

## Cooley Dickinson Hospital Launches Work Program for Disabled Adults

**NORTHAMPTON, MA** – Cooley Dickinson Hospital, in collaboration with the non-profit organization neba, has launched a program that will provide employment training to young adults with disabilities.

The program, entitled Project SEARCH, offers participants internships in a variety of the hospital's departments. Cooley Dickinson is the first hospital to lead a Project SEARCH program in western Massachusetts.

"It's extremely exciting to collaborate with neba and operate a Project SEARCH program here at Cooley Dickinson," said Ruth O' Connor, director of support services. "It's very important to our organization that we provide opportunities for those in our community with intellectual and developmental disabilities. They provide valuable support to our operations each and every day."

Participants in the program will gain valuable work experience through month-long internship rotations. The goal is to support young adults with disabilities, who are transitioning from school to work, through a community/agency partnership that allows them to gain employability skills. Many of the program's interns are ultimately hired for both part-time and full-time positions.

The Project SEARCH model involves an extensive period of training and career exploration, innovation adaptations, long-term job coaching, and continuous feedback from instructors, job coaches, and employers. It is dedicated to workforce development that benefits the individual, community, and workplace.

"We're thrilled to collaborate with Cooley Dickinson, as part of our mission to empower those with disabilities through employment," said Ruth Poirier, NEBA's division supervisor & Project SEARCH program coordinator. "Partnerships like these help us break down barriers of social injustice and assist those who have been historically marginalized in our community."

Founded in 1983, neba's mission is to provide meaningful employment opportunities for disabled individuals. For 35 years, the organization has worked with the Massachusetts Department of Developmental Services to assist in making programs like Project SEARCH available for young adults. neba became the first agency in western Massachusetts to provide a Project SEARCH program when it partnered with Springfield College in 2018.

Project SEARCH has more than 400 program sites in 40-plus states in the United States, as well as programs in Australia, Canada, England, Scotland, and Ireland.

"Programs like this are a win-win-win: for the individual, the organization, and the community, so we're very excited to welcome these new employees in training into our Cooley Dickinson family," said O' Connor.

**About Cooley Dickinson Hospital**

Cooley Dickinson Hospital ([cooleydickinson.org](http://cooleydickinson.org)) is a not-for-profit, acute care hospital that offers community-based programs and services in Northampton, Massachusetts. A member of the Mass General Brigham System, Cooley Dickinson has been advancing the health of people in the Pioneer Valley since 1886. The organization includes community-based primary care and specialty practices in Hampshire and Southern Franklin counties, and a VNA & Hospice program that provides home health and hospice nursing and rehabilitation visits. We are committed to serving our patients and communities with exceptional, compassionate, and personalized care.