

*This month the VCU RRTC wants to recognize Tommy Dubois for his outstanding work in internship development and job placements at the Fort Eustis Project SEARCH site.*

Tommy joined the VCU RRTC team in the Fall of 2017 as the Project SEARCH program was just getting started in its first year at Fort Eustis. Tommy brought a wealth of talent and experience to the team. Being an Army veteran of 13 years, Tommy was an instant asset for his ability to translate military jargon and explain the nuances of military culture. Military culture is what the students at Fort Eustis have all been raised on; every participant in this program is either a military dependent or has a military connection in their family. Using this military theme as a base for job development Tommy successfully placed four of the graduating students in federal employment. Those who have ever applied for a federal job know, it is a very involved and lengthy application process. It can require everything from fingerprinting to physical exams to extensive background checks. Tommy had the patience and determination to go through the necessary steps with his clients and see them through to these valued placements. Some of the advantages of federal jobs worth noting for these clients are: the possibility of relocating (a common occurrence among military families), the experience which could be easily transferable to a new position, the familiar structure of a federal position, and the excellent job security in working for the federal government.

Before making these great placements Tommy put in a lot of work in the internships for these students. 2017 being the initial year for the Fort Eustis Project SEARCH site, meant that all of the internships needed to be developed from scratch. Tommy played an active role in developing the 15 internships for the program. He helped establish connections with 7 different businesses in Fort Eustis to create these 15 unique opportunities. Again, let us emphasize how much work went into this: 7 different businesses, 7 different screening processes, each business a part of Fort Eustis and operating as its own independent entity. That's a lot of collaborating, worthy of applause.

"Tommy is always willing to jump in and do what needs to be done," boasts Holly Whittenburg, the site coordinator for Fort Eustis. "He's quite skilled at working with students with autism. He doesn't settle; he pushes his clients to succeed but understands when and where supports are needed." Tommy doesn't hesitate to try fading with his clients to see how they handle it. He carries it out in a careful way and makes sure they have their supports ready before doing so.

Another example of how Tommy has really brought a spark to this program was his initiative to do senior superlatives for the graduating class last Spring. Tommy assigned every student and staff member a superlative, highlighting everyone's unique and special qualities. We hear there were candy bars too.

Thank you, Tommy, for your tenacious efforts in making meaningful connections for your clients and bringing camaraderie to the first year at Fort Eustis!

