COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

This year we are thrilled to add a service project component for Next Steps at Vanderbilt students. Service projects will occur once a month on Friday afternoons at various organizations in the Nashville area. The objective is to give the students the opportunity to volunteer alongside one another in new environments, which will foster new experiences! An important aspect of this new component of the Next Steps program is the opportunity students will have to advocate for themselves in the community, show their willingness to volunteer, as well as expand their already steadily developing leadership skills. This community outreach will also give our students the chance to demonstrate their capacity for being contributing citizens.

Our first project was in conjunction with Hands On Nashville and entailed assembling survival bags for individuals and families who experience homelessness. The students helped to fill bags that the group Open Table will deliver. Staff from Hands On Nashville were exceptional facilitators and gracious hosts. At the end of our time, students reflected on how they felt about sharing their time and talents with others. Great insights were shared, including one from Nicholas Pinter, who commented: “I feel like I am pushing myself out of my comfort zone.”

This was a great opportunity to pay it forward and we are excited to see what adding this service project component to the program means for our students.
Students from three of our states four postsecondary education programs (PSE) participated in the Think Employment! Summit in September. They experienced what we all experience when we attend conferences. They greeted folks in their PSE network, met new people, and learned about new resources. It was especially encouraging to watch them speak with the employer exhibitors to learn about each employer, share their career aspirations, and to receive professional tips about their resumes and one page employment profiles.

During the sessions the students heard from speakers about having a full-time job and living independently, the history of disability, a budgeting tool on the Step website, an overview of benefits planning, and learning to be better self-advocates. Attending conference sessions usually provides people with a quick introduction to ideas that they can then research on their own. For the different program directors, they will have opportunities to build upon the exposure to these learning experiences.

From the directors’ perspectives we each had the opportunity to realize yet again that we may have underestimated our students’ maturity levels and abilities. At the end of a long day of sessions and no down time, they students were able to demonstrate more than appropriate, professional behaviors.

What the students had to say about TennesseeWorks Think Employment! Summit:

“It was interesting. I learned about different things about getting a job. I talked to a man who did farming. I thought that was really cool. I also liked all of the snacks.” ~Sean

“I loved it. There were employers I was interested in like Walgreens. Awesome guest speakers.” ~Bryshawn

“I thought the conference went really well. It was nice to learn about the employment and different resources that can help me in various career fields. It was nice to meet other students from the PSE programs.” ~Hardin

“The conference was a great experience for me. I really learned a lot. Maybe sometime I could be the speaker that would be cool.” ~Jamie

“They shared good information with us. I really enjoyed the session about speaking up for yourself.” ~Nick
My name is Emily Duchac and I am thrilled to serve as the president of the Next Steps Ambassadare. As we go into our second year as an official student organization, Next Steps Ambassadare are embracing new and exciting changes. With new leadership roles, committee positions, and active Ambassadare involvement in every aspect of the organization—from fundraising, to recruitment, to event planning—we are hoping to see Next Steps grow even more. Little changes like Ambassadare t-shirts will help raise awareness on campus, while bigger changes, like the fundraising committee, will help harness undergraduate involvement in our spring fundraiser, Vanderbilt Star.

Mentoring and befriending Next Steps students is still at the heart of the organization, and Ambassadare are incredibly excited to work with the students this year! As the Ambassadare organization grows and expands, we hope to create more opportunities and experiences for students in the program, while getting more of the Vanderbilt community involved.

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**FEATURED EVENT**

**COLLEGE NIGHT: TAKE YOUR NEXT STEPS INTO THE FUTURE**

Next Steps at Vanderbilt will host an event called “College Night: Take Your Next Steps into the Future” on **Thursday, Oct. 23, from 6-8 p.m.** Next Steps staff and students extend a warm welcome to those who are interested in pursuing postsecondary education. Come learn about peer mentorships, Vanderbilt courses that Next Steps students take, Next Steps courses, internships, job opportunities, admissions, financial aid, how individuals with disabilities fit into a college campus, and much more. There will be campus tours and opportunities to meet current students, staff, volunteers, parents, and others. For information and to register visit **vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/events/4462**
Hello, my name is Hardin Manhein and I am a second year student at Next Steps at Vanderbilt University. This will be my final year at the Next Steps Program and I have learned a lot. My Vanderbilt class that I am taking is world class music. So far, I am really enjoying the class. My internship this semester will be at the Parthenon. In my internship I will be doing a docent training on Saturdays to become a tour guide. I am also going to help teach people about the Centennial Fair in Nashville. A few things that I am excited about this semester are getting to know my new ambassadors and being a good leader for the new students. Some favorite things that I have already done is being a leader to the first year students and taking my world music class. In conclusion, my goal is to do well in my first semester and help out anyone who needs it.

INTERNSHIP SPOTLIGHT

Almost two decades ago, Jean Voorhees, Director of the Belmont Weekday School, remembers a tall three-year-old student who loved Disney movies, was always happy, and had “the lightest blonde hair.” The student was Nicholas Pinter, and this semester he is returning to his pre-school as an intern. Nicholas has a passion for early childhood education, and with his fond memories of the Belmont Weekday School, he calls this work experience his “dream internship.” Still tall and blonde, Nicholas is now working alongside Jean and other staff members to direct painting time, prepare the playgrounds, manage snack time, and read and direct activities with the children. Additionally, the staff has asked Nicholas to help with holiday parties and other special events. Nicholas says, “When I am working with the kids, I really feel like me. I feel good because I am teaching and helping them, and being a good mentor. And that’s important to me.”
Hi! My name is Elizabeth Story and I was in the first class that graduated from Next Steps at Vanderbilt. Since graduating, I have moved out of my parents’ house and I am living in a condo with one of my best friends from kindergarten. One of the many things that my roommate and I do together is a cooking class that we take on Monday nights. We have made a lot of delicious dinners. I work at the Susan Gray School, which is located on Vanderbilt’s campus. I am an office assistant and do a lot of various things at the school. I do the attendance, helping with the lunch carts, and helping the kids in a classroom go to sleep during naptime. It is a lot of fun and keeps me busy.

I also have been babysitting two girls named Lily and Ella-ford, which is always fun to do and I never know what they are going to do. One of my many successes is definitely walking a lot more around Green Hills. Sometimes I get what you might call “road rage”, but sometimes I call it “pedestrian rage” because the drivers in Green Hills are not used to seeing pedestrians walking across the street when it is their turn. I have a lot of goals, but one important goal of mine is trying to stay healthy and to exercise. This has been a long time goal and will always be one. I use what I learned in college every day and in everything that I do and they have made me a better person.

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Next Steps at Vanderbilt provides transformational learning experiences, within an inclusive educational setting, for young adults with intellectual disabilities, university students, faculty, staff, and community leaders. Find us on Facebook at: http://tinyurl.com/nsatv-facebook or learn more at: vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/nextsteps/. This newsletter was edited and designed by the Communications and Graphics staff of the Vanderbilt Kennedy Center for Excellence in Developmental Disabilities. vkc.mc.vanderbilt.edu/vkc/