

Our Story



In 1996, while working as the Director of the Emergency Department at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, Erin Riehle, M.S.N. was frustrated with finding employees for entry-level jobs that involved restocking supplies. While working to identify a solution to eliminating the high turnover rates, 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 and Susie Rutkowski, M.A. 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 globally from one original program site at Cincinnati Children's to over 700 programs across 48 states and 10 countries. Some of our business partners include: Henry Ford Health West Bloomfield Hospital, Corewell Health (aka Troy and Royal Oak Beaumont Hospitals), Michigan State University, Fifth Third Bank, Dow Chemical, The Smithsonian Institute, Duncan Aviation, Medtronic, Embassy Suites, Dow Chemical, Blue Cross/Blue Shield in Detroit, Emory Midtown Hospital, Drexel University, Xavier University, Kaiser Permanente, McConnell Air Force Base, Vanderbilt University Medical Center, National Institutes of Health and Cleveland Clinic to name a few. **Project SEARCH's primary objective is to secure independent competitive employment for people with disabilities.**

Locally, in Michigan, Project SEARCH is driven by a collaborative with these partners:

- ~Hospital or Business Setting
- ~Local School District(s) and/or Intermediate School District
- ~Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS) and/or Bureau of Services to Blind Person
- ~Community Rehabilitation Partners New Horizons
- ~Community Health Network/OCHN, Community Living Services and MORC

"When businesses identify the strengths of employees with disabilities, then help them find them jobs that match their skills, those employees turn out to be faithful, low turnover, hard-working employees... The Project SEARCH community, whether the instructors, skills trainers and other partners all help us at Fifth Third Bank become successful partners. As experts in running this type of program, they offer the experience to truly make our students successful. Fifth Third Bank sees Project SEARCH as an opportunity to strengthen the community and a true recruitment strategy. We achieve both these things by helping our student interns learn valuable and transferable life and employment skills." Teresa Tanner, Executive Vice President, Fifth Third Bank, Chief Administrative Officer.

The Training Program for Project SEARCH is a unique, one school calendar year, business led, school to work transition program serving young adults with disabilities ages 18-26, who are seeking competitive employment upon completion of the program. A seamless combination of classroom instruction focused on team building, workplace safety, technology, self-advocacy, maintaining employment, financial literacy, health and wellness, preparing for employment, social and communication are curriculum units taught by a certified special education teacher. The program takes place in a healthcare, government, university 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. Interns participate in three - 10 week unpaid internship rotations providing real work experiences to develop and acquire independent competitive job skills. The interns work with a team that includes their family, an instructor (special education teacher from local school district), skills trainers, as well as local and state agencies to create an employment goal. The primary agencies collaborating with **Henry Ford Health West Bloomfield Hospital** include: **Michigan Rehabilitation Services (MRS)**, **Bureau of Services for the Blind (BSBP)**, **West Bloomfield School District**, **New Horizons Rehabilitation**, and **Oakland Intermediate School District**.

BENEFITS of the Project SEARCH Model:

Benefits to the young adult/intern:

- 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 coaching, instruction and feedback
- Develop connections 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/ employee 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 United States.
- Experience increased regional and national recognition through marketing of this unique program.
- Increased performance and retention in high-turnover, entry-level positions

For more information about Project SEARCH, please visit our website:

www.projectsearch.us.

To view an informational video, click on these links,

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8juNYG6nP1U>

[Michigan Project SEARCH video](#)

Also, please like us on Facebook – Project SEARCH Cincinnati.

<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Project-Search/180256751986040?ref=ts>