



News Release

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For More Information, Contact
A.J. Hostetler, Communications Director
aj.hostetler@dars.virginia.gov
804-662-7372

‘PROJECT SEARCH’ STUDENTS GRADUATE WITH NEW JOB SKILLS

Student clients gain job skills, independence

(RICHMOND, Va.) — Nearly 100 Virginia students with intellectual and developmental disabilities gained valuable work experience and interpersonal skills this school year through an innovative workforce and career development program.

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 their student-interns. This year, more than a third of the participating students have secured jobs.

Thirteen host sites across the Commonwealth participated, including two new sites for the 2013-14 academic year, Bon Secours Memorial Regional Medical Center in Mechanicsville and Bon Secours Maryview Medical Center in Portsmouth. Project SEARCH is coordinated by the Virginia Department for Aging and Rehabilitative Services, the Virginia Department of Education and local public schools systems.

“In the spring, Project SEARCH students complete what is typically a transformative year for them. Many of them start the year as a young student with a disability and end the year as an employee, colleague and taxpayer. They not only have a new identity as a worker, but also a new social network and much improved sense of self,” said DARS Commissioner Jim Rothrock.

Host sites mark the end of the internships with graduations. “These ceremonies are celebrations for our graduates, their families, the hospitals where they interned, and in the end, our Commonwealth,” Rothrock said.

[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 \$600,000 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.

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 to make students' transition seamless from the initial interview for the program to graduation. Students work in jobs such as pharmacy aide or data entry clerk while learning the professional, interpersonal and independent living skills that can transfer to other jobs and enhance their independence.

Upcoming graduation dates for participating Project SEARCH students and sites are:

- Bon Secours St. Francis Medical Center, Midlothian, June 3
- Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital, Richmond, June 3
- Carilion New River Valley Medical Center, Christiansburg, June 3
- Sentara Norfolk General Hospital, June 3
- Bon Secours Maryview Medical Center, Portsmouth, June 6
- Carilion Roanoke Memorial Hospital, June 6
- Inova Alexandria Hospital, June 6
- Bon Secours Memorial Regional Medical Center, Mechanicsville, June 11
- Sentara Williamsburg Regional Medical Center, June 12
- Virginia Commonwealth University Health System, Richmond, June 12
- Novant Health Prince William Medical Center, Manassas, June 13

Students participating in the Project SEARCH programs at Sentara Careplex Hospital in Hampton and the Clinch Valley Medical Center in Richlands graduated in May.

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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. Follow DARS at [Facebook.com/vadars](https://www.facebook.com/vadars) or on Twitter [@vadars](https://twitter.com/vadars).