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For Immediate Release

Abilis and Darien YMCA Welcome First Group of Interns at Darien Project SEARCH

Eight-Month Internship Teaches Adults with Disabilities Key Job Skills – Program Launched with a Special Visit from Darien First Selectman Monica McNally and State Representative Terrie Wood

DARIEN, Conn., February 11, 2022 – A special internship program for adults with disabilities recently launched in Darien, Connecticut, that is a partnership between **Abilis** and **Darien YMCA**. **Project SEARCH** welcomed its first four interns, all adults with special needs, who are embarking on an eight-month internship program to learn new job skills. The Darien YMCA is the first Y in the country to host the Project SEARCH program. Abilis and the Darien YMCA are thankful to The Darien Foundation, which funded the technology used in the Project SEARCH program.

Helping to welcome the interns to the program were Darien First Selectman Monica McNally and Connecticut State Representative (141st District) Terrie Wood, who stopped by the program recently to meet the interns, the Abilis and Darien YMCA staff running the program, and to get a feel for the job training that will be taking place during the program.

“It was a pleasure to receive a tour of the new Abilis program, Project SEARCH, located at the Darien YMCA. While the facility is very nice, it was the enthusiasm of staff and participants that I found particularly remarkable,” said Monica McNally, first selectman of Darien. “Project SEARCH provides a wonderful opportunity for participants to learn skills that will enable them to qualify for jobs and become more fully engaged members of our community.”

Project SEARCH’s eight-month internship program helps young adults with disabilities who have the goal of being competitively employed. Abilis runs two Project SEARCH programs: one at Greenwich Hospital that has been in place for the past several years and focuses on hospital-related jobs, and this new Project SEARCH program in partnership with Darien YMCA, which offers job training in different departments, including the childcare center. The program offers total immersion in the workplace and facilitates the teaching and learning process, as well as the acquisition of employability and marketable work skills. Interns participate in three unpaid internships throughout the program and explore a variety of career paths. Along the way, the interns increase their independence, self-confidence and self-esteem, preparing them for future employment.

“Abilis is thrilled to partner with the Darien YMCA and expand the Project SEARCH program to the Darien community,” said Amy Montimurro, CEO and president of Abilis. “Abilis believes each person should have the opportunity to live, work and take an active role in their community and

deserves a full and meaningful life. Learning these important job skills in a structured and supportive environment helps set up our program participants for success and more independence, which are so crucial when supporting individuals with disabilities.”

“It’s so exciting to have Abilis and Project SEARCH at the Darien YMCA - we are the first Y in the country to host the Project SEARCH program and I would love to see Darien be a model for other Y’s,” noted Jennifer Gardner, chief executive officer of the Darien YMCA. “It’s also wonderful to have the Project SEARCH interns working side-by-side with our team. The interns are excited about learning new skills and our staff has been happy to help participate in that learning process.”

Abilis, the Darien YMCA and the Project SEARCH program also collaborate with local school districts and the Connecticut Department of Developmental Services. Project SEARCH is a national program that was developed at Cincinnati Children’s Hospital Medical Center as a business-led, work-preparation program for young people with intellectual and developmental disabilities. Most participants are enrolled while transitioning from high school to work. Traditionally the program has been at hospitals. The Darien YMCA is the first community Y in the country to host the program. The hallmark of Project SEARCH is total workplace immersion, which facilitates a seamless combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and hands-on training. Project SEARCH's primary objective is to secure competitive employment for every program participant.

Abilis is thankful for a \$65,838 grant received from **The Darien Foundation**, a local nonprofit that awards grants for technology and capital initiatives which promote and strengthen the community of Darien. The Darien Foundation funded the technology and equipment for the Darien Project SEARCH program at the Darien YMCA, as well as for three other Abilis initiatives in Darien.

“Collaborations like this are central to the mission of The Darien Foundation,” said Ward Glassmeyer, chairman of the board of The Darien Foundation. “We were proud to play a role in the launch of Project SEARCH and to support the wonderful work being done here by Abilis and the Darien YMCA.”

To be eligible for Project SEARCH, applicants must be between the ages of 18 and 30 and have a developmental disability, eligible for development or disabilities services, and want to work competitively. If the young adult is currently a high school student, a recommendation is required by their school district. For other young adults, tuition is paid by the Department of Developmental Resources (for those eligible) or a family may choose to pay privately. The next classes of Project SEARCH begin at Greenwich Hospital in September 2022 and at the Darien YMCA January 2023. Applications for the next Project SEARCH sessions are currently being accepted and families interested in learning more can attend the **Project SEARCH Information Session** being held at the Darien YMCA on **Wednesday, March 16, 2022, at 5:00 p.m.** To learn more, email Monica Smyth, program manager of Project SEARCH at smyth@abilis.us.

Abilis celebrated its 70th year in 2021 of being a 501c3 non-profit organization that supports more than 800 individuals with special needs and their families from birth throughout their lives. Abilis is a leader serving the special needs community in Fairfield County, Connecticut, in towns including Darien, Greenwich, New Canaan, Norwalk, Ridgefield, Stamford, Westport and Wilton, and has a long-standing reputation for individualized, high quality care. For more information, visit www.abilis.us, or facebook.com/AbilisinC, twitter.com/Abilis, or instagram.com/abilis_us

Darien YMCA is a 501c3 nonprofit charitable organization with a mission to strengthen the foundation of the community through programs, services and relationships that build a healthy spirit, mind and body for all. For more information on Darien YMCA, visit darien-ymca.org or on [Facebook](#) and [Instagram](#) at [@thedarienymca](#) and [Twitter @DarienYMCA](#).

The Darien Foundation is an independent, community-based, 501c3 public charity. Since 1998, The Darien Foundation has awarded nearly \$5.5 million in grants for technology and capital initiatives, which create opportunity for Darien's youth, supports the town's safety and security services, and enhances the overall quality of life in Darien. For more information about The Darien Foundation, visit darienfoundation.org or on [Facebook @darienfoundation](#), [Instagram @thedarienfoundation](#), [Twitter @DarienFDN](#).

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