



News Release

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PROJECT SEARCH PARTICIPANTS CELEBRATE COMPLETION OF CAREER PROGRAM

(RICHMOND, Va.) — Around 150 high school students in Virginia with developmental and intellectual disabilities participated in internships during the school year to gain useful skills and work experience as part of the Project SEARCH program.

Project SEARCH is a national career program for high school students with disabilities, offering hands-on training in various healthcare or business settings throughout the senior year. The program, which is funded by the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, began in Virginia in 2008. Since then, more than 700 students have participated at host sites across the Commonwealth.

“It’s incredible to see these students grow and succeed in the program, gain independence and become part of the new Virginia economy,” said Commissioner Jim Rothrock. “The students’ lives are indeed transformed while their new coworkers are inspired by their talents.”

Project SEARCH programs are concluding for the 2016-17 school year at 17 host sites. Students will celebrate with their families and colleagues in ceremonies to mark their accomplishments. (See list below for dates of completion ceremonies.) Students participating in Project SEARCH obtain invaluable experience through internships, with the goal of having a job by the end of the year. Some students are offered jobs before they finish the program. Last year, around one-third of students had received jobs prior to completing their internships.

DARS, the Virginia Department of Education, local hospitals and public school systems coordinate the program. DARS provided more than \$700,000 in funding for job coaches to work with students throughout this academic year to ensure that they learn the responsibilities and duties of the workplace, as well as “soft skills.”

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:

- Bon Secours St. Francis Medical Center, Midlothian – June 6
- National Conference Center, Leesburg – June 6
- Sentara CarePlex Hospital, Hampton – June 6
- Sentara Norfolk General Hospital – June 6
- Bon Secours Memorial Regional Medical Center, Mechanicsville – June 8
- Novant Health Prince William Medical Center, Manassas – June 8
- Centra Lynchburg Hospital – June 8
- VCU Medical Center, Richmond – June 8
- Inova Alexandria Hospital – June 9
- Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital, Richmond – June 9
- Bon Secours Maryview Medical Center, Portsmouth – June 13
- Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center – June 15

Additionally, Project SEARCH completion ceremonies were celebrated recently at Carilion New River Valley Medical Center, Christiansburg; Clinch Valley Medical Center, Richland; Augusta Health, Fishersville; Chesapeake Regional Medical Center; and Carilion Roanoke Memorial.

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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.