

Phoenix Center Student Shines As East Hanover Library Volunteer



Being a volunteer is a great way to meet people, learn a new skill and feel a sense of accomplishment for helping one's community. Just ask Vir Motianey, a student at the Phoenix Center (www.phoenixcenterinc.com), a school in Nutley that provides educational and therapeutic services to children with autism, multiple disabilities, and behavioral disabilities.

Once a week Vir volunteers at the East Hanover Library (www.easthanoverlibrary.com) and is responsible for overseeing and implementing an important project: Re-labeling books in the massive cooking and biography sections.

"This is no small feat," comments Nancy Svorinich, the children's librarian. "We have thousands of volumes and it's a painstaking job." Thanks to Vir's efforts and patience more than 1000 books have been neatly re-labeled, making it easier for patrons to find a specific title."

According to Toni Basilone, Vir's job coach at the Phoenix Center, Vir has developed the ability to work independently and looks forward to seeing library staff and patrons each week who have become friends and colleagues. He has learned the process quickly, has grown both socially and vocationally, and takes pride in his accomplishments.

The volunteer relationship is a win-win for both the library and the school. Vir's contributions provide support for the staff by helping them with a long list of ongoing tasks. And for Vir, who will be graduating in June, the opportunity to volunteer at the library has helped him to develop both job and social skills. This valuable experience has led him to a paid job at Costco that Vir balances with his volunteer work and studies.

The collaboration between the two organizations developed when Doug Berrian, Ed.D, Education Director and Co-Founder Director of the Phoenix Center, and Gayle Carlson, Director of the East Hanover Library, met at a resource fair in preparation for the annual Community Partnership Day hosted by Novartis Pharmaceuticals Corporation. Community Partnership Day is an annual day of hands-on volunteer service that connects Novartis employees with nonprofit partners from around the state. The resource fair provides an opportunity for non-profit organizations to meet and greet Novartis employees who can learn about their mission and services to the community, and then decide on the projects they would be interested in working on.

"Opportunities such as the library project offer a terrific experience for our students," states Dr. Doug Berrian, "as it helps them to build the skills that are necessary in making the transition from school to the outside world."

The project was beneficial for both the Phoenix Center and the East Hanover Library and demonstrates the value of community partnerships in helping organizations to achieve goals and fulfill their mission. Thanks to Novartis and its dedication to the community, a newfound alliance has been formed. Thanks to the East Hanover Library, an opportunity for community support was created. And thanks to the Phoenix Center, their mission continues to be met by focusing on an individual student's abilities, not their disabilities.