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**Press release**

**Thursday 3rd May 2012**

**Hospital trust helps jobseekers get back to work**

**JOBSEEKERS are building skills to help them return work thanks to a partnership between a hospital trust and Jobcentre Plus.**

Sandwell and West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust has been working on a pilot with Jobcentre Plus to offer placements to people interested in a caring role.

After undergoing an assessment and training at Sandwell College, six people were given the opportunity to get a real taste of healthcare by helping out on wards at Sandwell Hospital.

Tasks included making hot and cold drinks for patients and helping to feed them if necessary, as well as collecting medication from the hospital pharmacy to give nurses more time on the wards.

The ‘ward service assistants’, who were identified by the red T-shirts they wore, spent eight weeks helping out on the wards.

Sue Horsburgh explained how rewarding she found the experience: “When I started on my first day there was a lady who was quite poorly. She couldn’t talk and all she could really do was put her thumb up but I went to see her in my last week and I had a conversation with her.

“I went home each day and felt I had done something worthwhile.”

Fellow ward service assistant, Jennifer Howell, added: “For me it was getting feedback from the nurses and doctors.

“I have just started a new job working with people with learning difficulties and it’s absolutely fulfilling.

“It’s through the training that I have felt confident enough to go for a caring role.”

The work experience has also helped Sarah Jones, another of the six to undertake the placement, settle on a career as a healthcare assistant.

“I love it,” she said.

“There was nothing negative.

“I know that after doing this I never want to do anything else ever.”

The pilot was run in the Medical Division at the Trust and Assistant Director of Nursing, Linda Pascall, and Head of Nursing, Helen Jenkinson, were key to making it possible.

Linda praised the contributions made by those on the placements.

“We have really appreciated the support the ward service assistants have given to the wards,” she said.

“Their positive attitude has made this venture a success and we hope to be able to continue to work with our Jobcentre Plus partners to offer this scheme which has proven to have genuine benefits for our local community.”

Jim Pollitt, Head of Learning and Development at the Trust, added: “The success of these projects depends on good placements and I would like to thank all the staff who have helped and supported the people on the work experience pilot.”

The project has resulted in two of the participants securing a job.

Pauline Jones, Account Manager at Jobcentre Plus, is impressed with the success of the pilot.

 “We have had a really close relationship and we’ve already got two people into work,” she said.

“I’m really pleased with how it has gone.”

**Ends**

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