Project SEARCH

Our Story

Fourteen years ago, in 1996, while working as the Director of the Emergency Department at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Erin Riehle was frustrated with the high turnover rate in entry-level jobs that involved restocking supplies. While working to identify a solution to eliminating the high turnover rate, Cincinnati Children's had adopted a major diversity initiative, taking a policy statement from the American College of Healthcare executives, which reads, "Healthcare organizations must lead their communities in increasing employment opportunities for qualified persons with disabilities and advocate on behalf of their employment to other organizations." Erin wondered if people with disabilities could fill the entry level jobs she had. Not knowing anyone with a disability she turned to the Hamilton County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities and the Great Oaks Institute of Technology and Career Development and asked if her idea was possible. Together with these organizations, Jennifer Linnabary, and Susie Rutkowski, the idea of filling a handful of jobs in Cincinnati Children's Emergency Department evolved into a comprehensive program model—Project SEARCH.

Project SEARCH has grown from one original program site at Cincinnati Children's to over 150 across 39 states and four countries. Some of our business partners include but are not limited to: Fifth Third Bank, Medtronic, the Department of Labor, the Miami Metro Zoo, the City of Miami, Kaiser Permanente, and the University of Rochester Medical Center. Project SEARCH's primary objective is to secure competitive employment for people with disabilities.

Today, Project SEARCH has become an international program and model of success that provides people with disabilities with the training necessary to gain marketable skills that will enable them to secure competitive employment.

Project SEARCH coordinates four distinct programs including the following:

- High School Transition Program
- Adult Employment Program
- Vocational/Educational Clinic
- Replication and Dissemination

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OUR PROGRAM MODEL

The High School Transition Program is a one-year internship program for students with disabilities, in their last year of high school. It is targeted for students whose goal is competitive employment. The program takes place in a business setting where total immersion in the workplace facilitates the teaching and learning process through continuous feedback and acquisition of employability and competitive work skills.

BENEFITS of the Project SEARCH Model:

Benefits to the Students:

- Participate in a variety of internships in a high-status local business
- Acquire competitive, transferable and marketable job skills
- Gain increased independence, confidence, and self esteem
- Obtain on site and individualized instruction, support, and accommodations
- Develop linkages to vocational rehabilitation and other adult service agencies

Benefits to the Business (Host Organization):

- Access to a new, diverse, talent stream with skills that match the labor needs
- Gain intern/ employees with disabilities who serve as a role model for customers and give them a sense of hope, which is reflected in satisfaction surveys
- Access to a demographic of the economy with intense buying power: people with disabilities represent one of the fastest growing market segments in the US
- Experience increased local, regional, and national recognition through marketing of this unique program
- Performance and retention in some high-turnover, entry-level positions increase dramatically

Additional Project SEARCH programs and initiatives include but are not limited to: Project SEARCH-CCHMC Education/Vocational Clinic; Project SEARCH Healthcare Training Program; and coordination of Project SEARCH program replication in new markets.

Project SEARCH

A TRUE COLLABORATIVE

One of Project SEARCH's most unique attributes is its emphasis on collaboration. Project SEARCH is driven by partnerships and a network of special education teachers, job coaches, and business leaders that play an integral role in executing our goal of obtaining competitive employment for individuals with disabilities.

- ***Teresa Tanner, Fifth Third Bank's Vice president of Human Resources,*** says that when businesses identify the strengths of employees with disabilities, then put them in jobs that match their skills, "those employees turn out to be faithful, low-turnover, hard-working employees."
  - "This is a tremendous opportunity for the hospital to work with the community and school district. These young adults want to learn, feel a sense of accomplishment and lead a full life. " ***~Teresa Hopkins, HR Generalist, Mercy Memorial Outpatient Rehabilitation Center, Monroe County, MI***
  - "I like Project SEARCH because I can get different kinds of jobs through the program. I work at the hospital with my coworkers and friends. They treat me good and make me happy. They treat me like part of the team. I want to stay here for a long time." ***~ Jill Frambes, Clinical Support Technician & Project SEARCH Graduate, Cincinnati Children's***
    - "Project Search is exactly what we wanted; it brings together the worlds of education and community services and expands options and opportunities for students with developmental disabilities as they transition from school to the work world." ***~ Ann Costello, Director, Golisano Foundation***

"There's a misconception that you can only give people with disabilities the easiest work. But that's not true. When we're trying to match people with businesses, we look for complex work that's systematic" – ***Erin Riehle, Director, Disability Services & Project SEARCH, Cincinnati Children's***