



# News Release

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
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## **‘PROJECT SEARCH’ STUDENTS GRADUATE WITH NEW JOB SKILLS**

*Student clients gain job skills, independence*

**(RICHMOND, Va.)** — Nearly 90 students participated this school year in an innovative and expanding workforce and career development program that helps Virginia youth with intellectual and developmental disabilities gain valuable work experience and interpersonal skills.

Project SEARCH provides high school students with disabilities a hands-on training program during their senior year of high school. Students work in a health care or business setting, with the goal of gaining employment by the end of the school year. Some of the host sites offer employment to students prior to graduating. This year, more than a third of the participating students have already secured jobs.

The youth participated at 11 host sites across the Commonwealth, including a new site for the 2012-13 academic year, Inova Alexandria Hospital in Alexandria. Project SEARCH is coordinated by the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, the Virginia Department of Education and local public schools systems.

“The addition of two more sites in 2013-14 is a tribute to the student success and hard work we have seen in our current sites. For most high schools students, this is their first work experience and partnering with these medical facilities readies them for competitive employment,” said DARS Commissioner Jim Rothrock.

Throughout the school year, DARS counselors guide their young clients through the program, working with teachers from the students’ local schools as well as job coaches from local employment service organizations. These partners work each day with participating students to help them learn the professional, interpersonal and independent living skills that will aid them in their path to potential employment. Students work in jobs ranging from materials

handling to surgical technician while learning skills that can transfer to other jobs and enhance their independence.

[Project SEARCH](#), a national program dedicated to providing education and training to young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, began in Virginia in 2005. Each year, DARS provides nearly \$500,000 to fund job coaches to work with the participants through the academic year to ensure that they learn the responsibilities and duties of the workplace.

This year's host sites and graduation dates for participating students are:

- Clinch Valley Medical Center, Richlands, May 16
- Carilion New River Valley Medical Center, Christiansburg, May 22
- Sentara Careplex Hospital, Hampton, May 29
- Bon Secours St. Francis Medical Center, Midlothian, June 4
- Virginia Tech Carilion School of Medicine, Roanoke, June 5
- Sentara Norfolk General Hospital, June 5
- Virginia Commonwealth University Health System, Richmond, June 6
- Prince William Hospital, Manassas, June 6
- Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital, Richmond, June 7
- Inova Alexandria Hospital, June 10
- Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center, June 13

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The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, in collaboration with community partners, provides and advocates for resources and services to improve the employment, quality of life, security, and independence of older Virginians, Virginians with disabilities, and their families. For more information, visit [www.vadars.org](http://www.vadars.org).