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Project Search expansion brings skills training to adults with developmental disabilities

PROVIDENCE, R.I. – After five years of success with its three youth locations, the Office of Rehabilitation Services (ORS), a division of the Department of Human Services (DHS), expanded its partnership with others to open a new site for adults with disabilities ages 21 to 30.

Project Search is a training program for people living with developmental disabilities that helps prepare them for competitive employment.

As part of the expansion, eight interns started in the school-to-work program at Rhode Island Hospital today, October 15. This addition is a collaboration between DHS, Rhode Island Hospital, the Department of Behavioral Healthcare, Developmental Disabilities and Hospitals (BHDDH), the Department of Labor and Training (DLT) and Goodwill Industries.

“All Rhode Islanders should have an opportunity to meaningfully engage in their communities,” said Executive Office of Health and Human Services Secretary Eric J. Beane. “It is fitting that we are celebrating the expansion of Project Search during National Disability Employment Awareness Month, which highlights the important contributions people with disabilities make every day to our workforce and state. We’ve made important progress in connecting people of all ability levels with training and employment opportunities; this program is an important part of the equation. Congratulations to all involved in making this expansion possible and ensuring more people have the opportunity to realize their goals and find jobs in the community.”

Project Search started in Cincinnati in 1996, and it has since spread internationally. Rhode Island’s three youth sites, funded by a federal grant and partner investments, are at Miriam Hospital, Blue Cross Blue Shield and Newport Hospital. There have been 57 graduates total, with 77.2 percent successfully finding employment upon completion.

“It is extremely rewarding to see students gain confidence throughout the school year; it empowers them to showcase their skills, talents, and abilities as they move into the workforce as young adults,” said ORS Associate Director Ron Racine.

Said DHS Director Courtney E. Hawkins, “We all get dignity from the opportunity to work. Creating employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities through Project Search ensures they have the opportunity to experience that feeling of dignity as well. Getting all who can work to work is also important for the State’s future, and through Governor Raimondo’s leadership, we plan to not leave anyone behind.”