

Project SEARCH



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 Health care executives, which reads, "Health care 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 200 across 40 states and four countries. Some business partners include but are not limited to: Fifth Third Bank, Xavier University, Medtronic, the Federal Department of Education, the Federal Department of Labor, Zoo Miami, Indiana State Government, Emory Midtown Hospital, Kaiser Permanente, and the University of Rochester Medical Center. **Project SEARCH's** primary objective is to secure competitive employment for people with disabilities.

Project SEARCH in River Falls is driven by collaboration with the following community partners:

- **HOST SITE:** River Falls Area Hospital, part of Allina Health
- **LOCAL SCHOOL DISTRICTS:** River Falls High School (Lead), Ellsworth High School, St. Croix and Pierce County area schools
- **VOCATIONAL REHABILITATION:** WI Division of Vocational Rehabilitation (DVR)
- **COMMUNITY REHABILITATION:** BRIDGE for Community Life Inc

"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, Assistant Secretary for the Office of Disability Employment Policy (ODEP), Department of Labor (DOL), Washington, DC



Project | SEARCH®

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 health care, 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.



BENEFITS of the Project SEARCH model:

BENEFITS TO THE STUDENTS:

- Participate in a variety of internships within the host site
- Acquire competitive, transferable and marketable job skills
- Gain increased independence, confidence, and self esteem
- Obtain work based individualized coaching, instruction and feedback
- Develop link 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 intern/ employees with disabilities who serve as a role model 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

