

'ESTABLISHING A SOLID FOUNDATION'

Teens work at L&M through youth employment program

By **JUDY BENSON**
Day Staff Writer

New London — Aspiring physical therapist Charles Boyd, 19, first worked with John Wheeler two weeks ago, just after a stroke damaged the 79-year-old Mystic resident's vision, balance and hand-eye coordination and landed him at Lawrence & Memorial Hospital.

On Wednesday morning, Boyd assisted L&M physical therapist Samantha Day in ball-toss and balance

exercises that gave Wheeler a chance to demonstrate the swift progress he'd made.

"His balance has really improved," said Boyd, a New London resident who will begin his sophomore year at Southern Connecticut State University this fall. "When he first got here, he had trouble catching the ball."

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■ *Charles Boyd, left, a physical therapy intern, exercises with patient John Wheeler of Mystic to improve his balance and hand-eye coordination.*

SUZANNE OUELLETTE / The Day



L&M doubles number of teens in job program

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Having a chance to witness — and contribute to — the recovery of patients like Wheeler is one of the reasons Boyd likes having a summer job that's about more than just making money. Working beside L&M physical therapists also gives him a first-hand look at the career he plans to pursue, and thus far, has affirmed his goal.

"I go with a different therapist every day," Boyd said. "I help with walkers and IV poles and exercises, and if I have questions about medical terms or treatment plans, I can ask them. I just like working here and helping people."

Boyd is one of 14 New London teens working at the hospital this summer through a state-funded youth-employment program administered by the Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board. The program, in its second year, is employing 337 teens from 17 towns at local nonprofit agencies and companies.

L&M is hosting the largest number, with students assigned to jobs in mammography, respiratory therapy, paramedic services, labor and delivery, and medical records departments, among others. In New London, the city's Office of Youth Affairs is managing the program for the workforce investment board, which also pays the students' wages with the \$500,000 state grant. On Friday, the last day of the five-week program, the hospital is hosting a luncheon for the student workers.

"They can be that second set of hands," said Michelle Landry, L&M's manager of career development.

"When the students are here, it's a real morale boost for the staff, because people really like talking about their jobs and telling all the positive things about their jobs."

L&M, she said, hosted seven teens when the program began last year, and decided to double the number it took in this summer. Boyd was among the first seven last year, and made such a good impression with the physical therapy staff that they asked to have him back, Landry said.

"It's a terrific way for us to get extra help," she said, "and, let's face it, at a great price."

The program, added hospital spokesman Kelly Anthony, also gives the hospital a way to reach out to teens to interest them in pursuing medical careers, as it faces current and projected shortages of nurses, doctors and other health professionals.

"The hospital is committed to and concerned about getting more people into the health-care field," he said.

John Beauregard, executive director of the workforce board, said the program is being offered at all five workforce investment boards throughout the state. His agency, he said, tries as much as possible to place students in jobs in fields such as health care and tourism where workers are needed, and to match students with their interests whenever possible. But it also has a broader goal.

"We're trying to build general work skills, about how you dress, about showing up on time, about teamwork," he said. "This is about establishing a solid foundation."

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