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September 4, 2018

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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New work transition program for individuals with disabilities set to graduate

Carlisle, Pa. — After nine months of internships at Cumberland County government offices and classes to help them prepare for the workforce, the first participants in a new work transition program will graduate Sept. 4th at 5:00 p.m. at the Cumberland County Service Center, 310 Allen Rd, Carlisle Pa. — all with permanent jobs waiting for them.

The county teamed with Goodwill Keystone Area and the Pennsylvania Office of Vocational Rehabilitation to establish a Project SEARCH® program for young adults with disabilities. Participants were chosen from clients of the county's Office of Mental Health and Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities (MH.IDD), which serves Cumberland and Perry counties. Created at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center in Ohio, Project SEARCH® helps individuals with significant intellectual and developmental disabilities learn work skills and secure competitive employment.

The county program began last December, with the next group of interns starting the program on Oct. 1. During their internships, participants rotated through jobs in six different county agencies. The work was wide ranging, from clerical tasks and assisting with computer and phone set-ups to outdoor maintenance and helping with resident activities at the nursing home. Classes and guest speakers supplemented the on-the-job training, said Kristy Lanser, Project SEARCH® program manager for Goodwill Keystone Area, helping the participants build their ability to live independently as well as prepare for and maintain employment.

Four participants will take part in Tuesday's graduation ceremony. "It is great to see them reach this point," Lanser said. "They have grown so much since they began this program — they have more confidence and they advocate for themselves more. They are more knowledgeable about how to act at the worksite, they have become more independent at work and home, and they have gained the ability to do many different tasks."

The ceremony also will highlight the county's commitment to the program, Lanser said. "Without that support, Project SEARCH® would not be successful," she said. "It's important that everyone works together to help the interns grow and be able to use their newly learned vocational skills effectively. The county intern sites have been very supportive. They are a critical part of our program."

"We are delighted with the success of this program," said Vince DiFilippo, chairman of the Board of Commissioners. "To see what the interns learned to do and how they grew both on the job and individually is very special."

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Cumberland County is the fastest growing county in the Commonwealth and offers the perfect mix of small town, suburban and rural living. Established in 1750, Cumberland County consistently maintains one of the lowest tax and unemployment rates in the State, while providing exceptional services for its more than 250,000 residents. More information on Cumberland County can be found at www.ccpa.net.