

## Bryn Mawr Rehab's Career Development Program for Individuals with Disabilities

Bryn Mawr Rehabilitation Hospital (BMRH), a member of the Main Line Health System, has become the first in the region – and second in the nation – to establish a Project SEARCH program that will target adults with disabilities. Project SEARCH was originally developed by the US Department of Labor and implemented by Cincinnati Children's Hospital in Ohio to provide internship experiences for high school-aged children with disabilities.<sup>1,2</sup> The US Department of Labor recognizes that identifying alternate labor pools, which can include individuals with disabilities, can be a viable strategy to confront critical workforce shortages.<sup>3</sup> BMRH recognizes the potential in a historically underutilized workforce.

The Americans with Disabilities Act defines the term “disability” in three parts. An individual with a disability “(1) has a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities; or (2) has a record of such an impairment; or (3) is regarded as having such an impairment.”<sup>4</sup> According to a 2010 survey of Americans with disabilities, among all working-age (ages 18-64) people with disabilities, only 21% state they are employed.<sup>5</sup> Among the disabled unemployed, 73% attribute their disability as being the primary reason of their unemployment.<sup>5</sup> Regrettably, an overwhelming 43% of individuals with disabilities reported that they have encountered job discrimination.<sup>5</sup>

These statistics are staggering and clearly demonstrate the need for programs that provide opportunities for individuals with disabilities. BMRH has developed

a unique Project SEARCH Program designed specifically for adults. Although creating a new program can be challenging, BMRH is proud to take a leadership position in this arena, both as a way to give back to the community, and to improve the quality of life for people with disabilities by helping them enter or re-enter the job force.

BMRH, in partnership with the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) and Main Line Health, will serve as a single conduit for delivering vocational training and employment services for adults with disabilities. At the conclusion of the program, BMRH anticipates hiring graduates of Project SEARCH within the Main Line Health System to improve performance in high-turnover, entry-level positions. For example, interns are currently placed in physical therapy, environmental services and materials management roles, to name a few.

The highlights of the program include:

- Three, 10-week job site rotations throughout Main Line Health hospitals
- Personalized training plan for each intern
- Support of a job coach, worksite supervisor, and peer mentor throughout the program
- Assessment for necessary adaptive equipment at work sites
- Functional curriculum that will provide travel training, and time and money management skills

The primary purpose of this program is to obtain competitive employment for adults with disabilities.

The program's success will be measured based on indicators, which include: weekly hours worked, salary, benefits, and employee and employer satisfaction. Evaluation data will be obtained on an ongoing basis to allow for early identification of barriers to achieving success. In the first year, eight interns will participate in the program. If the BMRH project for adults is as successful as the high school model, we anticipate an 82% placement rate.

Looking to the future, BMRH hopes to expand the program to non-Main Line Health entities by forming partnerships with regional businesses to provide employment opportunities to qualified graduates of the program. This program will allow BMRH to further its mission to serve individuals and their families whose lives can be enhanced through physical or cognitive rehabilitation. ■

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### Teenice Nebblets

*ARAMARK Administrative Fellow  
Main Line Health System*

### Donna Phillips

*President, Bryn Mawr Rehabilitation Hospital  
Main Line Health System*

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