

## Project SEARCH



Twenty years ago, 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 the high turnover rate, Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center had adopted a major diversity initiative based on 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 available. 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. As she worked 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. The first internship cohort began in the 1998 school year.

Project SEARCH has grown from one program site at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center to over 450 sites across 45 states and an additional 8 countries. Our 14 Michigan business partners include Beaumont Health Systems - Troy Campus, Bronson Methodist Hospital in Kalamazoo, DTE Energy in Detroit, Duncan Aviation in Battle Creek, Fifth Third Bank Operations Center and Spectrum Health in Grand Rapids, Spectrum Health Zeeland Community Hospital, Henry Ford College in Dearborn, Henry Ford West Bloomfield Hospital, Lakeland Health in St. Joseph, ProMedica/Mercy Memorial Hospital in Monroe, Michigan State University in East Lansing, ProMedica Bixby Hospital in Adrian and The Dow Chemical Company in Midland. Project SEARCH's primary objective is to secure competitive employment for people with disabilities.

Project SEARCH is driven by collaboration with these community partners:

- ★ Host Business
- ★ School District
- ★ Department of Health and Human Services-Michigan Rehabilitation Services
- ★ Disability Network
- ★ Community Mental Health Provider

**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 at 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 marketable work skills. Students participate in three 10-week internships to explore a variety of career paths. The students work with a team that includes their family, a special education teacher and a DHHS-MRS counselor to create an employment goal and the team supports the students during this important transition from school to work.

### **Benefits to the Student Interns:**

- ★ Participate in a variety of internships within the host business
- ★ Acquire competitive, transferable and marketable job skills
- ★ Gain increased independence, confidence and self-esteem
- ★ Obtain work-based individualized coaching, instruction and evaluation
- ★ Develop linkages to DHHS-MRS 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 immense 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
- ★ Dramatic increase in performance and retention in some high-turnover, entry-level positions
- ★ Assistance in meeting the 7% utilization goal of hiring people with disabilities in accordance with Section 503 of the Rehabilitation Act