

Richcroft: Making an impact on lives

BY DONNA M. OWENS

When Oladayo Solanke migrated from Nigeria to the United States for a new life, she prayed to find a job, one that would enable her to uplift people.

But she never imagined that being hired in the country's multibillion dollar caregiving industry would lead to a White House invitation.

Following a flurry of calls, emails and background checks, Solanke's serendipitous visit happened April 18. That day in the Rose Garden, President Joe Biden signed an executive order to expand access to affordable, high-quality care and provide support for care workers and family caregivers.

Solanke was there, proudly representing her family, the National Alliance for Direct Support Professionals and her employer, Richcroft Inc., a Hunt Valley-based nonprofit organization that provides residential and personal care and support for individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

"I was near the front, wearing a name tag when the president signed the order," Solanke said of the ceremony, after which she shook Biden's hand. "It was a dream I could have never dreamt. When I got back to work, it was like I was a celebrity."

Richcroft, founded in June 1983, has nearly 500 employees and runs more than 50 residences in locations throughout Baltimore, Carroll, Harford and Howard counties. Its mission is to "create opportunities and cultivate relationships that enable every person to live their best life."

That philosophy underscores Solanke's role as a certified direct care professional, a position she's held at Richcroft for more than two years.

Working from a residence in Baltimore

County, she provides hands-on care to three individuals, tending to responsibilities that run the gamut from meal preparation to personal grooming. She works nights and weekends, and the schedule can prove demanding.

Still, Solanke said, it "gives her joy."

"I chose this career path because I have this passion in me to care for people," she said. "I love to assist people and put smiles on their faces."

Richcroft CEO Kevin Drumheller views such feedback — not to mention the surprise White House invitation — as validation of the company's culture of caring, respect and empathy for clients, their families and the team.

"We just celebrated our 40th birthday, and we are built on the concept of servant leadership," he said. "It's about training, growth, promotion and eliciting feedback so that our employees feel valued. We treat them right."

Drumheller, who holds advanced degrees in social work and education, launched his own career some three decades ago in the caregiver arena.

"I was a mental health counselor for kids" at a local hospital, he said. "I've done it, and I understand the importance of having good people in these positions."

Shontae Jones is Richcroft's director of human resources. She said the company's leadership strives to create an environment where "everyone not only feels a deep sense of purpose in their work, but where they also feel valued, appreciated and heard."

To that end, Richcroft made "significant investments" during the coronavirus pandemic to maintain a quality workforce amid widespread national staff shortages, and those goals



Above: Richcroft offers support services for adults and children with intellectual and other developmental disabilities. Michelle Council, left, a Richcroft staff member, visits the Rose of Sharon Equestrian School with Ryan Skelley as part of Richcroft's Community Development Services program. **LLOYD FOX/BALTIMORE SUN**

have continued. Compensation is one key example.

"We pay our people well," Drumheller said.

Richcroft's executives told *The Baltimore Sun* that it has boosted starting salaries for direct-support professionals several times, totaling a 58% increase.

In addition to monetary investments, employees are being offered a variety of training and