

ABOUT PROJECT SEARCH

Project SEARCH is a one year, high school transition program that provides skills training and work experience for young adults with significant disabilities ages 18 to 22. Originally conceived to solve hospital staffing challenges and to increase employment opportunities for qualified persons with disabilities, this program uses a business model that provides one point of entry for youth with disabilities, streamlines resources for schools and community organizations and becomes a win-win situation for all involved. The cornerstone of Project SEARCH is total immersion in the employer agency with a typical day involving onsite classroom instruction in employability and independent living skills, participation at a worksite rotation, lunch with co-workers, and feedback from the instructor.

Project SEARCH was launched in the private sector in 1996 and currently has over 140 sites in 42 states with both private and public employers as well as the UK and Australia.

What is at the heart of Project SEARCH?

The ultimate goal upon program completion is competitive employment in the community utilizing the skills learned on the internships and throughout the program.

IMPLEMENTATION OF PROJECT SEARCH

The implementation of Project SEARCH involves several partners in the community. Collaborators typically include a local public school system, a local hospital, Virginia Department of Education (who provides start-up funding for project implementation), VCU School of Education's Rehabilitation Research and Training Center, and the Virginia Department of Rehabilitative Services.

Project planning begins in Spring of the start up year. Approximately eight students with significant disabilities begin the program at the host hospital in September. Students are on-site at the hospital during the entire school year and will complete three 10-week rotations in a variety of departments. Students are given support through an onsite public school teacher, a job coach and work site accommodations to achieve independence.

ROLE OF PROJECT SEARCH

TEAM MEMBERS

- Virginia Department of Education provides start up funds to initiate the first year of implementation.
- The host hospital provides the classroom, a business liaison and internship sites.
- The local school system recruits students and provides an on-site classroom teacher.
- Virginia DRS provides milestone funding for student training, individualized supports and placement into employment.
- VCU RRTC provides oversight and coordination to build a lasting infrastructure.
- The Project Search Advisory Team provides input and overall guidance for project implementation.

Why is Project SEARCH important?

It provides employment and education opportunities for individuals with significant disabilities. The program is dedicated to workforce development that benefits the individual, community and workplace. This is critical for students with significant disabilities for their future employment opportunities. National statistics report that a low percentage of these students participate in integrated employment settings. More opportunities are needed for individuals with significant disabilities to be successful in employment and community living.