

# VCU ASD Career Links

## Project Overview

March  
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In January of 2009, Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) contacted Bon Secours to determine their interest in collaborating on a research study funded through the National Institute for Disability and Rehabilitation Research for students with Autism Spectrum Disorders. The CEO, Mr. Peter Bernard was very interested and set up a meeting between VCU and the Bon Secours leadership team. VCU brought in Erin Riehle from Cincinnati Children's Hospital to share the Project SEARCH model with Bon Secours. VCU proposed establishing a Project SEARCH research site for students with ASD at Bon Secours St. Mary's Hospital. Before we left that meeting, Bon Secours had agreed to host the Project SEARCH site.

The Project SEARCH model is a one-year educational program for students with significant disabilities in their last year of high school. It is targeted for students whose main goal is competitive employment in the community. The program takes place in a healthcare or business setting where total immersion in the workplace facilitates the teaching and learning process through continuous feedback and application of new skill. The program runs parallel to the 9 month school year.

Students assigned to Bon Secours participate in a 9 month internship experience which includes:

- On-site classroom activities: resume preparation, job interviewing, problem solving skills
- Completion of three 10 week internships
- Possible job placement at completion of the program in an entry-level job matching skill set and interest

# VCU

**Virginia Commonwealth University**  
**Rehabilitation Research and Training Center**

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Case Study -- AIDEN

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Aiden is a 19 year old young man with Autism. He is serious minded, though charismatic, and enjoys structure, following rules, and staying busy with work. He possesses many innate qualities that make him a strong worker. Occasionally Aiden initiates conversation with others, though he frequently talks to himself quietly, repeating words and phrases, or songs. He does not have many social experiences, and required a lot of support in this area.

Aiden's first internship was with the Radiology Department, and the Emergency Room. He was responsible for stocking linens in cabinets, cleaning and erasing x-ray cassettes, and occasionally cleaning and turning over patient rooms. Each of these tasks was routine, and structured which seemed to be ideal characteristics of employment for Aiden. The challenges which he faced at work, and where his job coach provided the most support was in regards to his social behaviors. Aiden is tactilely stimulated and he has a tendency to invade personal space and rub or touch the person with whom he is interacting. In the workplace this is unacceptable and made his coworkers feel uncomfortable. Aiden's job coach worked with him on appropriately positioning his body, and keeping his hands to himself. Aiden and his job coach used visual aids and role playing scenarios to clearly define for him the types of space and contact that are appropriate. Aiden also learned that he could not use curse words at work. No touching, giving personal space and using appropriate language were defined for Aiden as "professional." When he gets too close to people they ask him to "be professional" and this reminds him to back up, while also being a non-embarrassing way to address his behavior in the workplace. Despite the social challenges that Aiden faced he demonstrated his skills as a dedicated worker, who takes his job seriously and consistently works to high quality.

Aiden's second internship was in the Engineering Department. He expressed interest working with his hands to fix things and being "one of the guys". His job coach and teachers thought he would also benefit from working closely with a male role model who could help teach him how to respect women in the workplace while being respectful and "cool." In this department the employees worked in teams of at least 2, for Aiden, who still needed support with his social interactions, this would provide a safe and supportive atmosphere. During this internship experience Aiden became independent installing lightbulbs and vacuuming the air ducts in the hospital.

Aiden's first and second internships provided his job coach with a lot of insight into his interests and strengths at work. Aiden enjoys repetitive tasks and cleaning, he is dedicated to following rules, has strong orienting abilities, and does well working independently and staying busy. Knowing this, his job coach met with the head of the Infection Control Department to create an internship which would benefit the needs of the department, while capitalizing on Aiden's positive work traits. Aiden became responsible for cleaning, and stocking isolation carts (which hold warning signs, gowns, gloves, and masks for nurses and visitors to wear when entering patient rooms) throughout the entire hospital, totaling 75 carts. The job coach and manager worked to get Aiden his own cart to hold cleaning supplies, and the signs that he needed to stock. Aiden mastered the sanitizing of isolation carts quickly, but initially he had difficulty remembering how to stock the carts. His job coach created a checklist for him. This checklist was laminated and Aiden was able to write on it to determine how many supplies he needed to restock. This checklist helped Aiden become independent on his job. Now that Aiden was working independently he had trouble getting to lunch and

leaving work on time. Since Aiden has trouble telling time his job coach helped him set alarms on his cell phone, which was a quick, simple solution.

Aiden's Infection Control internship was very appreciated by staff throughout the hospital and the importance of his position was recognized. The day that he graduated from Project Search he was offered a position working in the Infection Control department. He works 20 hours a week, earns \$9.14 per hour, and takes specialized transportation to and from work. As an employee, in addition to sanitizing and stocking the isolation carts, he is also responsible for cleaning, refilling, and replacing batteries in the 45-50 free standing hand-sanitizing machines throughout the hospital. When he replaces hand sanitizer in a machine he needs to record the date that it was done, since writing neatly is a challenge Aiden's job coach obtained a rubber stamp for him so that he could simply stamp the date onto the chart. As far as his work tasks, he continues to thrive. He now has an iPod Touch where he keeps his checklist and reminder alarms.

Aiden's greatest challenge continues to come from inappropriate social interactions, invading personal space, and touching coworkers, and problem solving when faced with confrontation. He has difficulty with sensitivity, putting himself in the other person's shoes. In one particular incident a patient and a visitor confronted Aiden because they didn't like the way he was looking at them and they felt uncomfortable. When confronted Aiden felt offended but he did not back down from the conflict, and when he finished speaking with them he cursed to himself as he walked away. He was not able to reason and understand where they were coming from, and he was very angry and embarrassed. In order to address these social challenges Aiden's job coach created a card with visual aids which Aiden keeps on his supply cart. It clearly lists 3 steps to follow in case of conflict, states "no cursing", and illustrates appropriate personal space. These tools coupled with frequent reminders, role playing, and support from his family have helped Aiden cope with his challenges, and be a highly valued, "professional."

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Case Study -- JASON

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Jason is a 20 year old young man who has Asperger's Syndrome as well as physical disabilities which impact his endurance. He graduated from high-school and enjoys reading historical novels. He enjoys spending time talking to people while he works but during downtime he prefers to be alone, reading his book or playing his Nintendo DS game system. Jason is occasionally misinterpreted as speaking to people in a condescending/rude manner though that is not his intent.

Jason's first internship was with the Coronary Care Unit (CCU), a small hospital unit with eight rooms. His job was to remove soiled linen bags, stock bedside carts and counters in each of the rooms with medical supplies, and to restock lab trays with color coded test tubes. He also recorded the daily temperature log, removed expired items, and cleaned the refrigerator. A sedentary clerical portion of his job was to stamp patient flow sheets (charts). Jason needed little support learning his job skills, and more support staying on task and working hard. Each bedside cart already had a supply list on it clearly stating the total number of items to be stocked, so this helped Jason remember how to stock them properly. Jason's greatest challenge was his work ethic and concern for work quality. He rushed through his work and spent time reading or watching television in the break room. In order to support Jason, and institute good worker habits he was no longer allowed to bring a book to his internship and his job coach created a structured schedule that provided time frames for him to complete his duties.

Jason's second internship was with Biomedical Durable Equipment. Employees in this department work on teams of two and their job is to circulate throughout the hospital in a systematic order to clean and distribute IV pumps. Jason built a close relationship with his partner and enjoyed saying hi to everyone he passed throughout the hospital. As far as his work, he learned how to properly clean IV pumps with single and multiple chambers, as well as the poles to which they are attached. Jason frequently had to be reminded to take his time to clean it thoroughly. Jason always counted how many items he cleaned on a shift and was proud to announce this to his job coach and employer daily. His manual dexterity, and ability to complete tasks with multiple steps were keys to his success with this job. Jason did not face challenges with job tasks, but by the nature of the job his breaks were limited. Over time his endurance improved.

Jason was very successful in his first internship with CCU but had developed more as a professional, and had room to grow so his job coach expanded on that first internship and created a similar experience on the Intensive Care Unit (ICU), a much larger unit with 20 beds. Similar to his duties on CCU he was responsible for stocking bedside carts, stocking linen in patient rooms, removing soiled linen from the unit, restocking syringes in 2 cabinets, and making lab deliveries as needed. Jason's job coach helped him learn his responsibilities on the unit with visual aids. The carts on this unit did not have a supply list so the job coach worked with the department to create this, having a set number of items required helped to hold Jason up to a particular standard. To help Jason learn the names of the supplies his job coach created identifying labels, and practiced locating the medical supplies in the supply room. Though Jason had a structured schedule and knew how to properly stock the carts similar challenges to those experienced on CCU arose during this internship. Though he was expected to stock all of the carts in a day, productivity and high quality were a challenge for Jason because he continued to rush through, or avoid his work. Despite his

inconsistent work quality he was well liked on the unit, and his work was highly appreciated. A typically somber floor benefited from the upbeat, and naïve, yet positive attitude that Jason displayed while working around the unit.

Following his graduation from Project Search, Jason was hired to work 20 hours a week in the ICU, he earns \$9.14/hour, and he takes specialized transportation to and from work. Jason continues to complete the tasks that he was responsible for as an intern. Into his employment he continued to work closely with his job coach on consistently stocking the carts properly, completing all of them in a day, and following his schedule. Jason' quality and quantity of work is inconsistent, though the unit is pleased with all of the work that he does accomplish in a day. He has an ipod touch which contains a checklist of supplies for bedside carts, photos of properly stocked carts, and reminder alarms. Jason's job coach has created several schedules, and daily logs to hold him accountable for the work that he completes, and the way that he spends his time in the day. These tools have been adjusted many times to better accommodate his needs . His job coach continues to work with him and the people on his unit to ensure that the supports in place are being used properly and updated as needed.

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Case Study -- RALPH



Ralph is a kind-hearted 19 year old man with Autism. He is pleasant, polite, courteous, and eager to please. He thrives on positive feedback and praise and is well-known for his disposition. Ralph initiates conversation with others, and can carry on lengthy conversations, though he uses words in an unusual way. His ability to hold conversations by repeating phrases that he has heard before is often misleading to those who do not know him because his comprehension level is lower than it appears. Ralph tends to engage in social interactions with adults more than his peers, though he has positive things to say about everyone with whom he interacts. He enjoys eating at a particular table in the lunch room and would request to join others at that table if it was already occupied. Sometimes he engages in conversations with these people, and other times he does not.

Ralph's first internship was in Nutrition Services where his main job duty was to remove trash and boxes from the kitchen. Initially his internship did not include any interaction with patients or visitors. However, he made statements that suggested he would like to work with people. He often said he needed to help the patients. He indicated several times that he wanted to push people in wheelchairs, but this was not a viable option at the time. Instead, Ralph's job coach worked with the supervisor of Nutrition Services to further develop his internship to include brief social interactions with patients/visitors. Occasionally he wiped down tables in the cafeteria and from time to time he removed trays from patients' rooms. Though Ralph was always accompanying a coworker when on the hospital units, he had challenges with this task because he had a tendency to stay in the rooms chatting for too long and needed regular prompting to move to his next task. His supervisor allowed him to do this job on occasion because of the rewarding feeling it provided him with, but never felt comfortable allowing him to do this job steadily or on his own, she felt that his work in the kitchen utilized his work strengths, and benefited her departments needs the most.

Ralph's second internship was in the Environmental Services Department. Throughout this experience he displayed several positive worker qualities: he kept track of his own schedule and took initiative to return to work promptly after lunch, often asking to leave lunch early so he could get back to his duties. This was a well-structured internship with concrete tasks that had a definite beginning and end. Ralph was responsible for stocking the janitorial closets in the main hospital (floors 2-6), and the South hospital (floors 4-7), and removing baskets with empty boxes from the nine floors in the building, recycling them in a box compactor at the loading dock. Ralph quickly learned how to work the box compactor and needed little support mastering this task. However, for support stocking closets his job coach provided visual aids, and strategies to help him achieve success, and increase his independence. Ralph had difficulty remembering how to properly stock his supply cart and each of the shelves in the hospital closets. His job coach created a supply list clearly stating the number of items he needed to load onto his supply cart. She also posted photographs in each closet showing what it would look like when properly stocked. These visual tools helped him master his job duties, so he was able to work independently on those tasks.

Ralph displayed several behaviors throughout this internship experience fixating, attention seeking, and avoiding work. He fixated on the CBS 6 News tower outside the elevator on the 7th floor and got distracted looking at that instead of working. He also insisted on using the lobby restroom which was not allowed. His job coach had several conversations with him to teach him that he needed to focus on his work, she enforced the need for him to follow

rules and make his supervisor happy, because pleasing other people is a motivator for Ralph. In an effort to get attention and help from other staff he would create illnesses, and ailments stating he could not breathe, was having a stroke, or suffering from exhaustion, and would also say that he was unable to complete his tasks because he was not capable though this was never true. He was able to elicit attention from many people throughout the hospital, but these behaviors were not helping Ralph be a productive intern, so his teacher and job coach created a behavior plan. This was an incentive plan which Ralph reviewed with his teacher prior to work and at the end of each day. By engaging in positive behaviors, Ralph could earn 15 minutes of time sitting in the lobby with visitors. This behavior plan helped to work with Ralph's challenging behaviors.

Ralph's third internship was with the linen department. By nature, this job lacked structure and had periods of downtime, and these were not ideal characteristics of a job for Ralph. His job coach worked with the department to create a structured schedule. In the morning, he worked on a team with two women to distribute linen throughout the hospital, and manually remove bags of soiled linen from the soiled linen room. He also had one department for which he was independently responsible. In the afternoons he worked alone to remove soiled linen from patient rooms. As the internship began Ralph displayed similar behaviors to those he displayed while working in Environmental Services. He also encountered trouble because he had independence walking the hospital floors. He has such a strong desire to help but did not understand boundaries. For example, while he was working on a unit removing soiled linen a patient asked him for help getting into her bed. Despite the fact that he was not qualified to do this, he agreed to help. Ralph's job coach quickly intervened. When he was corrected he became very emotional. To work with this compulsion to help even when it may put himself or someone else in danger, his job coach modified and reinstated a behavior plan. Role playing to help Ralph learn how to respond to patient requests were practiced often.

On the day of his graduation, Ralph was offered a position with the Nutrition Services Department. He works for 20 hours/week, \$9.14 an hour, and he takes specialized transportation to and from work. Ralph's job coach and his supervisor worked closely to create a daily schedule; this was meant to provide Ralph with structure and independence. However, old behaviors reoccurred. His job coach customized a behavior plan for this position. Additionally, instead of following a set schedule he was responsible for checking in with his supervisor to find out what tasks they need completed. This simple change provided more opportunities for positive feedback and praise which ultimately are the biggest reinforcers to keep Ralph.

## Bon Secours Project SEARCH Media

Lynnae Ruttledge (Presidential Appointed National Rehabilitation Services Administration Commissioner) mentioned our project in the Senate Congressional Hearing on the Americans with Disabilities Act 20 Year Celebration last week. It can be seen at the following link. You will need to fast forward to about 44:00 minutes, you will hear her comments. It runs about 4 to 5 minutes.

<http://www.c-spanvideo.org/program/id/229290>

**Project SEARCH graduation video filmed by Nick Dawson, Community Engagement - Bon Secours Richmond Health System**

The video is on YouTube and can be seen via the Bon Secours blog: <http://www.bonsecoursgoodsharing.org/mission-values/projectsearch/>

**Richmond Times Dispatch article published on February 25th**

A copy of the article can be found at: [http://www2.timesdispatch.com/rtd/business/health\\_med\\_fit/article/AUT125\\_20100224-212205/326685/](http://www2.timesdispatch.com/rtd/business/health_med_fit/article/AUT125_20100224-212205/326685/) and [http://static.mgnetwork.com/rtd/slideshows/20100225\\_autism/index.html](http://static.mgnetwork.com/rtd/slideshows/20100225_autism/index.html)

**Richmond Times Dispatch article published on June 15th -- Graduation Celebration**

[http://www2.timesdispatch.com/rtd/business/health\\_med\\_fit/article/AUT115\\_20100614-221607/351183/](http://www2.timesdispatch.com/rtd/business/health_med_fit/article/AUT115_20100614-221607/351183/)

**Henrico Citizen article published on July 1st**

<http://henricocitizen.com/st-marys-celebrates-pioneers-2010.htm?twindow=Default&smenu=1&mad=No>