

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 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 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 630 programs across 48 states and ten countries. Some of our business partners in Florida include: Florida Hospital, Advent Health, Boca West County Club, Stetson University, John Hopkin’s All Children’s Hospital, Hilton Hotels, Zoo Miami, Rosen Shingle Creek, Renaissance World Golf Village-St. Augustine, Baptist Hospitals, Halifax Health, Princeton Village Retirement Community, UF Health, City of Miami, Gaylord Palms Resort & Convention Center, Golisano Children’s Hospital, Naples Community Hospital and many more. 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: Hospital or Business in the community, Local School District(s) and/or Educational Organization, Vocational Rehabilitation, Community Rehabilitation

“In Florida, we believe people want to work and that our job as Vocational Rehabilitation professionals is to provide them all the tools and support they need to accomplish that goal. Project SEARCH is an invaluable partner in this effort, providing opportunities for real-world experience across a variety of settings. Opportunity paired with encouragement, effective instruction, patience, and reinforcement results in experience that prepares Project SEARCH participants to succeed in competitive, integrated employment settings. Florida businesses also benefit from having loyal, hard-working, and proficient employees who contribute to their financial bottom lines! This is a ‘Win-Win’ for all of us, and we’re proud to be a partner in Project SEARCH.” Aleisa C McKinlay, JD, MA, Former Executive Director, Florida Vocational Rehabilitation

The Training Program is a nine month internship program for people with disabilities. It is targeted for individuals 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. Interns participate in three internships to explore a variety of career paths. The interns work with a team that includes their family, an instructor, and local and state agencies to create an employment goal.

BENEFITS of the Project SEARCH Model:

Benefits to the Students:

- ❖ 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 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 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 learn more check out the new “Project SEARCH 101,” a 20-minute introductory course to the model. This video version of Project SEARCH 101 is available to the general public. It can be accessed via this page of the Project SEARCH website:

<http://projectsearch.us/EDUCATION/ProjectSEARCHAcademy.aspx>

To view an informational video, click on this link,

http://youtu.be/rsHi_-4iyk; or, complete an internet search for key words James Varnum Award - Project SEARCH.

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

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

In Florida, contact your statewide coordinator: Carly Detlefsen at cdetlefsen@usfsp.edu