

5th October 2009

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Media Release

RUH first hospital in South West to help teens with learning disabilities into the workplace

The Royal United Hospital in Bath is this year hosting the first student interns in the South West to take part in Project SEARCH, a programme to help young adults with learning disabilities learn skills necessary for future employment.

10 students from Fosse Way, Three Ways, Hayesfield and Wellsway Schools are taking part in the school-to-work internship at the Royal United Hospital over the coming academic year.

Fosse Way School, in Radstock, is the first school in the UK to pilot Project SEARCH, and the RUH is extremely proud to be working with students from across the Bath and Wiltshire area in this pioneering initiative.

David Gregory, Headteacher of Fosse Way School said "Project SEARCH is a really important development for young people with special needs in their last year of schooling. For the first time in this country they will have the opportunity to be supported in their introduction to the work place with a real prospect of full employment by the end of the year."

"Here at Fosse Way we are excited to be collaborating with the RUH Bath in the national pilot of Project SEARCH."

The goal for each student is competitive employment somewhere in the community using the skills they have acquired at the RUH. The internship provides real-life work experience combined with training in employability and independent living skills to help students with disabilities make successful transitions from school to productive adult life.

Students build communication and problem-solving skills, as well as job-specific skills, through worksite rotations. These are unpaid student internships - similar to the clinical rotations that are part of every medical school curriculum.

Sue Smith, Assistant Director of HR at the RUH said "A teacher and a teaching assistant from Fosse Way School and two job coaches from Bath and North East Somerset Council will work with the students as they rotate around a number of key areas at the RUH and hopefully experience all the different elements of working in this busy but exciting NHS organisation."

"From HR to the Emergency Department, from Oral Surgery to Finance, each day the students will spend time in the workplace, as well as time back in the classroom at the

RUH to assess how their day has gone and learn other valuable skills such as writing CVs and attending interviews.”

“At the RUH we’re committed to creating an environment in which everyone feels valued and able to give of their best, and we believe that a diverse workforce can have a positive impact on both the everyday running of the hospital and our quality of patient care.”

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.

Anne O’Bryan, Employment Development Lead for Valuing People & BANES Council said “This is an excellent time to be employing people with learning disabilities as a leading employer. There is a cross-Government working group that is prioritising this untapped talent pool and Project Search is very much in the forefront of that.”

One of the primary keys to the success of the Project SEARCH model is a strong collaboration between partners and the RUH will be working extremely closely with partners Bath and North East Somerset Children’s Services and Adult Social Services and Fosse Way School, Bath, as well as BOSS (Bristol One Stop Shop) and Pluss Organisation Ltd.

The Project SEARCH model was first developed in the USA at the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital. Now running in over 120 American organisations including the Fifth Third Bank and the Department of Labor, the project has proven success in supporting people with moderate to severe learning disabilities into work and staying there. In 2003-2005, 78% of students in the USA secured real jobs either with the host employer or elsewhere.

Project SEARCH is up and running in two other UK cities, Leicester and Norwich, both partnerships involve colleges; but the Bath collaboration is the first to take students from as young as 16 to begin preparing for work.

The RUH students have already successfully passed a number of guidelines to ensure they are eligible such as basic communication skills (verbal or supported by technology), ability to take direction and a desire to work in a healthcare setting.

Now the hospital is welcoming them to the large, friendly team that they will be a part of for the next year.

***** ENDS *****

Notes to Editors

- Valuing Employment Now sets out the Government's goal to increase radically the number of people with moderate and severe learning disabilities in employment by 2025. The aim is for as many as possible of these jobs to be at least 16 hours per week in order to close the gap between the employment rate of people with learning disabilities and that of disabled people generally. The current employment rate for disabled people as a whole is 48%.
- 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 will share 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.
- The Government is currently inviting proposals from local partnerships who are interested in running the Project Search model then evaluating its success. Ten to 12 sites will be selected to take part in testing how the model could work in England.
- 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.
- BOSS promotes employment to people with learning difficulties through:
 - workshops, surgeries and special events run with other local organisations
 - linking people with advice and support on a work related issues, including how to get training; how supported employment works and benefits advice
- Pluss is a social enterprise that provides high quality employment, training and equipment for disabled people in South West England.