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ELECTRONIC PHOTOS OF THE STUDENTS ON THE JOB AVAILABLE

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**WORK DISCOVERY PROGRAM MAKES JOB PLACEMENT POSSIBLE
FOR STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS; EXCELA HEALTH NEWEST PARTNER
WITH WESTMORELAND IU**

GREENSBURG, PA, December 10, 2012 ... By helping people develop their skills, Excelsa Health is contributing to the success of today's workforce and investing in the future. Excelsa's new partnership with the Westmoreland Intermediate Unit (WIU) provides experience to students enrolled in the Work Discovery Program.

The Work Discovery Program helps some 100 students ages 16-21 with individualized educational plans to develop marketable work and social skills needed to find and maintain employment after high school graduation. The students come from various Westmoreland County school districts as well as the Clairview School into local businesses such as the Greensburg Hempfield Library, Christian Layman, Ramada Hotel and Conference Center and World of Values and work alongside their job coach to assume responsibility for daily tasks.

"Excelsa has been so supportive allowing us to branch out into other areas. This is what the kids need. The safety rules and regulations that the students have been learning will be extremely useful someday if they secure employment in the health care industry; the kids are getting the real experience," said Mary Petrina, Job Coach mentor for the WIU.

Currently Excelsa is hosting students at Westmoreland and Latrobe Hospitals and the Corporate Services Center under the auspices of Volunteer Services.

Students report to work in the required dress code which includes an Excelsa Health shirt, identification badge and tennis shoes, but their assignments vary by location. At Westmoreland Hospital a group of four students spot cleans, restocks magazines and empties trash receptacles in assigned areas. The students discuss the duties for each area and who is responsible for completing each task. A checklist affirms all assignments were fulfilled at the end of their shift.

“We take it one step at a time with tasks,” noted Job Coach Cindy King. “We teach and re-teach if there is a problem, but for the most part, the students prove to be independent. We step back and observe at that point. They always know that they can ask me questions.”

Ruth Johnson, Volunteer Services coordinator at Westmoreland Hospital, said, ““We are very supportive of the Work Discovery Program goal of teaching students marketable skills for future employment. We were delighted to be able to offer placements within our facilities.”

King also coaches four students at Excelsa’s Corporate Services Center in Patient Accounting. Here the students receive their assigned tasks from their supervisor (an Excelsa Health employee) and turn them in when they are finished. Some of the work includes removing invoices and checks from envelopes, organizing billing sheets by date and properly recycling Excelsa papers.

“I like doing my job,” says Hempfield student Keriann Collins about her assignments in Patient Accounting. “I love how I can organize, and I love math and numbers.”

Two groups of three students from the Ligonier Valley School District work in Latrobe Hospital. One group assists Food and Nutrition Services washing dishes and retrieving trays. The other group assists Environmental Services like the students at Westmoreland; they clean specific sections, wipe down waiting rooms and toys, and verify they have executed the assignment as they make their way around the hospital.

“We just love them,” said Patty Beatrice, Environmental Services supervisor, Latrobe Hospital. “I don’t have to babysit them; if something is wrong, they just tell me. They picked up on how to use the cloths, and place the dirty stuff where it needs to go.”

The staff embraces the students as part of their team. Pictures of the Latrobe

Hospital students appear on the bulletin boards in the Volunteer Services office as well as the Environmental Services break room. The staff also invited the students to participate in their daily meetings.

“Your staff is so welcoming. They have really incorporated our students as a part of their team,” Job Coach Heidi Miller says about her experience at Latrobe. “The students are very committed and care about their job.”

Polly Benning, Volunteer Service coordinator at Latrobe Hospital, explains that “this program is in no way meant to displace staff. Rather, it serves as an aid to staff, and both the students and the employees seem to be working together very well; they’re all supportive of one another.” She also points out how the employees have really developed relationships with the students as some of the staff included them in their Halloween celebration while other staff members had cupcakes for the students when they were required to get their flu shots.

The Work Discovery Program follows the school calendar, so the students will finish their assignments when the school year ends, at which time the new graduates can seek employment.

King said “the most rewarding part, for me, is watching the kids learn from the program, graduate from the program, and get jobs. Just being able to see them become independent and learn the structure of a job is so wonderful.” Some of the partners hire students from the program, while other students find employment with companies, such as Giant Eagle or Sam’s Club, or in specific work programs designed for their needs.