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Abilities' youth employment programs: Making a difference

Gaining the confidence to move from internship to a career

WASHINGTON, NJ – August 31, 2023 – True to the organization's mission to help individuals with disabilities reach their fullest potential in life, the youth employment programs offered by Abilities of Northwest Jersey, Inc. are making a difference in the lives of local residents.

This fall, Joe Hutchinson, 23, of Chester, will take the next step towards embarking on a career in the health care industry when he enrolls for classes at The College of New Jersey. During school breaks and after graduation, Hutchinson will work for Morristown Medical Center, a major trauma center hospital and the flagship of the Atlantic Health System of hospitals.

For a young man who had different abilities than most of his peers, and who struggled with self-confidence, this represents a major accomplishment.

Hutchinson got his start with Project SEARCH, a school-to-work transition program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities, where he participated in a nine-month internship program at the Atlantic Health System's Newton Medical Center.

"The staff in Newton was a critical part of my success, and I am grateful for their patience, friendship, and guidance," said Hutchinson. "They prepared me for the position I have now as a support services associate, where my job is to deliver all required and ordered supplies to each hospital department, including the operating room."

Project SEARCH is one of three youth employment programs offered by Abilities in conjunction with community partners and local and state educational services. Through these programs, young adults have gained training and employment opportunities that otherwise would not have been available to them.

“We’re proud of the way Joe embraced the challenges that he faced, and through hard work and self-setting goals became an excellent example for other student interns,” said Sue Zukoski, Abilities Chief Operating Officer. “We are looking forward to seeing what he will be able to accomplish in his career.”

She added, “We hope Joe’s story will be an inspiration to others. At Abilities, we offer supports and resources that can help students receive the support and resources they need to lead full, rewarding, and successful lives.”

Project SEARCH is a tuition-based internship program at Newton Medical Center and Atlantic Health System’s Hackettstown Medical Center that includes daily classroom instruction focused on employability skills and internship rotations within the hospital setting.

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Developed at the Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center in 1996, Project SEARCH is available at more than 500 locations nationwide. Locally, Project SEARCH is a collaboration between Atlantic Health System, the NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation, Sussex County Educational Services Commission, the NJ Division of Developmental Disabilities, and Abilities of Northwest Jersey Inc. Applications are available online at www.sussexesc.org.

The other youth employment programs for students with intellectual or development disabilities are:

Center for Adult Transition (CAT)

A state-funded program designed to provide students with the opportunity to experience higher education and receive support and resources, the Center for Adult Transition (CAT) is a partnership between Abilities and Warren Community College.

CAT students participate in one-year curriculum that includes academic, life skills, and employment readiness courses, after which they will be able to sample on-campus and off-campus jobs. As part of the program, students receive training in resume writing, job application completion and interview skills.

For more information about CAT, contact Abilities at info@abilitiesnw.com or (908) 689-1118.

Student Internship Program

Through a grant from the NJ Division of Vocational Rehabilitation and in partnership with businesses in Warren, Hunterdon, Sussex, and Morris Counties, Abilities provides internship opportunities for high school students ages 14-21. Participating students receive $18 per hour and work a total of 150 hours, while receiving training and mentoring.

Additional information is available by contacting Abilities at 908-689-71118 or info@abilitiesnw.com.

“We are very fortunate to have the support of state and local agencies, local organizations and businesses, and community partners,” said Zukoski. “With their help, young people like Joe Hutchinson have the opportunity to achieve their career goals and lead independent lives.

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About Abilities of Northwest Jersey, Inc.

Abilities of Northwest Jersey Inc. is a non-profit organization dedicated to inspiring people with disabilities to achieve their life goals by providing individualized supports. Incorporated in 1974, Abilities works diligently to create an inclusive community where individuals with disabilities are given the opportunity to reach their fullest potential in life. Visit our website at https://www.abilitiesnw.org/, or follow us on Facebook at https://www.facebook.com/abilitiesnw/.



Suggested caption:
Joe Hutchinson delivers supplies to the operating room at Morristown Medical Center. Hutchinson, who is enrolling at The College of New Jersey in September, got his start with Project SEARCH, a school-to-work transition program for young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Project SEARCH is one of three youth employment programs offered by Abilities of Northwest Jersey Inc.

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