



What is Project SEARCH?

Project SEARCH is a one year, high school transition program which provides training and education leading to employment for individuals with disabilities. Project SEARCH serves as a workforce alternative for students in their last year of high school. Three elective high school credits can be earned for successful completion of the Project SEARCH program. Each student applies to the program and is accepted through a selection committee process. Adults with disabilities may apply and be accepted if space is available. All students must be eligible for services with the Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission to participate.

Project SEARCH is based on a partnership that includes a local business, a school, Ohio Rehabilitation Services Commission and a county Board of MRDD (Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities). All partners are vital to the success of the program. The business provides a training classroom, a business liaison and rotational internships for on-the-job training. The school provides the instructor. ORSC works with a local rehab agency to supply job coaches that work with the students on their internships and final job placement. The local board of MRDD will provide follow along services for any eligible student who is hired. Cincinnati Children's Hospital as the flagship program provides technical assistance for replication and overall leadership to Project SEARCH nationwide.

The cornerstone of Project SEARCH is total immersion in a large business. Each day, students report to the host business, learn employability skills in the classroom and job skills while participating in 3 – 4 internships/experiences during the year. If available, students utilize public transportation. Students participate in monthly progress meetings to define their career goal and plan necessary steps to achieve that goal.

Managers at the internship sites work with the Project SEARCH instructor and job coaches to support the students. Students get continual feedback from the internship manager, co-workers and Project SEARCH staff. Students end their day by reflection, problem solving, planning and journaling their key learning's. The ultimate goal upon program completion is competitive employment utilizing the skills learned on the internships and throughout the program.

How did Project SEARCH evolve?

Project SEARCH was developed in 1996 by Nurse J. Erin Riehle, then the Director of the Emergency room at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center. She was in need of a reliable worker to stock supplies. She worked with Jennifer Linnabary, a job developer with the Hamilton County Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (current Project SEARCH Employment Coordinator) and Susie Rutkowski, Great Oaks Manager of Disability Education (current Project SEARCH Educational Specialist). They selected Annie Subiett, who has Down Syndrome to work in the emergency department. Annie now works full time at Children's Hospital 15 room Dental Clinic where she sterilizes and sorts instruments and is very successful. As a result of Project SEARCH over 60 individuals with disabilities are employed at Cincinnati Children's Hospital in a wide variety of non-traditional jobs.

Replication

Project SEARCH currently has a grant with the Developmental Disabilities Council in Ohio to replicate Project SEARCH throughout Ohio. Currently there are 14 Project SEARCH sites throughout Ohio (including 5 at Great Oaks in Cincinnati) with many other partnerships in the planning stages. States such as Indiana, Pennsylvania, Florida and Washington also have statewide initiatives to develop Project SEARCH programs.

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