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Program touts its 98% placement rate

'There's nothing that compares to' Project SEARCH

By Ed Stannard
Hartford Courant

Project SEARCH, a partnership between the Arc of the Farmington Valley and UConn Health, has meant meaningful work for dozens of young adults with intellectual and developmental disabilities.

They've worked in housekeeping, pharmacy, the mail room and

food service at John Dempsey Hospital and other departments at UConn Health during their 40-week training course. Almost all have been hired full time, either at UConn Health or at other businesses in the region.

The program has had graduates working for the Holy Family Retreat Center, Price Chopper, CVS, Mintz & Hoke advertising and many others.

Now, the Arc, known as Favarrh and based in Canton, would like a second partner, preferably a large employer with varied job opportu-

nities, to take on its clients.

"The goal is that they will be independently employed," said Sandra Finnimore, manager of Favarrh's Project SEARCH, one of 10 in Connecticut.

"We do a lot of lesson planning and lessons with them," she said. "And we go through things like financial literacy, how to prepare for a job, how to maintain a job, interviewing skills, communication skills, problem-solving skills, chain of command, things like that."

Turn to Employment, Page 2



Calé Jonathan Barlow, a Project SEARCH graduate, washes dishes for Morrison Healthcare food service at UConn Health. COURTESY

"My main concern is it's just an iconic barn. I'm attached to it. A lot of people worked and studied in that barn, and it just seems a shame to see that when you come over the hill there and it's just an eyesore."

— Robert T. Molleur



Students walk past UConn's yellow dairy barn on Storrs Road in Storrs on Friday. AARON FLAUM/HARTFORD COURANT PHOTOS

'UConn aggie' has a soul for dilapidated barn on campus



Signs of deterioration can be seen on UConn's yellow dairy barn.

Structure built in 1911 on site of original Storrs Agriculture School

By Ed Stannard
Hartford Courant

For 112 years, the dairy barn on Storrs Road has greeted University of Connecticut students, families and faculty, a reminder of the school's agricultural heritage.

However, one alumnus is dismayed that the big yellow barn is falling into unsightly disrepair.

Robert T. Molleur, who lives in Manassas, Virginia, has a heavy heart when he thinks about the barn. He lived there when he attended

the Ratcliffe Hicks School of Agriculture, working in the barn and graduating in 1981.

"There were two apartments in there for the herds-men back in the day, and one student lived in one, and I lived in one in the back," Molleur said. "So I worked and lived in that barn. And there's a lot of history there. Last time I was up there, it looked pretty dilapidated."

The barn, built in 1911, is on the site of the original Storrs Agricultural School, precursor to UConn. Molleur, 65, grew up in dairy

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Gender equality gets CT support

Nonbinary license designations slowly growing in acceptance

By Susan Dunne
Hartford Courant

At the Connecticut DMV, one nonbinary license is issued about every other day. The gender designation, denoting someone outside of the binary male or female, was offered by the state Department of Motor Vehicles beginning Jan. 27, 2020.

More than three years later, 571 Connecticut residents have chosen the "X," rather than the "M" or "F," the DMV reports.

That may not seem like much, compared to the thousands of people the DMV, and AAA, serve every day. But for people who chose the X, it's an empowering form of self-determination.

"This means my state was giving me legal recognition and affirming me in a way that some people might not be capable of doing," said Lindsey M. Pasquale of Hebron. "From a mental health standpoint, it's a very positive thing."

Pasquale, Northeast Regional Director at PFLAG National, was so keen to get an X that she and her friend went to the Manchester AAA on the first day they were offered. Pasquale's friend was the first in the state to get it. Pasquale was the second.

"I wanted to adopt it early. I thought there was a risk of it getting removed or getting underutilized and that people would think that not many people out there wanted it," Pasquale said.

She said the 571 who have gotten the designation is just a small percentage of nonbinary people in Connecticut.

"A lot of people aren't comfortable making the change. There are people living at home not out to their parents. People might be concerned how it might affect their job prospects by having it on there because they're not ready to come out at work," she said. "So many things go through people's heads."

Turn to Licenses, Page 2

Family-oriented entertainment

The owner of the Fun City chain of trampoline parks has a new location in mind: The former Porter and Chester Institute building in Rocky Hill. The building is just off the Silas Deane Highway and a block or two from an I-91 exit. Connecticut, Page 1

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Biden, Marcos will meet as China tensions grow

Philippines leader aims for stronger relations with US

By Aamer Madhani
and Jim Gomez
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is set to host President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. of the Philippines for White House talks Monday as concerns grow about the Chinese navy's harassment of Philippine vessels in the South China Sea.

Marcos' visit to Washington comes after the U.S. and Philippines last week completed their largest war drills ever and as the two countries' air forces on Monday will hold their first joint fighter jet training in the Philippines since 1990. The Philippines this year agreed to give the U.S. access to four more bases on the islands as the U.S. looks to deter China's increasingly aggressive actions toward Taiwan and in the disputed South China Sea.

China has angered the Philippines
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Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. attended joint US military exercises in his country last week. He will meet President Joe Biden in the White House on Monday. AARON FAVILA/AP

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Employment

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All but one of its 45 graduates have found employment, Finnimore said. “We have a 98% placement rate for all of the individuals who have come through our program, which is higher than the national average for Project SEARCH,” she said.

Calé Jonathan Barlow, 24, lives in West Hartford and works full time at UConn Health as a dishwasher while helping with other tasks in the kitchen.

“It was not an easy start,” he said. “I had to learn, but through it all I worked toward where I was getting. But I had to do it in a smart way. But they helped me become more independent because of the skills and my tasks that I learned. Eventually I got there. It wasn’t easy, but I worked my best at that.”

Barlow, who is on the autism spectrum, graduated in June 2021. He said his Project SEARCH internships, in housekeeping, the linen department and as a courier, taught him the skills that have helped him in his job.

“I had to remain in good health,” he said. “I had to have a schedule. I had to have a routine. So just that kind of stuff. And of course I had to get along with everyone. ... What’s important and what’s not so important? Stuff like that.”

He’s been working at UConn Health for two years. “When I started I was part time and I’ve been working full time since March last year, but they pay me well,” he said. “I show up on time



Steve Morris is the executive director of the Arc of the Farmington Valley, also known as Favarh

when I’m supposed to, so I just do my part. So I enjoy it.”

Cate Alix, 26, of Avon, who has Down syndrome, works as an office assistant at Mintz & Hoke. “Shredding is my jam,” she said.

“I would say out of Cate’s entire educational experience, both academic and work related ... her year at Project SEARCH brought her so far,” said Alix’s mother, Noelle. “In that one year, there’s nothing that compares to it.”

Cate Alix likes to break rules, her mother said, and Finnimore was strict with her about proper behavior. “I credit Sandy Finnimore and that program to just teaching Kate work skills, employment skills, appropriate social interaction and communication at work, like how to communicate by email, what’s appropriate for ... clothing, etiquette, the job itself,” Noelle Alix said.

“A lot of teachers just really liked her, and she’s got an infectious personality, so I think she got away with a lot from people and Sandy held her 100% accountable and to a professional standard every day, all day,” Alix said.



Cate Alix, 26, of Avon, says shredding documents is “my jam” at her job at Mintz & Hoke advertising. COURTESY PHOTOS

Cate Alix worked in a pizza shop and at her mother’s coffee shop, BeanZ & Co., which employs people with intellectual disabilities, before landing at Mintz & Hoke.

“They wanted to be part of the inclusive-employment mission, so they created a job working with Favarh and Project SEARCH. And one of the people they put up for the job was Cate,” Alix said. “She interviewed like everybody else and got the job, and she’s been working there for three years now.”

Cate Alix cleans the conference room, stocks supplies and, her favorite thing, shreds documents. “They have 100% embraced her as an employee of Mintz

& Hoke like everyone else,” Noelle Alix said.

George Moses, who oversees custodial services at UConn Health, has a Project SEARCH graduate working for him full time.

“We’ve had quite a few individuals from the program come through our department and through my linen department, and they’ve all done a great job,” he said. “And they have mentors that are with them from Project SEARCH that work with them and along with my staff.”

He said Finnimore and her staff keep watch over their graduates too. “We can go back and talk to Sandy or one of our other staff members if we might

have an issue, which is rare, and ask for their advice and they’re right here for us,” Moses said. “Side by side we’ve become a really good team.”

As for his employees, “It’s just amazing how we show them those life skills and they take them to the next level,” he said. “How to communicate, for instance, and how not to be afraid to say something.”

One Project SEARCH graduate has challenged doctors and nurses if they come into the linen room without sanitizing their hands, Moses said. “She’s not afraid to speak up.”

Expanding plans

Project SEARCH began at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital in 1996. Steve Morris, executive director of Favarh, said the program has been successful in two ways.

“First of all, from Favarh’s perspective, the program has been incredibly successful,” he said. “Not only is Project SEARCH the most successful program in the country for getting students with (intellectual and developmental disabilities) employed after high school, with an average of about a 76% placement rate, Favarh has been even more successful under Sandy’s leadership and we’re close to 100%.”

Also, Morris said, “because of our success with this program at Favarh, we have advocated and lobbied for the expansion of the program throughout the state of Connecticut. That hasn’t been easy, but we’ve gone to the Capitol to testify. We’ve lobbied for some extra funds to make it possible.”

Now there are Project SEARCH programs at several hospitals, Mohegan Sun casino, Goodwin College and the Darien YMCA.

Morris said Favarh would like to find a second host site to join UConn Health in taking interns.

“We struggle a little bit finding a host site, because it takes a certain size employer,” he said. “It takes a certain setting that has lots of different internship opportunities for students to try different things. So you can imagine that the hospital setting is pretty unique and that it’s really like a little city.”

“We’re looking at some big companies that have a larger footprint and who have some of those food services on premises, things like day care, or big enough to have some of these ancillary services where our interns can gain experience,” he said.

Morris said the host site’s commitment is small, amounting to giving Favarh space at the site. There is no commitment to hire the intern, he said.

“And if we’re talking about impact, the more people with intellectual disabilities who are working, they’re more self-sufficient, they’re less dependent on state services than the same people were in the past,” he said.

“It’s really about a more inclusive and diverse society where everybody’s given the opportunity to work and make a meaningful contribution.”

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Licenses

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‘Having the strength’

Brynn Bernstein of West Hartford has a state ID for health reasons. A state ID serves as an official identification but does not allow the bearer to drive. Bernstein said when they applied, they didn’t think twice about checking the X.

“It’s more correct than putting my assigned gender at birth on there,” Bernstein said. “It feels to me like not putting nonbinary on there is sort of like me claiming that I’m an extra inch taller or saying I was born on a different day.”

Luca Grove, 18, of Marlborough, does not have the X yet, but they will after they move back to Connecticut after college.

“It’s about having the strength to be publicly, identifiably genderqueer, in any sense of the word,” Grove said. “It’s opening up to that possibility.”

‘I am neither’

Pasquale first started thinking about a nonbinary license in 2019, a year before it became legal. That was when she submitted testimony in favor of SB 388, which pertained to prohibiting discriminating against intersex people.

Part of that bill suggested that the state “provide for a third option for gender designation on state documentation and personal identification records.”

“Seeing that on a hard copy right in front of my

eyes, I got excited,” Pasquale said. “As a nonbinary person, it was so validating to read that.”

In her testimony, Pasquale wrote “If you are someone who has identified with the gender you were designated at birth, having this third gender marker option may seem like such a small thing. Every time I am confronted with a form, I see two choices — male or female — and I am neither. I would like to be recognized for who I am. There are many other intersex and non-binary people that would also like this recognition.”

SB388 died in committee, but that one idea lived on, of a third option for gender designation on state documents.

Several other states currently allow the nonbinary designation. In 2022, the U.S. State Department began allowing the X gender marker on passports.

When applying for a driver’s license or a learner’s permit, applicants can merely check the X box in the gender segment of the application. All applicants who are 16 or 17 need parental consent.

People can also change their designation by filling out a different form.

Becoming a target

Others in the LGBTQ community have chosen not to check the X when they apply for or renew their licenses.

Mel Cordner, executive director of LGBTQ youth support agency Q Plus, said the rising tide of transphobia makes some hesitant to



Lindsey Pasquale shows her driver’s license marked nonbinary at her home on Friday. AARON FLAUM/HARTFORD COURANT

declare their gender identity on an official document.

“I know a lot of people, myself included, who haven’t changed theirs because they don’t want to become more of a target from whoever might access their ID, like police and doctors,” Cordner said. “That sounds sort of dramatic but it is reality.”

Even Pasquale, the early adopter and ardent fan of the idea, said if she was starting out in 2023, she would pause a bit.

“If I was making this decision today, it is definitely something I would

be spending more time in deciding, because now is a time when there is a coordinated, targeted assault on the rights of trans and nonbinary people,” she said.

No gender at all

In that vein, even some people with nonbinary licenses say the X designation shouldn’t be the final word on the issue. They say that removing gender designation entirely from official government documentation is a logical next step.

“What I’ve thought about mostly since getting it is that

I don’t particularly feel the need to have a marker for sex on any driver’s license at all. As long as it’s there I’ll tell the truth, but I don’t see a real need,” Bernstein said.

Cordner agrees. “Having your physical sex announced on an identity card we use for pretty much everything is weirdly intrusive,” they said. “The person carding you at the store is looking at your ID to verify your age, not your body parts. That’s not anyone’s business but yours.”

“Having an X option is well-intentioned, as it tries to create space to include

more people. But all the X does is put us all in a new box, reinforcing the idea that we don’t fit in the standard boxes,” they said.

Grove said they understand why emergency responders would need to know a person’s gender. But they pointed out that in non-emergency cases, assigning genders might confuse the issue.

“People talk about three sexes, usually, male, female or X. But there are so many more,” they said.

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BREAKING NEWS

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LOTTERY

Sunday, April 30

PLAY3 DAY	PLAY4 DAY
1 0 0 WB: 1	6 3 8 8 WB: 5

The late lotto numbers were not drawn in time for this edition. For results, please visit courant.com/lottery.

SATURDAY’S LATE NUMBERS

PLAY3 NIGHT	PLAY4 NIGHT
8 8 9 WB: 5	6 0 5 3 WB: 7

CASH 5
10 13 18 21 31

LUCKY FOR LIFE
17 19 34 36 37 LB: 8

POWERBALL
16 53 54 57 65 PB: 2

Tuesday’s est. Mega Millions jackpot:
\$52 million

Tonight’s est. Powerball jackpot:
\$60 million

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