

VSP programs

teach workers new skills
lead to new careers



by Brian M. Schleter



For years, Thomas Allen bounced around from one warehouse job to another, always living paycheck to paycheck. That all changed in January 2004 when he was referred to VSP and enrolled in the Contemporary Office Technology Training (COTT) program.

Thomas learned to use a computer and office procedures. In February he accepted a full-time job as an administrative associate in **Sinai's** Heart Center. "When you put your goals down on paper and check them off as you go, anything is attainable," he says.

Thomas is one of 386 clients VSP helped in the last fiscal year. Established in 1967, VSP provides vocational rehabilitation and employment opportunities to people with disabilities and economic needs, and may be the best-kept secret in the LifeBridge Health network. VSP clients get real, on-the-job experience and training, and many graduates become full-time employees at LifeBridge facilities.

"We've helped hundreds of individuals find meaningful employment," says Director David Shegan. "Once you have a steady job and are economically self-sufficient, for a lot of people it's a ticket to better mental and physical health."

VSP programs are funded largely by state agencies and federal and state grants. The Career Assessment Service is the first step for many clients, helping them identify job interests and set realistic career goals. For clients who have had problems finding and keeping jobs, VSP offers Work Adjustment Training (WAT). Clients learn the importance of maintaining good attendance and building communication skills while getting on-the-job experience. More than 20 departments at **Sinai** and **Levindale** participate, including Radiation Oncology, Central Sterile and Food Services.

"We make sure when they leave here, they're ready for employment," says Marla Friedman, a WAT coordinator.

VSP's Business Services Division provides office support, such as janitorial services, photocopying and mail processing, to LifeBridge Health, government agencies and private industry. More than 125 employees work at the large Metro Drive production facility, as well as at local, state and federal buildings.

The Job Development, Placement and Retention service helps graduates build a resume and link up with potential employers. Counselors in VSP's Win Through Work program help young people transition from school to work or enroll in vocational training.

"VSP is really on the cutting edge in a number of areas," David says. "This past fiscal year, grants have enabled us to deploy a full-time staff person to provide retention support to approximately 29 Patient Care associates, employed at **Sinai** as new hires. Our programs provide significant cost savings to LifeBridge."

PROFILES:

Avis Moran



After 10 years of being a full-time homemaker, Avis Moran found out about VSP in October 2003. Unable to afford private computer-training classes, she was referred to VSP and began COTT training. Avis gained necessary computer and office skills while obtaining her medical terminology

certification. She increased her typing speed from 40 wpm to 69 wpm.

Avis graduated the following June and immediately moved into the Quest internship program, where she honed her skills working for the Maryland Division of Parole and Probation. Following the internship, VSP's Tracy Piazza helped Avis land a job as a part-time scheduler at **Northwest**. Avis's duties include scheduling many outpatient appointments for **Northwest Hospital** patients.

"Avis was extremely flexible in learning our new scheduling system upgrade with less than ideal training conditions," says Valerie Roberts, Avis's supervisor. In June, Avis accepted a full-time position.

Sherell Smith



Sherell was referred from a Baltimore City Youth Opportunity Center and started receiving VSP services in 2002. Sherell identified her vocational goals with VSP's Career Assessment program, and she successfully completed a **Sinai Hospital** internship in the Case Management department.

She, too, received training through VSP's COTT program, which she completed successfully that fall. VSP's Job Placement services helped Sherell quickly obtain a job as an administrative assistant at **Levindale** in the Patient Accounting department.

"I soon realized that she was bright and I continued to give her new challenges. She took each one as a learning experience. This was refreshing to find in a young person," says Maggie Morgan-Lamb, her supervisor.

Last year Sherell was promoted to assistant financial counselor.

Antoinette Robinson



Antoinette started VSP's Work Adjustment Training program in May 2002. She was assigned to work in the Medical Records department at **Sinai**. Her solid performance caught the attention of her department manager.

Antoinette's supervisor approached her VSP counselor about the possibility of hiring Antoinette for an evening position.

Antoinette successfully completed the WAT program. The following August, she was hired as a health information clerk in the Medical Records department at **Sinai**.

Eager to learn new skills, Antoinette transferred to the Film Library. That experience helped her to qualify for a position as a radiology specialist in the Ultrasound department.

Antoinette wants to become an ultrasound technologist. She has enrolled in Catonsville Community College with hopes of entering the ultrasound-training program.