

Our Story



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 Great Oaks Career Campuses and the Hamilton County Board of Developmental Disability Services and asked if her idea was possible. Together with these organizations 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 600 sites across 46 states and ten countries. Some of our business partners include: Embassy Suites by Hilton, Fifth Third Bank, Blue Cross Blue Shield, UCLA Medical Center, multiple Kaiser Permanente Medical Centers, Wal-Mart Distribution Centers, National Institute of Health – Clinical Center, the Smithsonian, Xavier University, Medtronic, the Federal Department of Education, The Federal Department of the Interior, Zoo Miami, Indiana State Government, Emory Midtown Hospital, The University of Rochester Medical Center and over 50 sites in the United Kingdom. Project SEARCH’s primary objective is to secure competitive employment for people with disabilities. Project SEARCH is driven by collaboration with the following community partners:

- ❖ Host Business
- ❖ Local School District(s) and/or Educational Organization
- ❖ State Vocational Rehabilitation
- ❖ Community Rehabilitation Partner
- ❖ Long Term Support Agency / County or State Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities agency
- ❖ Families
- ❖ Workforce Investment Boards

“Project SEARCH breaks down stereotypes by increasing the public’s expectations about people with significant disabilities. The Project SEARCH program provides young people with significant disabilities the opportunity to contribute to their communities and to society at large by providing the necessary supports to work and receive minimum or prevailing wage. We are proud here at DOL to be the first Federal agency to embrace this program. This summer, we will hire several Project Search graduates at above minimum wage.”

Kathleen Martinez, Former Assistant Secretary for the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), Department of Labor, Washington, DC



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 healthcare, government or business setting where total immersion in the workplace facilitates the teaching and learning process as well as the acquisition of employability and marketable work skills. Students participate in three internships to explore a variety of career paths. The students work with a team that includes their family, a special education teacher and Rehabilitation Services Administration to create an employment goal and support the student during this important transition from school to work.

The Adult Training Program follows the same program design as the High School Transition model and serves young adults age 22-35. A Community Rehabilitation agency provides the instructor and skills trainers. Interns are on site at the host business each day and are also enrolled in an educational program through a local adult education or college program. A certificate of completion is typically provided for this work based training program.

BENEFITS of the Project SEARCH Model:

Benefits to the Interns:

- ❖ Participate in a variety of internships within the host hospital / business
- ❖ Acquire competitive, transferable and marketable job skills
- ❖ Gain increased independence, confidence, and self esteem
- ❖ Obtain work based individualized training, instruction and feedback
- ❖ Develop linkages to Vocational Rehabilitation and other adult service agencies

Benefits to the Business:

- ❖ Access to a new, diverse, talent stream with skills that match labor needs
- ❖ Gain interns/employees with disabilities who serve as role models for customers
- ❖ 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 regional and national recognition through marketing of this unique program
- ❖ Performance and retention in some high-turnover, entry-level positions increase dramatically

Visit our website for additional program details: www.projectsearch.us