direct communication with physicians or medical caregivers. Koelsch Communities has partnered with Workforce Southwest Washington for several years to provide state-of-the-art training programs and resources for its employees.

**WORKFORCE SOUTHWEST WASHINGTON (WSW)**, a nonprofit organization founded in 2002, funds community prosperity by investing in services that help individuals gain skills to obtain good-paying jobs or advance in their careers and that help companies recruit, train and retain workers. Since 2003, they have invested more than \$100 million to strengthen Southwest Washington businesses. WSW is the Local Workforce Development Board (LWDB) designated by federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) legislation to oversee the public workforce system in Clark, Cowlitz, and Wahkiakum counties.

### THE PROBLEM

The Koelsch Communities team identified a need for specialized training in working with residents with dementia to reduce staff burnout and improve patient care, especially for those who refused care. They sought to create better connections between caregivers and residents that would improve quality of work for employees and quality of life for residents. Initial research revealed that advanced dementia training programs were not available in the United States, but the team discovered “Humanitude,” a paradigm-shifting four-day training program from Europe. Koelsch’s team began searching for opportunities to support a pilot program in a handful of their communities.



### SOLUTION

Koelsch’s Culture and Training Director reached out to the local workforce development board, Workforce Southwest Washington (WSW), to ask what resources might be available to help fund a pilot training program. WSW procured and provided a \$40,000 grant to fund the advanced dementia care training pilot. With WSW’s investment, Koelsch brought an instructor over from Spain for four days of training. Forty Koelsch healthcare staff were trained using hands-on techniques that they could immediately implement when caring for residents.

### OUTCOMES

Koelsch’s staff noticed a dramatic positive change in quality of life for many residents. There were improvements in residents walking, talking, and accepting care. Several withdrawn residents began feeding themselves and interacting with others. There was a 90 percent reduction in aggressive behavior and refusal of care by residents with dementia.

The training also served as an employee satisfaction and retention tool with Koelsch committing to title changes and salary increases for employees that successfully completed the training.

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Koelsch was able to implement a European model of training that:

- 01 Reduced turnover
- 02 Increased employee satisfaction
- 03 Increased employee engagement
- 04 Improved relationships between caregivers, residents and their families
- 05 Created positive outcomes for residents

The training was so successful that Koelsch is actively implementing it in communities across the country. Future trainings could impact up to 2,200 employees and more than 3,000 residents they serve.



*“One of the reasons we like working with Workforce Southwest Washington is that they really want to help employers solve workforce challenges. WSW is creative in finding new resources, new sources of funding, new collaborative approaches. We wanted to work with them because they have their eyes on the whole scope of our industry.”*

*“By working with WSW, we not only received a grant, we also gained access to a significant amount of talent and networking connections in our industry. We can really move projects forward, collaboratively across a region.”*

*“I would highly recommend WSW for any business trying to solve workforce challenges and issues around recruitment, training and employee retention.”*



**Benjamin Surmi**  
Director of Culture & Training  
Koelsch Communities