



From left, Antelope Valley Hospital Patient Services Representative Grace Kelly goes over her duties with PathPoint client Zachary Robins as he shadows her during Disability Mentoring Day, Wednesday, Oct. 21, at AVH in Lancaster. EVELYN KRISTO/Valley Press

# PathPoint: Enabling the disabled

By **AMBER HOFFMAN** Valley Press Staff Writer

For disabled or disadvantaged individuals, the path to finding their place in the community is a little shorter with the help of PathPoint.

The nonprofit organization with offices around the country is devoted to providing comprehensive training and support services to empower people with disabilities or disadvantages to become valued members of society, according to their mission statement.

"A lot of our individuals want to work and they're interested to see what's out there," said Christina Rajlal, program manager for PathPoint.

PathPoint, formally Work Training Program was founded in 1964 and serves more than 2,000 individuals across the country.

The organization serves people with disabilities or disadvantages including those with physical or developmental disabilities such as autism and down syndrome; people with psychiatric disabilities including schizophrenia and bipolar disorder; and people who are disadvantaged, such as low-income Americans or at-risk foster youth transitioning out of the system.

Antelope Valley Hospital hosted eight PathPoint participants between the ages of 18 and 59 for Disability Mentoring Day on Wednesday, Oct. 21. The participants shadowed staff from several departments at AVH including purchasing, mail services and admitting.

"All of the individuals were interested in what the hospital had to offer and figure out where they had to contribute," Rajlal said.

After a brief meet and greet the participants were divided into three groups based on the departments that fit their interests.

Participant Reggie Smith of Palmdale said he wasn't initially excited about visiting the purchasing department.

But once Smith, an accounting major at Ashford University, met AVH buyer Ronnye Carroll his tune changed.

"Reggie was talking about how he wanted a job in inventory control," Rajlal said. "But he didn't realize there was such a position as a purchaser or buyer that he would be qualified for."

Carroll showed Smith the hospital's buying process, including receiving orders, negotiating prices and placing orders.

"I loved explaining what we do here," Carroll said. "(Smith) built up his confidence very quickly. He's upbeat and not afraid to ask questions."

Smith even caught a mathematical error that Carroll had missed — he noticed two numbers were transposed.

"I love numbers," Smith said. "It's something I would love to do; to take responsibility for."

Smith has been in the PathPoint program for about a year and comes from a disadvantaged background according to PathPoint officials.

"Reggie really caught on fast, he didn't want to leave — you couldn't pull him away from the computer," Carroll said with a chuckle. "I wish we had three hours together. I'm so glad I was a part of this — we had a good time."



Participants with PathPoint observe as Antelope Valley Hospital mail clerks Casey Potts, second from right, and Norma Lopez run through their daily routine at the hospital. PathPoint participants were able to shadow various employees Wednesday, Oct. 21, in recognition of Disability Mentoring Day. Participants from left are Kristina Miller, Ricardo Vasquez and Brian Crow. EVELYN KRISTO/Valley Press

Mail room staff demonstrated how letters and packages are sorted and distributed to the various departments within the hospital. Participants were even given the chance to do some sorting and delivering themselves.

PathPoint participants trailed employees at several area businesses during the month of October, which is National Disability Employment Awareness Month. The group visited a Valley firehouse, toured Costco and had their photos taken with rapper 50 Cent while touring the radio station Power 106 FM in Burbank. But Rajlal said AVH was a highlight for all participants.

"We hope that the participants learned more about opportunities for employment at the hospital," Julie Triggs, public relations manager at AVH said. "By hosting PathPoint we are breaking down the barriers that prevent people with disabilities from working in the Antelope Valley."

According to Rajlal, PathPoint is always searching for new companies to provide mentorships for participants.

The organization's goal is to find jobs for all PathPoint participants in areas they have skills and interests in that also match the needs of employers.

Participants have been placed at Wal-Mart, Cinemark 22, Vons, the Catalyst Foundation and numerous smaller businesses.

In addition to employment services, PathPoint also offers independent living and community access services.

The PathPoint Lancaster office is located at 348 E Ave. K-4. For details, call (661) 723-7484, or visit [www.pathpoint.org](http://www.pathpoint.org).