



A BETTER WORLD

Todd Cohen

TODDCOHEN49@GMAIL.COM

919-272-2051

JOB TRAINING

Hospital partnership aids individuals with disabilities

DURHAM STUDENTS INTERN AT DUKE REGIONAL TO LEARN JOB SKILLS

Five days a week this school year, seven young people from all seven public high schools in Durham who have completed their high school course work are interning at Duke Regional Hospital, rotating through departments to develop skills to prepare them for local jobs.

The students all have intellectual and developmental disabilities and spent most of their school career separated from most other students, learning in classrooms for those with "individual education plans."

They are among 70 who are interning at nine sites, primarily hospitals, throughout North Carolina through Project SEARCH, a model launched in 1996 in Cincinnati.

Funding several of the North Carolina programs has been the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities.

The council, a stand-alone state agency mandated and funded by the federal government, works to give people with disabilities and their families access to – and a voice in shaping – services and support they need.

Employment is critical for individu-

als with disabilities, says Chris Egan, the council's executive director.

About 80 percent of individuals with developmental disabilities in the U.S. are unemployed, he says. In North Carolina, about 185,000 to 200,000 individuals, or about 1.5 percent to 2 percent of the population, live with developmental disabilities.

And they face continuing challenges, including low expectations, stereotyping and isolation, Egan says.

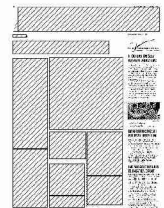
"If you have a disability, you're often not considered capable, and society's expectations tend to be low," resulting in "fewer choices and fewer opportunities to contribute to your community, even when you want to and could," he says.

Historically, Egan says, stereotyping resulted in the segregation and separation of individuals with disabilities in school, the workplace and the community.

Operating with an annual budget of \$1.9 million, the council invests 70 percent of its funding in about 20 initiatives that focus on improving services and connectedness for individuals with developmental disabilities and their families.

A new five-year plan the council is developing focuses on boosting its constituents' financial security and community living, and their participation in advocacy work.

It is working with Wake Technical



Community College and other partners to expand Project SEARCH starting in August to young adults with developmental disabilities in Wake County.

For about 20 years, it has funded a program that each year provides about 25 individuals with developmental disabilities and family members with a day-and-a-half of training a month to help build their leadership skills so they can be effective advocates for services they need.

And it is working to help organize a state chapter of the National Association of Direct Support Professionals.

Direct support professionals provide services that are indispensable in the daily lives of individuals with developmental disabilities, yet they are among the lowest paid in the health care field, Egan says.

Ultimately, he says, the council aims to help ensure that individuals with

developmental disabilities lead full and fulfilling lives.

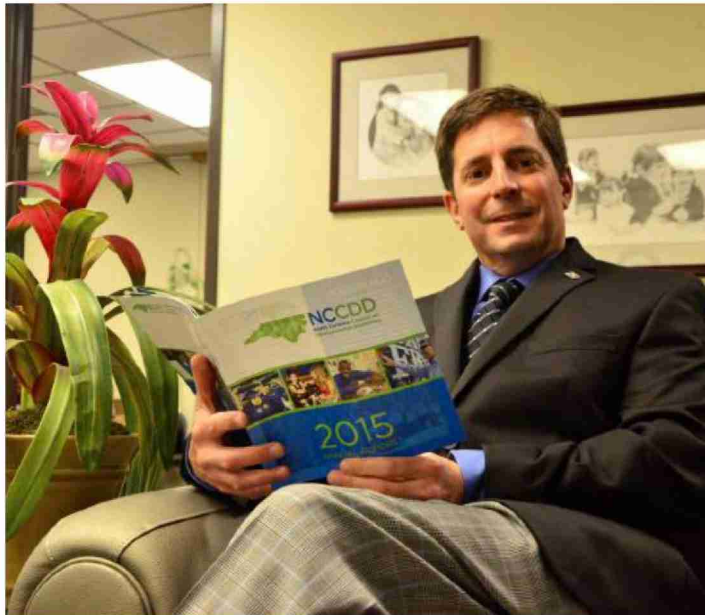
“A disability is a natural part of the human condition,” he says, “and a label doesn’t define a person and what they’re capable of.”

Todd Cohen publishes Philanthropy North Carolina at www.philnc.org. He can be reached at (919) 272-2051; send nonprofit news to toddcohen49@gmail.com.

“If you have a disability, you’re often not considered capable, and society’s expectations tend to be low.”

CHRIS EGAN,

Executive director, [North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities](#)



DATHAN KAZSUK

Chris Egan is the executive director of the North Carolina Council on Developmental Disabilities.