

TITLE

Three internships to provide a variety of career options

USA: Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center – Project SEARCH

PROJECT SUMMARY

Project SEARCH – developed at Cincinnati Children's Hospital Medical Center, a research environment that promotes visionary thinking and innovation – prepares young people with intellectual disabilities for successful employment and job development. The project was launched more than 20 years ago and has since grown into an international network of independent programme sites that are operated and funded at the local level by schools, disability agencies, and companies. In 2016, Project Search operated 405 programmes in North America and several European countries.

FACTS & FIGURES

- Beneficiaries in 2014: 2,034 – 73 per cent were employed
- Beneficiaries in 2015: 2,568 – 77 per cent were employed
- Beneficiaries in 2016: 3,176

PROBLEMS TARGETED

One reason for the high level of unemployment, underemployment, and poverty among people with intellectual disabilities is the lack of effective services to help them transition from school to a successful adult life. In the United States, laws regulate these transition services, but students too often leave school with no clear plan for achieving maximal independence.

SOLUTION & METHODOLOGY

Project SEARCH is a one-year school-to-work programme targeting students with intellectual and developmental disabilities in their last year of secondary school who want to be employed in the open labour market. The programme takes place entirely within a business setting, providing students with three internships to allow them to explore a variety of career options. This total workplace immersion ensures a good combination of classroom instruction, career exploration, and worksite-based training and support. The goal for each student is competitive employment in the open labour market. Project graduates are integrated into their communities as regular employees at a variety of companies, hospitals, government offices, etc. As such, they are eligible for Social Security and any fringe benefits offered by their employer.

OUTLOOK & TRANSFERABILITY

The programme takes place entirely on the premises of a company, which participates without a subsidy and is involved in such crucial decisions as participant selection, internship site development, and the active internal marketing of the programme. Begun at Cincinnati Children's Hospital, Project SEARCH has now expanded to 405 programmes in 45 U.S. states as well as in Canada, England, Ireland, Scotland, and – most recently – the Netherlands. This growth is continuing, and the organization expects to reach 450 sites next year.

QUOTE

"When businesses identify the strengths of employees with disabilities and then put them in jobs that match their skills, those employees turn out to be faithful, low-turnover, hard-working employees."

— Teresa Tanner, Chief Human Resource Officer, Fifth Third Bank, Cincinnati

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REFERENCES

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