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Communications Department
Tel: 01225 82 5849/5799/6230/1299

communications@ruh.nhs.uk
www.ruh.nhs.uk

Media Release

RUH welcomes teenagers with learning disabilities into the workplace

The RUH is celebrating the success of six teenagers who are getting ready to graduate from a year's internship at the hospital. The significant fact here is that each of these young adults has a learning disability.

Thanks to the huge success of Project SEARCH – a programme to help young adults with learning disabilities learn skills necessary for future employment – these young students from Bath and North East Somerset (BaNES) and Wiltshire have significantly increased their prospects of full employment.

The RUH was one of the first hospitals in the South West to welcome teenagers with learning disabilities into the workplace as part of Project SEARCH, working in partnership with Fosse Way School and BaNES Adult Services. This is the third year that students have been taking part in the school-to-work internship at the RUH.

The Project provides an opportunity for real-life work, focused on both general and task-specific job skills. Students receive daily instruction in the workplace and independent living skills and participate in rotations on a particular job, to help them to make a successful transition from school to productive adult life.

Project SEARCH Co-ordinator Jan Marsh says Project SEARCH has helped people to see the students' abilities instead of their disabilities. It challenges traditional perceptions about employing people with learning difficulties.

The students have been working in Oncology outpatients, Trauma and Orthopaedic Unit, Urology, pre-op assessment unit Catering, Pharmacy and Sterile Services.

One student has already found permanent employment working within the pathology department. When Matt Hayball starts work he will be supported by our follow-on job coach, Jackie Grinter. Bath RUH Project Search is the first in the country to be able to offer this support to ease the transition into work.

The RUH is committed to creating an environment in which everyone feels valued and able to give of their best, and believes that a diverse workforce can have a positive impact on both the everyday running of the hospital and the quality of patient care.

Chairman Brian Stables says: "We're delighted with the success of the Project Search initiative at the RUH. The students learn such a lot during their internship and we know that those who go on to achieve employment become valuable members of the team.

“Six out of the nine students who undertook Project SEARCH in the first year are now in employment, and four of last year’s students now have paid jobs.

“We are proud of our staff for embracing the concept and creating such great opportunities for the interns.”

Ends

Notes for Editors

- Project SEARCH supports the cross-government Learning Disability Employment Strategy, called Valuing Employment Now: Real Jobs for People with Learning Disabilities, launched on 24 June 2009 by Phil Hope, Minister for Care Services. The strategy sets out a vision to increase the number of real jobs for people with learning disabilities with appropriate support being provided, and close the employment gap with their employment rate and that of the disabled population as a whole.
- Nationally, the unemployment rate for adults with learning disabilities is 90% and the majority of these individuals want to work. Working with large employers drives culture change, as staff and customers see people with learning disabilities performing a variety of valued roles.
- One of the primary keys to the success of the Project SEARCH model is a strong collaboration between partners and the RUH is working extremely closely with partners Bath and North East Somerset Adult Services and Fosse Way School, Bath, as well as Remploy; an organisation which helps people with physical/learning disabilities.
- Project SEARCH at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center has provided a number of job analysis reports to the Bath and North East Somerset Project SEARCH team. They have also developed innovative training aids and job adaptations for streamlining many different positions and shared these with the Royal United Hospital Bath NHS Trust.
- Project SEARCH programmes across the USA have received numerous awards and publicity, including the President’s New Freedom Initiative Award presented by Department of Labor, Ohio Governor’s Award, and Clark County Washington - Employer of the Year.
- Fosse Way is a special school for children and young people with a very broad range of abilities. The school is co-educational and takes in children between the ages of 3 - 19. All our pupils, for a variety of reasons, find it difficult to be successful within mainstream schools as full-time pupils.
- The School was inspected by OFSTED in March 2009 and judged again to be outstanding. The inspector commented that Fosse Way School is “an outstanding school at the cutting edge of pioneering initiatives.”

- The school is situated in Norton-Radstock and draws pupils from a range of backgrounds, both urban and rural, across Bath and North-east Somerset as well as six other local authorities. It is comparatively small with 145 pupils currently on role.