



News Release

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‘PROJECT SEARCH’ STUDENTS CELEBRATE NEW JOB SKILLS

Student clients gain job skills, independence

(RICHMOND, Va.) — Nearly 95 high school students in Virginia with developmental and intellectual disabilities participated this school year in the innovative Project SEARCH career program to gain valuable work experience and skills.

Since the program first started in the 2009-2010 academic year, 475 Virginia students have participated in Project SEARCH, a national program for high school students with disabilities that provides hands-on training during the senior year. The Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services’ recent analysis of the program showed that 82 percent of the Commonwealth’s students had found employment since participating in the program.

“Project SEARCH really helps high school students with disabilities develop independence, set career goals and obtain job skills to help them enter the job market of the new Virginia economy,” said DARS Commissioner Jim Rothrock.

Project SEARCH participants obtain invaluable experience through internships in a health care or business environment, with the goal of having a job by the end of the year. Some are offered jobs before they finish the year-long internship program.

This school year, 13 host sites from across the Commonwealth participated in Project SEARCH. At least 17 students participating in the program have already been placed in jobs.

DARS, the Virginia Department of Education, local hospitals and public school systems coordinate the program. Each year, DARS provides nearly \$600,000 in funding for job coaches to work with students throughout the academic year to ensure that they learn the responsibilities and duties of the workplace.

DARS counselors guide the clients through the program during the year, working with teachers from their local schools, job coaches from local employment service organizations and staff from the host business who serve as liaisons and mentors. These partners work each day to make the transition seamless from the initial interview for the program to its completion for the participating students.

Below is a list of this year's host sites and the scheduled dates to celebrate the success of the participating students:

- Carilion New River Valley Medical Center, Christiansburg – May 27
- Clinch Valley Medical Center, Richland – May 28
- VCU Medical Center, Richmond – June 1
- Bon Secours St. Francis Medical Center, Midlothian – June 2
- Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital – June 3
- Sentara Norfolk General Hospital – June 3
- Sentara CarePlex Hospital, Hampton – June 4
- Inova Alexandria Hospital – June 5
- Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital, Richmond – June 5
- Bon Secours Maryview Medical Center, Portsmouth – June 9
- Bon Secours Memorial Regional Medical Center, Hanover – June 10
- Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center – June 11
- Novant Prince William Medical Center, Manassas – June 11

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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 or follow DARS on Facebook at www.facebook.com/vadars or Twitter at @vadars.