



Valley View opens arms to Oklahomans with disabilities

ADA — Valley View Regional Hospital is the first hospital in Oklahoma to participate in a national program known as Project SEARCH, dedicated to workforce development for individuals with significant disabilities.

By providing a nine-month stint of on-the-job training in various internships and experiences throughout the hospital, Valley View has made it possible for four of Oklahoma's young adults to graduate from the training program and go on to gain employment in Ada.

The graduates include: Erick Carrigan, Ada; Mark Dilbeck, Stratford; Melissa Pursiville, Ada; Thomas Spears, Ada.

"Valley View and Project SEARCH have helped me get off the couch and on my feet," Spears said, who now has a full-time job at Chartwells on the CLEET campus in Ada.

"Because of this opportunity, I now have the power and knowledge to do what I want to do. It wasn't easy but it has made me a better person," he said.

Other students echo that same sentiment. "This program has helped me get a job and most of all, no one gave up on me throughout this past year," said Pursiville, who recently graduated from Byng High School and now works in nutrition services at Rolling Hills Hospital in Ada. "I gained so much. I now have certifications in CPR, First-Aid, Automated External Defibrillator and I am a certified nursing assistant. I even gained the confidence to get my driver's permit and it's all because of Valley View and Project SEARCH."

Beginning last fall, the four young adults underwent job training, followed by three 10-week job internships at Valley View which included everything from laboratory to food service and wound care to information technology. The interns gained many skills, including surgical sterilization, removing memory from computers, prepping and servicing equipment, inventory and stocking and customer support and service.

"I know that I wouldn't have the job I have now without this program," said Dilbeck, who today works at Wal-mart in Sulphur. Carrigan, who works at Chartwells Food Service on the CLEET campus in Ada, added, "I was given a great opportunity. I had fun at Valley View and I am having a great time at CLEET. It was worth the whole nine months."

By partnering with businesses, Project SEARCH gives people with disabilities the opportunity to maximize their potential through competitive employment in non-traditional jobs. The four interns were recently honored at a reception at Valley View for their hard work and dedication.

For more information about Project SEARCH, phone Brenda Brasher, vocational rehabilitation counselor, at the Oklahoma Department of Rehabilitation Services, (580) 310-5300 or bbrasher@okdrs.gov.