

THE JOB INTERVIEW

Finding a place in the workforce

At Concord Hospital, program trains developmentally disabled

By **RAY DUCKLER**
Monitor staff

Barbara Jobin calls her students in Project Search ambassadors, pioneers, trailblazers.

They are Nick Schaefer of Concord, who's lost 30 pounds by walking to Concord Hospital, the site of the program for developmentally disabled people who want to learn and work.

They are Maureen McDonnell of Weare, who finished an internship in human resources last week and received a cake, a card and lots of confidence.

And they are Nikolay Hubbard of Hopkinton, who's earned his driver's license and shows Jobin how to fix the on-screen interactive board.

"The kids are walking around here really feeling accepted," Jobin said. "Someone here said they knew kids with disabilities worked hard but didn't realize how hard they work. Comments like that and seeing my students do so well, that's what makes it so rewarding."

Jobin has been a speech and language pathologist in the Concord School District for nearly 30 years. The district joined forces last September with Community Bridges, Vocational Rehabilitation and Concord Hospital to localize a program born in Cincinnati 14 years ago.

So Jobin moved her office from Kimball School to Concord Hospital.

The goal is simple: Teach life skills to developmentally challenged people, mostly high school seniors, so they can work and get paid.

Teach them how to balance a checkbook, how to use a debit card, how to build a resume.

Teach them to make eye contact when conversing, what to wear during an interview, how to fill out a job application, how to maneuver through this giant complex, with its 3,000 employees and more directions than an ant farm.

Teach them to walk tall.

"We just had one student apply for a part-time job and we're waiting to hear," said Jobin, referring to Hubbard. "He applied at Concord Hospital, and just because we're at Concord Hospital, it doesn't mean that they will employ you. We are there to apply, just like anyone else."

Project Search runs parallel with the school year, mixing class time with internships. The students fold towels, sterilize medical equip-

ment, move items around the hospital campus, and cook and clean.

Jobin teaches nine students, one short of class capacity. Two job coaches sit in, and both will job shadow students this summer before they "fade," as coach Samantha Dolloff calls it.

"They were shy and timid when they first got here," Dolloff said. "They were so nervous.

They're nothing like what you see here today."

Graduation for the inaugural class is June 13. Jobin was thrilled to explain the program, hoping to attract 10 new students for the fall semester.

Is there a common thread between your students? My students have communication difficulties. All can talk, and they're great talkers, but it's knowing how to use those skills appropriately, like how to enter the cafeteria. This is the business world they're entering. The goal is for students to get paid employment.

See **JOB - A6**

Any fun recollections after an internship ended?

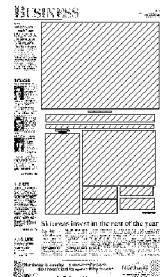
One of our students had been working in the kitchen and wanted to bring pizzas that he had made for the celebration.

We gathered, and every intern came with a recognition from the department that they were working in. It could have been a card or cake or candy. I had tears in my eyes.

Those kids were on cloud nine.

Is discipline more of a problem here than in other educational settings? It's the same gamut of issues as with anyone else, but you're dealing with them from a work point of view. They all have adjustment and transition issues. There are some behavior concerns, but any issue that has happened, we've been able to address it.

Actually, we know that kids or young adults with disabilities are hard workers, and when



they're employed, they stay in a job for a long time. And they never miss a day here.

Will your students recruit others for the next school year? We're in the process of accepting 10 new interns for next year. We will have a Project Search day one of the last days here where current students meet with incoming students so they can talk about things.

Was this a good career move for you? I'm happy, like I've died and gone to heaven. I'm so happy to see how well the students are doing.

How supportive has Concord Hospital been? They have been gracious in making us feel acceptable. The kids are walking around here really feeling accepted, and they get letters of recommendation from the departments. They include us in every

activity. Pride Day, a 30-minute walk called Wacky Walk, raffles, everything.

Can you comment on the growth you've seen? The first time they all came to the cafeteria, they all sat at different tables. Now, they sit at one or two tables, talking and behaving with a lot more confidence.

What about the program's first-ever graduating class? June 13. That's a big day. We're trying to find enough room in the hospital to hold all the people who want to be here. Parents, families, co-workers, teachers, representatives from Voc Rehab, Community Bridges. It's going to be a huge accomplishment.

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JOHN TULLY / Monitor staff

Devin Girard, a Project Search student intern on the nursing floor at Concord Hospital, picks up and delivers cups of water to patients during her shift Thursday. The school-to-work program gives students with disabilities training for jobs.



JOHN TULLY / Monitor staff

Trudy Philbrick, a Project Search student intern in the mail room at Concord Hospital, double checks where to place an envelope with Jamie Meserve, a mail assistant.